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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Kasey Bass Baker entitled “Gender, Genre, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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Gender, Genre, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee

Kasey Bass Baker
May 2008

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to David, with whom I have already had so many adventures, and to the memory of my grandparents, Bennett and Minnie Bass, who always told me that my possibilities were limitless.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for the guidance and mentorship of my dissertation committee, Dr. David Goslee, Dr. Nancy Moore Goslee, Dr. Allen Dunn, and Dr. Cheryl Brown Travis. My work with you in courses and in reading groups and through research assistantships, editorial assistantships, and teaching appointments has challenged me and helped me to grow as a researcher, writer, and teacher. I would especially like to thank Dr. David Goslee, the chair of my committee, with whom I have talked about many of these ideas since my first semester at the University of Tennessee. Thank you for sharing your time with me so generously. I am also grateful for fellowships from the University of Tennessee that lessened my teaching duties and that allowed me to research at the British Library and at Eton College Library. I would like to thank Dr. Joseph Dupras, who led my first serious scholarly work in the genre of the dramatic monologue, as well as those who talked with me about this project at the conferences where I presented much of this material in earlier forms. Finally, I would like to thank members of my family—Megan and Kevin Bass, Sara and Dean Bass, Fran and Dub Winkles, and Dana and Carl Baker—for their constant encouragement throughout this process. I am most grateful to David for his friendship and his unwavering support.

Abstract

Gender, Genre, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue describes how female and male poets used the dramatic monologue to create a dialogue about gender and subjectivity. I first chart the evolution of the dramatic monologue by explaining changing Victorian literary critical values as evident in the use of the terms *subjective* and *objective*. As opposed to earlier literary interest in objectivity, later Victorian poets use the monologue to experiment with new subject positions, valuing individual perspectives most. I trace this pattern in the way Victorian poets across the period use the developing monologue to create often simultaneous and overlapping conversations about subjectivity. In the first conversation, poets such as Levy, Mew, and “Michael Field” (Bradley and Cooper) use the Magdalen figure to create a powerful subject position through the fusion of the sexualized and objectified female body and the embodiment of divine female power. In the second conversation, poets feature the prostitute as the ultimate example of an other consumed in an intimate, yet impersonal, relationship in order to explore whether individuals can achieve critical distance, the ability to observe and judge objectively, or whether observation requires a violent mastering of the other, turning the other into an object. Such poems include Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Jenny*, Webster’s *A Castaway*, and Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*. In the third conversation, Christina Rossetti and Mary Coleridge, among others like Hopkins, Swinburne, and “Field,” all experiment with the poetic genre to probe the very paradox at the core of this project—the abject position made subjectively powerful. In the fourth conversation, turn-of-the-century poets like Levy and Kendall create individual speakers with multiple

subjectivities, and poets like Webster embrace similar multiplicity through allusive techniques that provide positions of power.

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Introduction: Literary Networks and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue

The Victorian period was a time of immense social change, beginning with the 1832 Reform Act, which opened the vote to middle-class men, and culminating in women's suffrage in 1919. Legal changes like newly granted suffrage, the acknowledgment of a group's ability to reason fairly and to act in the best interest of populace, mark a shift in cultural paradigms. To grant women the vote, Victorian lawmakers first had to recognize women as trustworthy, intelligent, and capable of directing the country, recognition that countered a long medical, legal, and social history supporting beliefs of women's physical and intellectual inferiority. In so doing, the Victorians embarked on a project of redefining humanity and subjectivity. New laws recognizing this group's agency and abilities reflected and changed the way people in the society understood humanity, including their own identities and their ethical responsibilities.

The dramatic monologue was uniquely suited to represent new models of subjectivity because the way its form portrays a speaker's mind. Although we might be able to find biographical details that link a speaker and a poet, generally, the speaker of a dramatic monologue is a separate creation—a mask, as Ralph Rader explains.¹

¹ Influenced by formalist and reader-response approaches, Rader differentiates between the mask lyric, the dramatic lyric, the expressive lyric, and the dramatic monologue. He focuses on whether the poet creates a speaker's character separate from his or her own poetic identity—as we understand it, of course—and on whether the poet creates an auditor's character separate from the assumed reader:

There (in the dramatic monologue) we are pleased to feel that the world of the poem is exactly *like* the real world; in the dramatic lyric we have a clear sense that the experience in effect takes place *in* the real world, the

Furthermore, this speaker is usually in a specific situation that we can picture—in that cottage with the fire waning, on stone streets at dawn, or surrounded by works of art with the painting of the Duchess just having been draped with cloth. As we will see, there are many different accounts of the genre’s development and of its primary characteristics. In this project, I will suggest that one of its main functions has always been to allow for the study of the individual’s subjectivity in contact with an other. Because of the contact of the speaker and interlocutor, self and other, the form portrays contrasting models of relationships, each with ethical implications.

In the following chapter, I will analyze the language—i.e. *subjective* and *objective*—that many Victorian poets and critics used to describe their epistemological and ethical concerns. Then, in the second chapter, I will use poetic treatments of the Magdalen character to illuminate the conversations about objectivity and subjectivity that emerge through the developing poetic form. The last three chapters outline three poetic conversations, each of which posits different models of subjectivity. In each

world we and the poet are in. That the actor in the dramatic lyric is felt to be in the same world we are is easily shown. No one would think a scholar foolish, for instance, who tried to discover when Hopkins saw the windhover, whereas only a very foolish scholar would try to find the portrait of the Duke’s Duchess. For that matter, we know that Keats heard the nightingale, and Hardy gives us outside the body of the poem the date when he heard the thrush; and no one would be surprised to hear that Arnold wrote his great lyric looking at a moonlit Dover Beach one evening on his honeymoon trip to Europe. (143)

Rader claims that the auditor in the poem proves fundamentally important for defining the poem’s genre: “In the dramatic monologue proper, however, the speaker is always precisely located in the sharply focused concrete setting that can be seen as in a photograph” (140). However, just what is the “dramatic monologue *proper*”? We will continue to explore this question below.

conversation, poets gravitate to a particular form of subjectivity and then experiment with the monologue, especially in terms of the self/other relationship, to portray it.²

In this project, I am employing several postmodern theories of subjectivity that interrogate the possibilities of self-knowledge and of self-expression. When I focus on subjectivity, I have to acknowledge the ways that subjects are subjected by power structures. However, I would argue that the individual can always act, even if only within the available, often competing, structures of knowledge and expression—structures that always position the individual at some distance from any kind of authenticity. We can see examples of theories of this sort of action in the work of writers like bell hooks and Paulo Friere. The very acts of thinking, reflecting, and communicating have to take place within and through conceptual and practical structures. However, the individual has agency to use and to manipulate these structures. He or she

² In her introduction to *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, Margaret Reynolds describes the importance of annuals and anthologies in the publication history of Victorian women writers. She suggests that these annuals allowed women writers to interact:

This constant looking at each others' work, valuing and assessing each others' talent, marks not only the personal experience of the Victorian women poets, but spills over into their poetry too. There are numerous poems addressed by one poet to another as if carrying on a conversation with one another. Hemans' "The Last Song of Sappho" . . . is an obvious example, but there are many others: L.E.L.'s Last Question," Kemble's "To Mrs. Norton," Charlotte Brontë's two poems to her sisters, . . . Rossetti's "L.E.L.," Amy Levy's "To Vernon Lee," and Michael Field's "To Christina Rossetti." (xxx)

In a recent plenary address, Dr. Linda Hughes advocated reading "sideways," a method she bases on network theories. This method involves reading a text in its original form in publication and contextualizing the reading with related texts and images. For example, one could read a poem published in a magazine in conjunction with surrounding images and texts, even if they seem at first to be disconnected cognitively. I am interested in building upon such approaches to Victorian literature to imagine men and women in conversation through various publications.

can define the world through such structures, rather than merely being defined by them. I would like to describe the monologue as an ideal vehicle for this sort of manipulation, especially because it provides an elegant portrait of a moment of self-knowledge and self-expression. Poets can use this vehicle, then, to explore the available structures of thought and expression.

Poetic dialogue multiplies the possibilities for poets—especially those using the monologue—to manipulate epistemological and rhetorical structures. Thus, dialogue can be productive, and engaging in it can be reconciliatory, uniting individuals in a common pursuit. In this way, the poet in the act of expression is like an architect. The architect cannot create matter itself, but he or she can manipulate it, organize and re-create it, in the form of structures that might not be themselves utterly new, but that redefine the environment and reshape the world for the individual who inhabits them. Furthermore, the act of architectural design itself re-creates design history by interpreting past structures and creating the opportunity for future innovations. The poet can likewise organize and re-create words through the design of the poem—as well as through building upon the history of poetry itself—while otherwise unable to think or to communicate outside of these epistemological, conceptual, and rhetorical structures.

There is a long history of genre criticism on the dramatic monologue that defines its boundaries and charts its evolution.³ One foundational article (1947), by Ina Beth

³ Early criticism on the dramatic monologue, published between 1900 and 1930, focuses on clearly expressing the genre's fundamental elements. Relatively few articles since then have articulated new approaches to the dramatic monologue, and only three full-length studies exist: Robert Langbaum's *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (1986), Laura Marie Williams's 1999

Sessions, describes the genre by using seven very specific criteria: “1) speaker, 2) audience, 3) occasion, 4) interplay between speaker and audience, 5) revelation of character, 6) dramatic action, and 7) action taking place in the present” (508). She breaks the genre into subgroups (perfect example, imperfect, formal, and approximate) according to how well they fit these criteria. Robert Langbaum’s critical flexibility has prepared the critical community to address more openly the difficulties of defining the genre. Should we define it according to writers’ projects, readers’ experiences, or social factors? Langbaum’s study on the relationship between Romantic poetry and the dramatic monologue created a foundational narrative of “the poetry of experience”:

For having seen the poetry which set out to be different from romantic poetry, we can find in the core that remains unchanged the essential idea of romanticism. That essential idea is, I would suggest, the doctrine of experience—the doctrine that the imaginative apprehension gained through immediate experience is primary and certain, whereas the analytic reflection that follows is secondary and problematical. The poetry of the

dissertation on women poets writing the dramatic monologue, and Glennis Byron’s *Dramatic Monologue* (2003). Langbaum emphasizes the canonical male poets who use the form and their male Romantic predecessors. Williams describes dramatic monologues written by women poets, but she does not primarily place them within a broader history of the genre. Although Byron does include some non-canonical women poets in her study, her broad approach does not allow for focused analysis of the interrelations of many of the male and female poets who used the genre in the period. She notes, “the most significant future changes [in scholarship on the dramatic monologue] may result from the adjustment of the generic grouping to include women’s poetry” (28). My project extends Langbaum’s, Williams’s, and Byron’s by focusing more specifically on the changes to the genre in the Victorian period, especially in its uses by both male and female poets, rather than in its literary history represented by male poets alone.

nineteenth and twentieth centuries can thus be seen in connection as a poetry of experience—a poetry constructed upon the deliberate disequilibrium between experience and idea, a poetry which makes its statement not as an idea but as an experience from which one or more ideas can be abstracted as problematical rationalizations. (35-36)

He explains that this focus on “immediate experience” leads to the development of the monologue:

The combination of sympathy and judgment makes the dramatic monologue suitable for expressing all kinds of extraordinary points of view, whether moral, emotional or historical—since sympathy frees us for the widest possible range of experience, while the critical reservation keeps us aware of how far we are departing. The extraordinary point of view is characteristic of all the best dramatic monologues, the pursuit of experience in all its remotest extensions being the genius of the form. We are dealing, in other words, with empiricism in literature. The pursuit of all experience corresponds to the scientific pursuit of all knowledge; while the sympathy that is a condition of the dramatic monologue corresponds to the scientific attitude of mind, the willingness to understand everything for its own sake and without consideration of practical or moral value. We might even say that the dramatic monologue takes toward its material the literary equivalent of the scientific attitude—the equivalent being, where men and women are the subject of investigation, the historicizing and psychologizing of judgment. (96)

While I agree that the monologue allowed for “the scientific attitude of mind,” I would contend that many poets also immediately saw its potential for “practical [and] moral value,” particularly female poets writing at the turn of the century. Langbaum looks at the subtle differences in poets’ responses to enduring poetic and epistemological problems. Sessions’s formalist account and Langbaum’s epistemological one represent two very different models of literary criticism that have led to recent blended accounts, such as the one I have developed.

Recent critics have been more interested in building upon Langbaum’s approach, drawing long lines of evolution for the form that stretch past earlier demarcations and that allow for more flexible definitions than those allowed by existing taxonomies. W. David Shaw describes the genre:

a poem of one-sided conversation in which the swerve of lyric apostrophe away from rhetoric often deflects the speaker from his ostensible purpose of persuading or manipulating a silent auditor. As an important example of what I. Armstrong calls the “double poem,” the monologue both subverts and reconstructs its culture by its Socratic testing of convention and its humane appeal from morality or custom to a sense of how life might be lived more ethically. Like the short story or the novel, the dramatic monologue is an immensely protean genre that at different times exhibits all of the features I have just touched on. Because unconscious motives are stronger than conscious ones, speakers in monologues also tend to exhibit bad faith or unconscious deception rather than outright lies that they are conscious of perpetrating. (“Lyric Displacement” 303)

He argues, “The vocative is the defining trope of the Victorian monologue, which naturalizes the apostrophes of Coleridge’s conversation poems by transforming them into a speaker’s seduction of a silent listener” (308). Shaw describes the layers that form through the speaker, interlocutor, audience, and poet:

But behind the vocative we can still hear the apostrophes of lyric poetry, and the more audible these apostrophes become, the more aware we also are of the ventriloquist who speaks through his puppets. By functioning as a trope of deflection that “complicate[s] or disrupt[s] the circuit of communication” (Culler, p. 135), apostrophes and vocatives raise important questions about who is being addressed in a monologue and about who is being heard. The dead musician whom the speaker apostrophizes in Robert Browning’s “A Toccata of Galuppi’s” (1855) is not a living person but a ghost, a spectral presence. And that monologue’s apostrophes also make us aware of another ghost: the ghost of the poet, who is the phantom behind the mask. (308)

For Shaw, these layers fracture the poem dialogically: “In principle, the monologue is not ‘monological’ at all, in Bakhtin’s sense. Its form is ‘dialogical,’ a supple and agile interplay between impersonated characters and the poet who impersonates them. To apostrophize a ghost is also to animate it” (311). This interplay is part of the Victorian response to Romantic lyrics:

The naturalization of lyric apostrophe is part of a Victorian attempt to provide a local habitation and a name for the Romantic poet’s communion with nature-spirits and ghosts. . . . The dramatic monologue becomes an

ascendant genre in post-Romantic literature partly because it is better equipped than lyric poetry to oppose the dogmas of a secular and scientific age in which an antiquated belief in “doing-by-saying” (including a belief in oracles, prophecies, and knowledge as divination) is in rapid and widespread retreat. (323, 325)

In the following chapters, I will build on Shaw’s notion of ghosting by identifying the ways poets create ghosts of the other in the self and of the self in the other.

Studying poetry by Romantic poets like Hemans and Landon, Isobel Armstrong provocatively claims women’s place as creators of the genre:

A number of poems by women testifying to a refusal to be regarded as an object have been described by feminist critics, but by using a mask a woman writer is in control of her objectification and at the same time anticipates the strategy of objectifying women by being beforehand with it and circumventing masculine representations. This is the theme of Christina Rossetti’s poem about masking, “Winter: My Secret.” It should come as no surprise, then, that it was the women poets who “invented” the dramatic monologue. (326)

I am not seeking to identify in this project the “inventors” of the genre, but I would like to build upon these flexible models of criticism. Because I am discussing subjectivity and gender theories through the monologue, I find it necessary to analyze the monologue through its literary history, its social history, and its generic history. Furthermore, building on the work of recent critics, I will evaluate its epistemological, formal, and ethical functions. Like Armstrong, I find that women poets using the monologue

gravitate toward speakers who have been objectified (i.e. Magdalen and Xantippe). However, when they write such poems, they are participating in conversations with other poets—such as Browning—who have also used the monologue to explore objectification. As we will see in the critical arguments of U. C. Knoepfelmacher and Cynthia Scheinberg, it can be quite difficult to categorize the power available in an objectified position. Does silence give a sort of voice to the interlocutor/other? Does it draw the reader's attention and elicit sympathy? Christina Rossetti and Mary Coleridge certainly find abjected positions empowering, as we shall see. They explore these positions through manipulating the form.

For the purposes of this project, I will define the monologue as a poem that usually has a speaker, an audience, and an occasion—to use Sessions's language—but these characteristics are the first to be modified in experimental versions of the form. Rather than breaking from the form, these experiments redefine it, helping it to evolve. For example, May Kendall transcends the categories in "Woman's Future" by creating a monologue that has a speaker, but part of the audience has been internalized in misogynistic voices that figure in the speaker's psyche, and the occasion has been expanded to include all women sewing in all drawing rooms. I am much more interested in maintaining critical sensitivity to such experimentation than I am in defining in concrete terms the limits of the form. However, I will assume that the monologues that Browning and Tennyson created early in the period, such as "My Last Duchess," "Porphyria's Lover," and "Ulysses," stand as the initial exemplars against which later poets write. I will also assume that these poems were written in conversation with other early creators of the form, such as Hemans and Landon.

In order to describe Victorian poetry's self-reflexivity (8)⁴, Armstrong focuses on texts' complexities and their "unsettled nature" (10):

To see the text as a complex entity defining and participating in an area of struggle and contention is to make intentionality a much wider and more complex affair and to include the contradictions and uncontrolled nature of language within the text's project. . . . Post-Derridean criticism, however, tends to ignore the aspect of active struggle in a text. Volosinov, taking up a different form of the Hegelian tradition that then one from which deconstruction stems, puts the struggle with language at the centre of a text, and such a concentration on language should help in the rereading of Victorian poetry. (10, 11)

Focusing on this struggle allows her to observe, "The double poem is a deeply skeptical form. It draws attention to the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the cultural conditions in which those relationships are made" (13). I would like to build upon her approach to the genre by examining the "text as a complex entity defining and participating in an area of struggle and contention." Furthermore, in this project, I will build a narrative of the genre's literary history based on the patterns of struggle, rather than based on dates of composition.

Although the first chapter moves somewhat chronologically and the third focuses on a pivotal time—the 1870s—this project is not primarily organized chronologically. There are two threads in the chronological evolution of the monologue that I would like

⁴ Armstrong explains, "The history of Victorian poetry is the gradual assent to self-reflexive art and the struggle against such an assent" (8).

to track: the increasing importance of subjective art toward the end of the period and the experimentation with the genre by late Victorian women writers. However, I will focus on outlining four simultaneous conversations, each of which contains similar examples of formal experimentation with the subject and object positions in the monologue, broadly defined. For example, I will claim in the third chapter that Webster responded to Rossetti's *Jenny* through *A Castaway*, and Browning responded to both through *Fifine at the Fair*. I will soon explain this argument in more detail. I do not pretend that Webster, Rossetti, and Browning actually sat down to have a conversation about these poems, although I would love for that to have been the case. I also do not want to claim absolutely that Browning would not have written *Fifine* without both *Jenny* and *A Castaway* preceding it. I want to broaden the idea of a conversation to what I will describe as the intersections of nodes of poetic networks, the moments in time in which poets, sometimes without even knowing each others' work, reach a similar conclusion. In our case, they create a similar model of subjectivity.

Like pictorial models of the Internet (see Figure 1), I imagine Victorian poetry as a network of nodes that touch in certain points, perhaps in moments of intertextuality or of commonality in approach.⁵ I am interested in the points that seem most active.

⁵ Julia Kristeva, while describing Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin's work, explains the concept of intertextuality: "[A]ny text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another" (*Desire in Language* 66). As Leon Roudiez notes

This French word was originally introduced by Kristeva and met with immediate success; it has since been much used and abused on both sides of the Atlantic. The concept, however, has been generally misunderstood. It has nothing to do with matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work; it does, on the other hand, involve

Perhaps these poets wrote in different moments in the Victorian years; perhaps they did not know each other's work. Regardless, their efforts coalesce in the developing history of the genre. In this way, we can read their work as a conversation, an active node of connection in the larger literary network. Each conversation, as I am formulating it in this project, represents such a node. It is important to clarify that I am describing each conversation as a node, rather than describing each poem or each poet as a node. I chose this organization because if we represent each poem as a node, it becomes more difficult to define agency. As we have seen, Armstrong offers a model of textual struggle that could be helpful here; I certainly want to pay attention to such struggle. I also want to be able to respond to the poets who were actively engaged in these conversations, particularly those who wanted to manipulate the boundaries between speaker and author, such as Christina Rossetti, Mary Coleridge, and, we might argue, Augusta Webster. Thus, representing each poem as a node limits our critical possibilities. We could describe each poet as a node in the network, but some poets are represented more than once and in different conversations. For example, Webster participates in the second and the fourth conversations, and Levy participates in the first and the fourth ones. In order to maintain the opportunity to explore textual struggle and to allow for authorial intention—when such readings seem supported biographically—I have chosen to

the components of a *textual system* such as the novel, for instance. It is defined in *La Révolution du langage poétique* as the transposition of one or more *systems* of signs into another, accompanied by a new articulation of the enunciative and denotative position. (15)

For a thorough discussion of theories of influence and of intertextuality, see *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*, edited by Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein.

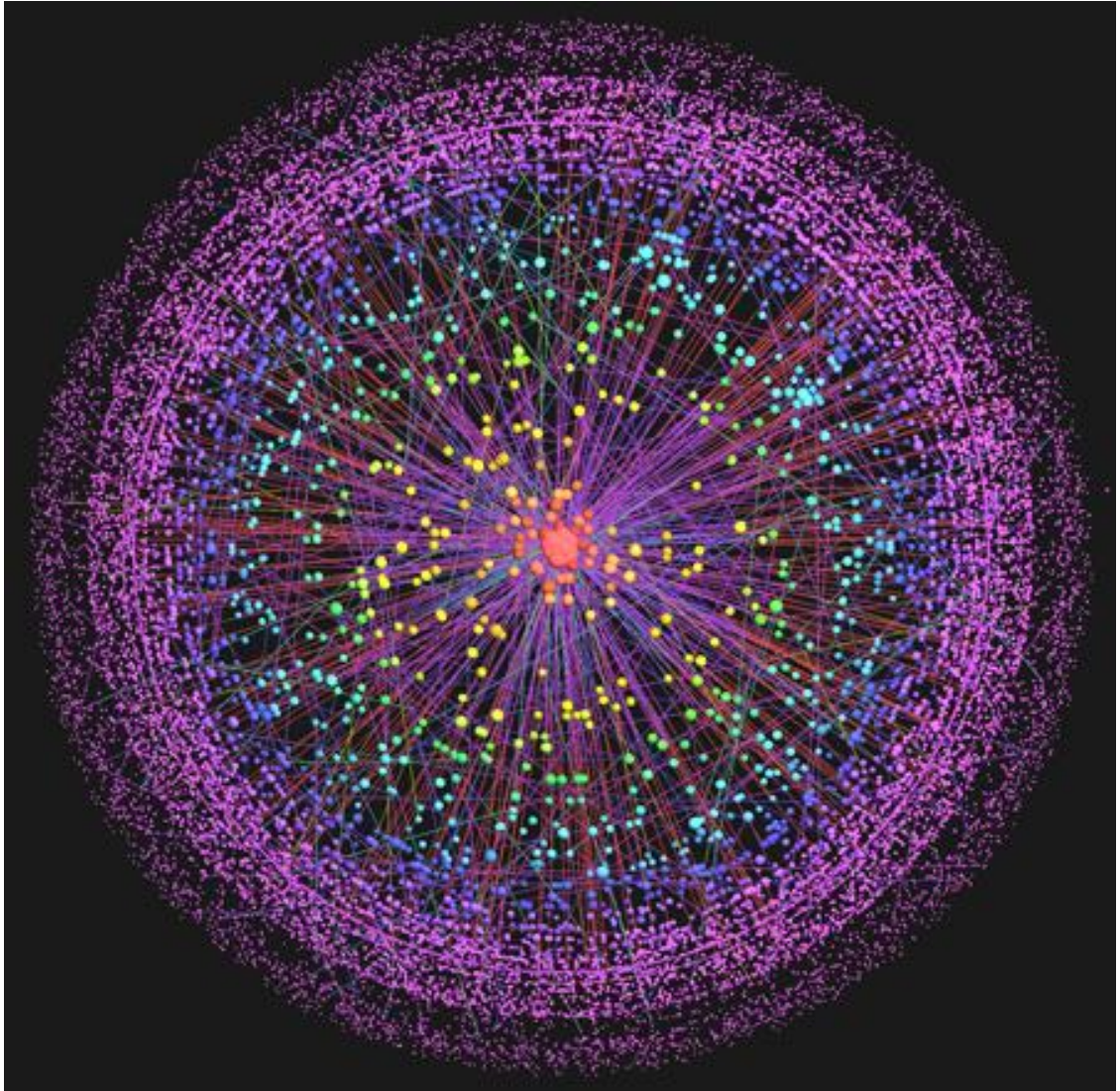


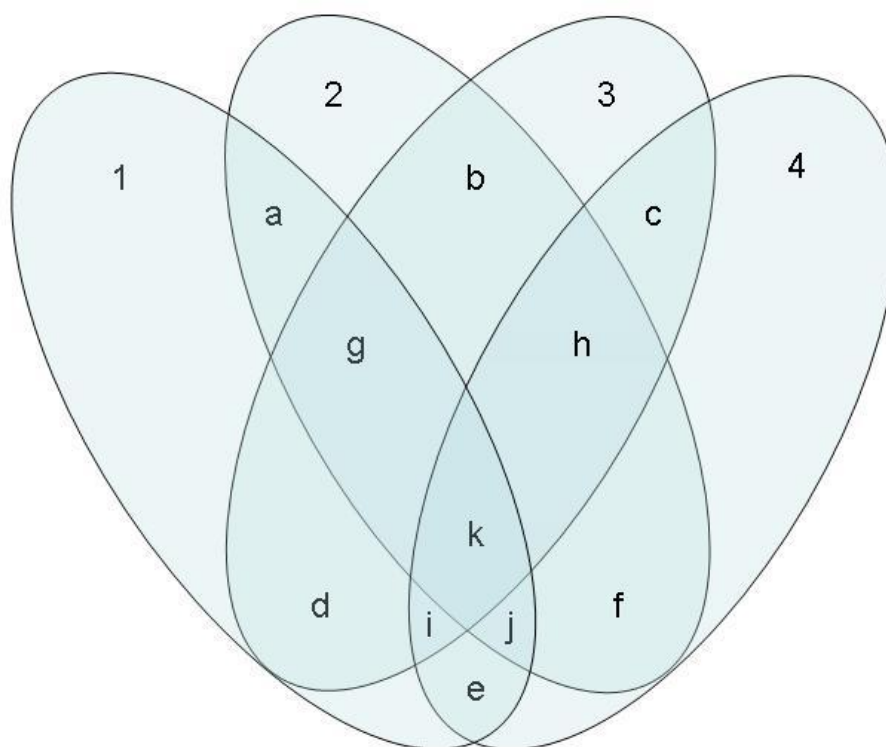
Fig. 1: Hierarchical Structure of the Internet

represent the conversations as nodes. This allows for a diversity of approaches in each conversation while maintaining the possibility for interconnection.

As we have seen, this project will begin with a history of Victorian uses of the terms *subjectivity* and *objectivity* in literary criticism. Most apparent in the writings of Robert Browning and John Ruskin, these terms respond to shifting notions of ontology and epistemology. The very frequency of the terms *subjectivity* and *objectivity* reveals the Victorians' dedication to tackling such central human issues and their anxiety about the need to address them. In many ways, this project is an attempt to follow Victorian poets as they navigate such issues. Poets writing later use the monologue to experiment with new subject positions, signaling an aesthetic turn to subjective art and individual perspectives. In Chapter Two, I trace this pattern in the way poets use the developing monologue form to portray the Magdalen figure. They create a powerful subject position through the fusion of the sexualized and objectified female body and the embodiment of divine female power. Poets like Amy Levy and Charlotte Mew use the Magdalen figure to traverse socially imposed stereotypes—the sexual temptress and the morally pure mother figure—in this process exploring how women can gain agency through multiple identities. Focusing on Magdalen allows me to give shape to the literary history I am describing through a character that vexes the categories of subjective and objective. In each following chapter, I describe a poetic conversation that posits a differing model of subjectivity through the dramatic monologue, shaping theories of subjective and objective art. These models include contrasubjectivity, abject subjectivity, and intersubjectivity.

These overlapping conversations work together in the mutual development of the monologue. I would offer two models of their interconnection. First, we could imagine that each conversation is an ellipse in a Venn diagram (see Figure 2). In Figure 2, the conversations are represented by numbers (1-4), and their overlapping areas are represented by letters (a-k). I would like to describe the project in terms of this diagram in order to clarify the relationships between the conversations. Building upon the image of the Internet in Figure 1, Figure 3 allows us to magnify the nodes to see how they might be connected through a web-like system. The terms *objectivity* and *subjectivity* define critical concepts that become central concerns for each conversation. The complicated history of these terms in Victorian literary culture provides a shared language for poets creating monologues. Therefore, the middle overlapping area (k) in Figure 2 corresponds to the concepts all conversations have in common, concepts detailed in Chapter One. In Figure 2, we might understand this shared connection as the lines themselves.

The first conversation, on Magdalen and the monologue, overlaps with the second, on contrasubjectivity, through their shared focus on the self-objectified prostitute (area a). However, these conversations differ in their approach to this character. The first conversation focuses on the combination of identities in Magdalen, with all of her mythic history, while the second conversation focuses on the implications of the relationships of Magdalen and her erotic partners, creating a complicated subject/object dichotomy these poems explore. The first conversation overlaps with the third one, on abject subjectivity, through their shared focus on the abjected individual able to find new perspective through abjection (area d). However, the poems in the first conversation allow the individuals portrayed more agency than do the poems in the third conversation



1=Magdalen and the Monologue

3=Abject Subjectivity

2=Contrasubjectivity

4=Intersubjectivity

a=1 and 2

d=1 and 3

g=1, 2, and 3

j=1, 2, and 4

b=2 and 3

e=1 and 4

h=2, 3, and 4

k=1, 2, 3, and 4

c=3 and 4

f=2 and 4

i=1, 3, and 4

Fig. 2: Overlapping Conversations⁶

⁶ This model is based on an image from the Venn diagram tool created by Juan Carlos Oliveros for genomic and proteomic research.

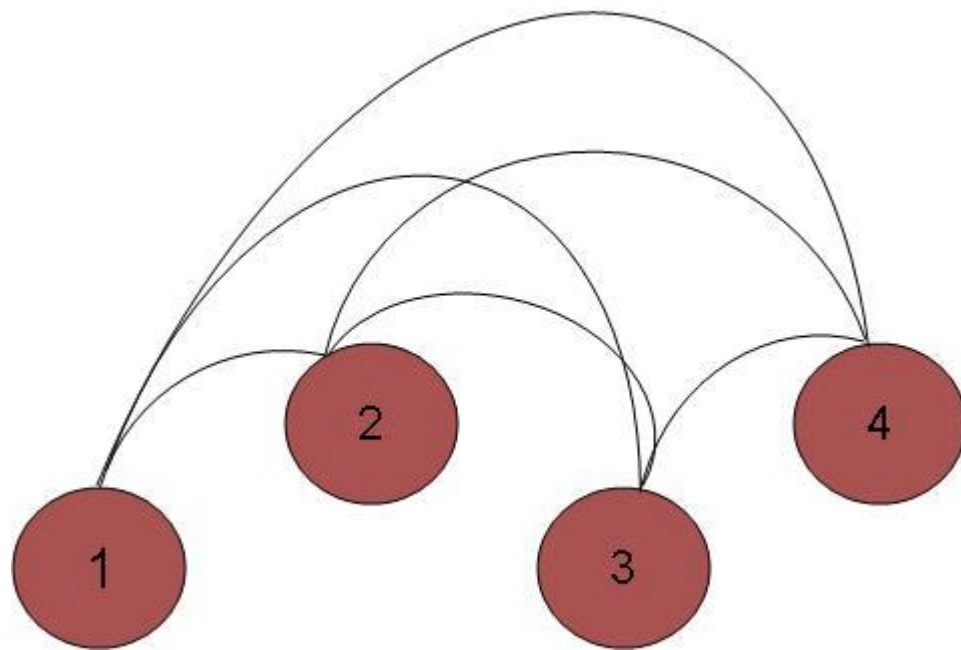


Fig. 3: Interconnected Nodes

through their continual redefinition of subject positions. The first conversation overlaps with fourth one in their shared exploration of multiple identities and internalized discourses (area e). These two conversations differ because the fourth conversation develops the negative consequences of internalized discourses, especially misogynistic discourses.

The second, third, and fourth conversations also share important points of interconnection. The second conversation connects with the third one (area b) in their shared focus on the isolation of the individual. In the second conversation, the self must define itself against the other. A similar inherent distance between self and other exists in some elements of the third conversation, such as in the model of abject sublimity Christina Rossetti develops. The second conversation overlaps with the fourth one (area

f) in the assumption that one's identity depends upon the agonistic relationship of the self and the other. As we shall see, however, these two conversations reveal responses to this assumption that, while not necessarily exclusive, are opposed; one models the expulsion of the other, and the other models the absorption of the other. The third conversation overlaps with the fourth one (area c) in their shared focus on the explosion of a central identity, which is abjected or multiplied, respectively. Thus, these conversations are not inherently isolated. They rise in polyphony to describe the evolution of the genre through innovative models of self and other. Using network models allows us to break out of strictly temporal or personal models of relationships, such as those developed in studies of poetic influence. It allows us to view the history of the genre in something close to multiple dimensions, providing us with more dynamic critical vision.

“See yourself in my soul!”:

The Crisis of the 1870s

The poetic crisis of the 1870s responded to discussions about gender that grew particularly heated in this year. In 1868, Eliza Lynn Linton published her scathing “Girl of the Period,” arguing that the paragons of femininity of the past have been replaced by the current fashion-obsessed “loud and rampant modernization” (360). Perhaps in response to Linton, in the same year, Frances Power Cobbes published “Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors,” and a year later, John Stuart Mill published *On the Subjection of Women*, texts that share the view that the current system dehumanized and degraded

women. These arguments proved highly effective in moving the culture toward new rights for women, such as in the Married Women's Property Act of 1870 and women's unofficial admission to Cambridge in 1872, cultural changes that reverberated in the next few decades. In 1885, the *London Times* ran a series of letters to the editor about the propriety of female nudity in the Royal Academy of Art, started by the letter from "a British Matron" ("A British Matron"). Partially a reaction to the new female art students, the letters reveal a central anxiety about women's objectification in the society. The generic changes my project charts occur primarily in these decades, in which all representations of women came under public scrutiny, partially because more women were using the dramatic monologue to write back and partially because a cultural paradigm shift had fractured the stability of gender representation for both male and female poets.⁷ In this way, the cultural and poetic crises of this period mirror one other.

⁷ See, for example, the effigies of the New Woman featured in the Cambridge protests in 1897 against women's full membership in the university (Cornell University). The votes for women's membership were easily defeated (Cornell University).



Browning's Don Juan in *Fifine at the Fair* shouts at his wife, Elvire, "See yourself in my soul!" (808). The crisis of gender representation in the 1870s originates in this issue: Can women see themselves in a man's description? Can a man imagine an ethical, non-violent relationship with a woman? What happens when men consider women as versions of types originating in male souls? Furthermore, is empathy possible without projecting the self onto the other?⁸



The banner above reads, "Get you to Girton Beatrice Get You to Newnham Here's No Place for You Maids." As in Linton's "Girl of the Period," an appellation quickly shortened to "GOP," figuring the female body as unnaturally modified in modern times, ridiculously and clownishly stripped down from her former grandeur proved a popular strategy against the growing women's movement.

⁸ As we shall see, these questions respond directly to similar concerns in Romantic poetry. In fact, we might say that the dramatic monologue as formulated by Browning and Tennyson continues Romantic explorations of psychological self-creation and other-destruction. There is not a clean break between "Romantic" and "Victorian," or lyric and dramatic monologue in this way of describing the genre's history. These are fluid and interpenetrating categories that respond to issues of subjectivity and gender.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's publication of *Jenny* in 1870 marks an important moment in the poetic conversations about gender and genre. He uses the poetic form adeptly to explore the limits of empathy, pioneering the portrayal of what I have termed "contrasubjectivity," self-creation against the other. Augusta Webster's *A Castaway* explores the social pressures that create the industry of prostitution while her speaker disdainfully describes her encounters with faceless, voiceless men, encounters through which she believes she is actually doing their wives a favor. Through this tension, Webster answers Rossetti by giving Jenny a voice and silencing her pitifully needy customers, meanwhile positioning poetry to respond to social problems and to give agency to even the most miserable women in the nation. At the heart of the crisis of the 1870s is the question of whether individuals can gain critical distance, or whether poetry reveals the speaker's subjectivity and the presence of persistent violence in relationships, particularly between men and women. When Rossetti read the last few lines of Browning's *Fifine at the Fair* (published in 1871), in which Juan confesses to having given money to Fifine in pity (just as Rossetti's speaker gives Jenny gold), the lines "convinced [Rossetti] that Browning had joined the conspiracy against him, and he flung the book from him and broke off a friendship of twenty-five years' standing" (DeVane, *A Browning Handbook* 366). Browning did, I argue, respond to the crisis differently than Rossetti, by creating scenes that track the process of Juan's objectification of women. In the poem, Juan tries to convince Elvire that his admiration for Fifine, a tightrope walker at the fair, is purely an objective appreciation for her beauty. However, Elvire knows immediately his true interest in the girl and tries repeatedly to walk away from him. The final act of dropping coins, which bounce in Fifine's tambourine, brings *Jenny* into the

poem and proves the failure of Juan's attempt, implicating him in a relationship of commodification. In many ways, Browning does not deviate from his earlier work in this poem, which continues his focus on the ethical concerns in "Porphyria's Lover" and "My Last Duchess." However, in these earlier poems, the violence of representation is physical, the women silenced by force and positioned post-mortem for the male speakers' pleasure. In this poem, the women are alive and Browning has his male speaker face them, through Don Juan's monologue to Elvire and Fifine, in order to trace the process of linguistic dehumanization that creates gender violence in the genre, a process of metonymy and mythopoeia, the women's identity ignored and replaced.

"Living had failed and dead had failed / And indeed I was alone":

Finding Agency in Abjection

Beginning just before and stretching through the 1870s, many poets began to experiment with the speaker position of the dramatic monologue. While the previous conversation focused on the objectification of the other, or the objectification of the self by the other in the case of *A Castaway*, this conversation focuses on the self made an object to the self. These poets attempt to determine how abjecting the speaker in order to negate conventional notions of identity can create a new form of subjectivity. This movement also shifts the genre closer to the lyric, attenuating the shadowy differences between them. Building upon Shaw's argument, we might consider abjection the ghost other in the self that makes the self unfamiliar. Altering the form of the dramatic monologue allows the poets to imagine a different coherence of the self, using a genre

that typically calls into question the authenticity of the lyric voice and shows ruptures in psychology.

The abjected speaker provided another means by which to imagine a speaking position empowered psychologically, though vulnerable physically.⁹ Although abjection often precludes a speaking position or a desiring self, many Victorian poets experimented with abjected speakers in order to question the autonomous self in other models of subjectivity. By enabling an escape from power structures, abjection broadened the focus of the discussion about gender and genre to a more comprehensive view of the ways power functions. Curiously, the dates of this generic experimentation coincide with those of the Contagious Diseases Act, suggesting that abjection had become a wide-spread cultural discussion with political implications. To what degree should women be represented as mere bodies, vessels from which to eradicate disease, rather than as full subjects in a nation that respects their autonomy and their right to the security of their own bodies? Acting out a sort of self-dehumanization and self-annihilation allows poets to explore the previously silent side of relationships, such as the objectified position of the Duchess in “My Last Duchess,” while imagining how abjection offers a new recourse to agency. A response to power inequality, this approach disassembles asymmetrical power by offering an escape from oppression.

For instance, Christina Rossetti wrote a series of poems from 1846-56 that exemplify this abject movement. In “From the Antique,” “Song,” “Sappho,” and

⁹ We might connect this function of abjection to the jilted women of Felicia Hemans’s and Mary Robison’s early versions of the dramatic monologue form. Like Armstrong, we could use such connections to chart various lines of the monologue’s development.

“Cobwebs,” the speakers hope to escape physical, religious, and social structures. In “After Death,” “Echo,” and “A Chilly Night,” the speakers cannot reach their interlocutors and, at times, view their own bodies as Other. For Rossetti, meaning does not disappear with the loss of selfhood; it begins. In “A Chilly Night,” the speaker wants to join in a common language with her ghostly mother, but in the end, she exclaims, “Living had failed and dead had failed / And I was indeed alone” (49-50). Her recognition of the alterity of the Other leads to her sense of alienation, but also to her expansive, alternative existence. Rossetti’s speakers desire the freedom of the abject, the abasement of selfhood and loss of identity. Paradoxically, the speakers desire a state that would free them of desire and, thus, fulfill their desire. Through negation, the speaker leaves the coherent self to inhabit a space outside of the body, one of enhanced vision. In Gerard Manley Hopkins’s “terrible sonnets,” the speaker describes his body’s pain and soul’s emptiness. Rather than sketching a traditional spiritual narrative of stasis, dejection, and fulfillment, these poems focus on the speaker’s spiritual emptying. According to their biographers, Rossetti’s and Hopkins’s poetry of the abject was written during times of immense personal pain. However, some of the poems that alter the speaker position through abjection seem to express a sort of energetic exultation, rather than patient fortitude.

From the negated space Rossetti imagines in “Cobwebs,” Algernon Charles Swinburne builds static worlds like the one in the “Garden of Prosperine.” This negated space pulses with energy for Swinburne, who creates limitless opportunities for rebuilding new formations of the speaker position. Similarly, Edith Emma Cooper and Katherine Bradley, writing as “Michael Field,” often create situations in their poems in

which abjection ironically empowers the speakers. For instance, in “Embalmmment,” the queen embalmed in honey wants to be near her lover, but not to sleep. Mary Coleridge finds power in abjection, seeking these moments personally and poetically. As we shall see, her composition of the “The Witch” coincided with personal events through which she contemplated abjection, the abjection of the self in sexual encounters and romantic relationships and the abjection of the body in death. Futhermore, her active use of intertextual methods expresses the same drive, her voice abjected beneath incorporated canonical voices.

“Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!”:

Polyphony, Intertextuality, and Multiple Subjectivities

The next generic innovation occurs later in the period, between 1870 and 1910, when poets begin multiplying the voice of the speaker and negating the interlocutor, imagining differently the problems of relationship and objectification. Rather than abjecting the speaker to envision new power, these poets bring outside voices into the primary speaker’s psyche and into the text through intertextuality, creating a polyphonous form. This is another type of ego-explosion, one based on a premise that subjectivity is not developed through defining the self against the other, but through an internalized relationship with the other.

Occurring at once, many different cultural events produced this shifting model of subjectivity. In these later decades, the growing suffrage movement and the British

empire spawned debates about race and class in the nation. As a result, the nation seemed more and more like a conglomeration of various voices. Furthermore, the widespread public use of telegraph offices in the 1870s and the increasing number of telephone installations in the 1890s (Mitchell 82-83) suggest that British society at this moment quite literally reverberated with voices—multiplying from every corner. Polyphonic evolution in the dramatic monologue seems a natural reaction to the shifting cultural setting and, consequently, to the changing shape of subjectivity.

Although I read Victorian poetry as a large conversation with multiple intertextual points, many of these poets chose intertextuality as an aesthetic project in itself. For instance, Augusta Webster used poetic methods she developed from her interest in intertextuality. Intertextuality sets up an implicit character study that posits her female speakers against her precursors' male speakers. Furthermore, the presence of earlier texts in Webster's poems, like "Caliban" in "Circe" and *Jenny* in *A Castaway*, suggests that she understands her poetic identity as multiple. Intertextuality, then, is another form of polyphony, one that maps the shape of poetic subjectivity.

Internalized intertextuality results in a certain kind of polyphony many female poets especially practice, an agonistic form that positions one voice as an *agôn* filled with competing discourses. In "Michael Field," Cooper and Bradley best represent the drive to don a mask in the service of polyphonic poetry. Their jointly written poems weave together multiple voices in a single poetic speaker while highlighting the process of polyphony; "A Girl" finds "our souls so knit, / I leave a page half-writ" (10-11). For "Field," poetry provided a way to draw other voices into one's own, while also recognizing the ways a single voice splits off into multiple voices. May Kendall and

Amy Levy experimented with intersubjectivity, multiple voices brought into the individual's subjectivity. They were most interested in the ways that they could modify the monologue to portray the incorporation of the voice of those who might be interlocutors in other, more traditional monologues. The literary self-reflexivity inherent in this re-envisioning of past poetic conversations reveals ongoing Victorian configurations of the genre, which developed through cultural and poetic crises into an instrument for charting subjectivity, with the flexibility to evolve in the hands of new poets.

Chapter One: Epistemologies of Poetic Observation: Subjectivity and Objectivity in Victorian Literary Criticism

In his “Introductory Essay” to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s letters, Robert Browning describes the poetic ideal of approximating an “absolute vision” (17) that combines the “objective poet,” “one whose endeavor has been to reproduce things external,” (11) and the “subjective poet,” one “impelled to embody the thing he perceives” (13).¹⁰ Victorian theories abounded about objectivity and subjectivity, so much so that in his “Of the Pathetic Fallacy,” John Ruskin denounces the terms absolutely:

German dullness and English affectation, have of late much multiplied among us the use of two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians—namely, *objective*, and *subjective*. No words can be more exquisitely, and in all points, useless; and I merely speak of them that I may, at once and for ever, get them out of my way and out of my reader’s. But to get that done, they must be explained. (1282)

Literary criticism of the Victorian period reveals a shift in value that hinges upon the changing notions of subjectivity and objectivity, a shift paralleled by the evolution of the dramatic monologue. Before progressing to my evolutionary model of these terms, I need to define them. *Subjectivity* carries with it two concepts that, while related, move any discussion in two separate directions. In 1821, Samuel Taylor Coleridge first used

¹⁰ I have used the *Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* as the source for all Victorian poets and critics cited in this chapter.

the term *subjectivity* to describe “consciousness of one’s perceived states.” This usage shifted Robert Southey’s original use of the term in 1812, “the idea the mind abstracts from [an] impression,” from the result of the mind’s process—the abstraction of an impression—to an awareness of one’s rational process at work, the “consciousness of . . . perceived states.” I would like to build upon these early definitions to outline other related definitions of the term. The second meaning, derived from the first, describes the state of viewing the world from within one’s own mental framework—for example, judging subjectively means judging according to personal standards and values created through one’s experiences or derived from one’s belief systems. Objectivity, by contrast, implies the ability to judge based on criteria originating outside of one’s own mental framework, e.g. by accepting a communal standard instead. *Subjectivity* also relates to a third concept, that of subject-hood, or occupying a subject position.

Together these imply an idea of subjectivity that contains three levels. The first level requires awareness of the self. In the next level, the individual reflects on sense experiences in the world, making the individual actively self-conscious. Finally, the individual judges the world from his or her perspective—a unique vantage point—according to specific values, commitments, and sense abilities.¹¹ Of course, accounts of

¹¹ In *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920*, Regenia Gagnier defines *subject* as “subject to itself,” “‘Other’ to others,” “a subject of knowledge,” and “a body that is separate (except in the case of pregnant women) from other human bodies” (8). *Subjectivity* corresponds to these definitions of *subject* and represents that “opposed to objectivity” (8). She explains that all of these definitions influence self-representation: “Furthermore, in writing or self-representation (like autobiography), the *I* is the self-present subject of the sentence as well as the subject ‘subjected’ to the symbolic order of the language in which one is writing—the subject is subject of language, or intersubjectivity (i.e., culture)” (9).

subjectivity will differ according to one's understanding of the possible results of responding to the world, e.g. creating an empirical account of it, gaining spiritual knowledge from it, etc. In other words, the shifting Victorian responses to objectivity and subjectivity correspond to shifting ideas of those possible results, whether empirical or spiritual. Although *objectivity* usually describes a position of judgment, it also implies a theory of the mind that parallels that of *subjectivity*. First, the individual is a part of a community. Next, he or she brings individual reflections of the world into alignment with that community. Finally, the individual judges the world according to specific principles, along with the group. Thus, the differences between subjective and objective aesthetics reflect a greater difference, a divergence between schemas of epistemology.

Isobel Armstrong argues that the Victorian period was “post-Kantian.” Her definition will be helpful to this outline of Victorian interests in objectivity and subjectivity:

This meant, in the first place, that the category of art (and for the Victorians this was almost always poetry) was becoming “pure.” Art occupied its own area, a self-sufficing aesthetic realm over and against practical experience. It was *outside* the economy of instrumental energies (for in Kant art and technology spring into being simultaneously as necessary opposites). And yet it was at once apart and central, for it had a mediating function, representing and interpreting life. These contradictions were compounded by post-Kantian accounts of representation, which adapted Kant to make both the status and the mode of art problematical by seeing representations as the constructs of

consciousness which is always at a remove from what it represents. Thus the possibility of a process of endless redefinition and an ungrounded, unstable series of representations was opened out. So the Victorian poets were the first group of writers to feel that what they were doing was simply unnecessary and redundant. For the very category of art itself created this redundancy. (4)

Victorian poets were probably drawn to the monologue because it further complicated representation. The monologue's construction draws attention to these issues because truth is presented through its representation by a speaker, who serves as the representation of a mind in the poem. Thus, the reader cannot find an unmediated truth in any monologue; to make meaning, he or she can only set the representations together, the speaker's representation of truth and the poet's representation of that representation. Furthermore, because of its formal construction, the monologue dramatizes the interplay of objectivity and subjectivity within the relationship of the self and other. Although many monologues contain a speaker and an auditor or interlocutor, some poets modify the form by removing the auditor/interlocutor or by reconstructing the speaker's psychology through abjection or polyvocality. However, despite formal changes throughout the genre's history, one feature of the monologue remains constant: the relationship of the self and other. We do not see such concentrated attention to this relationship in any other form. Only the dramatic monologue creates a discourse of the self through the dependence of the self upon the relationship of self and other through—for example—the other's role (auditor/interlocutor) in the speaker's construction of language, the self as the other in abjection, or the other in the self in polyvocality.

We might visualize this relationship of self/other and subjectivity/objectivity through a double helix form. As readers, we subjectively enter the poem, judging the characters and the actions from our personal perspectives. Because our subject position differs from that of the speaker, we also judge the speaker from an objective vantage point, according to the schemas with which the poet frames the monologue, such as—in Browning’s poems—Christian narratives (“Fra Lippo Lippi,” “The Bishop Orders his Tomb,” “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”) or love narratives (“Poryphria’s Lover,” “Love Among the Ruins,” “My Last Duchess”). At the same time, the monologue’s structure brings us within the mind of the speaker, thus layering the subjectivity of the reader and speaker. Every word the reader repeats in his or her mind brings the spirit of the speaker to life. Thus, at the very moment we begin to judge the speaker objectively, we join the speaker in a bond of subjectivity. As Robert Langbaum explains, “the poetry of experience is, in its meaning if not its events, autobiographical both for the writer and the reader” because “the reader can identify [with the speaker] to make the poem an incident in his own self-development as well” (52). Of course, as Cynthia Scheinberg has argued, the reader might not be able to identify with the speaker; in that way, the very construct of the poem can be used self-consciously to draw attention to ways of knowing the self.¹²

Poets’ focus on individual experience has been traced through Romantic poetry in Langbaum’s important project as “literature’s answer to science, . . . a doctrine of experience, an attempt to salvage on science’s own empiric grounds the validity of the

¹² See “Recasting ‘Sympathy and Judgment’: Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue.”

individual perception against scientific abstractions” (27). When the Victorian poets reinterpreted this poem of experience, they developed the dramatic monologue, which blended the objective and subjective. As Armstrong explains, Victorian poetry doubles the lyric so that it becomes “not only the *subject*’s utterance but the *object* of analysis and critique” (12):

By seeing utterance both as subject and as object, it was possible for the poet to explore expressive psychological forms simultaneously as psychological conditions *and* as constructs, the phenomenology of a culture, projections which indicate the structure of relationships. I have called this objectification of consciousness a phenomenological form because phenomenology seeks to describe and analyse the manifestations of consciousness rather than its internal condition. Thus such a reading relates consciousness to the external forms of the culture in which it exists. The gap between subjective and objective readings often initiates a debate between a subject-centered or expressive and a phenomenological or analytical reading, but above all it draws attention to the act of representation, the act of relationship and the mediations of language, different in a psychological and in a phenomenological world. (13)

As readers, we understand that the speaker is not a living person, but a character made of text, compiled phrases of types cultivated from generations of people’s lived experiences. Thus, the subjectivity we feel that we are sharing with the speaker separates into bundles of objective judgments about humanity. In this way, the readers’ subjective and objective

experience doubles in the double helix structure with the representation of the speaker's subjectivity in text that presents recognizable character types.

As we have seen, Sessions offers the following criteria for a "perfect example" of the dramatic monologue: "1) speaker, 2) audience, 3) occasion, 4) interplay between speaker and audience, 5) revelation of character, 6) dramatic action, and 7) action taking place in the present" (508). By contrast, an "approximate" example of the monologue contains a speaker, but lacks some other elements. I would argue that Victorian poets immediately capitalized on the form's flexibility, usually not adhering to Sessions's "perfect example." As we have seen in the introduction, formal characteristics served as signifiers in a poetic language. Poets reconfigured models of subjectivity by manipulating the form (e.g. re-envisioning the speaker's position, reducing or increasing the interplay, or internalizing dramatic action in a character's psyche). Removing the audience in the poem, for example, changes the way the reader engages with the poem.¹³ To a degree, the double helix form described above collapses. The reader cannot as easily identify the speaker as a character separated from other characters, making it difficult for the reader to judge the speaker objectively. As a result, the subjective experience of the poem is enhanced for the reader even as the unique subjectivity of the speaker—usually portrayed in the contrast between the speaker and the audience—is threatened. Thus, by manipulating the monologue's formal elements, poets helped to shape the conversation growing in the period about objectivity and subjectivity, concepts that corresponded to theories of the mind. These theories of the mind have important

¹³ See Dorothy Mermin's *The Audience in the Poem* for more discussion about the evolution of this dramatic feature.

implications for the possible relationships between individuals; in this way, they chart the possibilities for ethical communities.

For Ruskin (1856), if one is truthful, any subjective description is, by nature, objective, because others can verify its veracity. For instance, he explains that some people claim that blue “can only be felt when the eye is turned to the object, and as, therefore, no such sensation is produced by the object when nobody looks at it, therefore the thing, when it is not looked at, is not blue” (1282). Such an idea is repulsively esoteric for Ruskin. In his opinion, if the thing is blue, it is blue for everyone all of the time. However, he is not entirely fair in his summary of the complex theories he describes. Ruskin derives the example of the mind’s interpretation of the color blue from Hume’s *Enquiry into Human Understanding*¹⁴ and the immaterialist theory from Bishop George Berkeley. Berkeley’s theory of observation and sight, developed in the

¹⁴ Hume uses the example of the color blue to describe the mind’s ability, in some isolated cases, to relate an idea obtained through experience to another idea originating in the mind:

Suppose, therefore, a person to have enjoyed his sight for thirty years, and to have become perfectly acquainted with colours of all kinds except one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it never has been his fortune to meet with. Let all the different shades of that colour, except that single one, be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest; it is plain that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible that there is a greater distance in that place between the contiguous colour than in any other. Now I ask, whether it be possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, though it had never been conveyed to him by his sense? I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can: and this may serve as a proof that the single ideas are not always, in every instance, derived from the correspondent impressions; though this instance is so singular, that it is scarcely worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim. (319-20)

eighteenth century, was still very influential when Ruskin was writing. In fact, in 1842, Samuel Bailey published *A Review of Berkeley's Theory of Vision*, refuting Berkeley. Defending Berkeley, John Stuart Mill and James F. Ferrier joined the debate, an elaborate conversation about vision, perception, language, and understanding published in the *Westminster Review* and *Blackwood's Magazine*.¹⁵ Berkeley writes in *Principles of Human Knowledge*,

Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any substance without a mind, that their *being (esse)* is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other *created spirit*, they must either have no existence at all, *or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit*: it being perfectly unintelligible and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect and try to separate in his own thoughts the being of a sensible thing from its being perceived. (115-16)

¹⁵ For more discussion, see Margaret Atherton's description of Berkeley's reception in the nineteenth century. See also George Pitcher's edited collection of these texts by Bailey, Mill, and Ferrier.

For Berkeley, a thing's existence requires a viewer or creator.¹⁶ If not perceived, the thing “must either have no existence at all, *or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit.*” If one considers Berkeley an empiricist, this scientific approach requires verifying data from a specific vantage point (i.e. the scientist) in order that the description of the thing observed can be considered within a logical framework: the scientist, looking at the object from this perspective, reported that it had these specific traits. Berkeley's approach circumvents two logical fallacies: the scientist cannot judge the object based on a priori knowledge and the scientist cannot deductively piece together “truths” about an absent object. Knowledge for Berkeley works only inductively; otherwise the scientist-cum-pantheist must grant each object a personal spirit of being that functions beyond verifiability. A fundamentally humanist philosopher, Berkeley believes that life functions through and for the individual.

Without mentioning Berkeley, Ruskin defines the argument thus:

[I]t does not much matter what things are in themselves, but only what they are to us; and that the only real truth of them is their appearance to, or effect upon, us. From that position, with a hearty desire for mystification, and much egotism, selfishness, shallowness, and impertinence, a philosopher may easily go so far as to believe, and say, that everything in the world depends upon his seeing or thinking of it, and that nothing, therefore, exists, but what he sees or thinks of. (1282)

¹⁶ David Hume similarly argues that all knowledge originates in experience from which the brain forms impressions and then ideas. Consequently, “a blind man can form no notion of colours” (318).

For Ruskin, then, Berkeley's empirical position is merely the "egotism" of a man demanding to be the center of the universe. Ruskin argues that the world does exist even without an observer noting it, to which Berkeley might reply that this might be so, but there is no proof and this sort of existence is meaningless to humans without such proof as our senses provide.¹⁷ Ruskin continues, "[B]lue does *not* mean the *sensation* caused by a gentian on the human eye; but it means the *power* of producing that sensation; and this power is always there, in the thing, whether we are there to experience it or not, and would remain there though there were not left a man on the face of the earth" (1282). For Ruskin, every object has the power of action that defines the essence of the thing. Humans do not derive meaning from experiencing these objects, but instead, from recognizing the essence of their power. Accordingly, Ruskin warns, "if you do not see them blue when you look at them, it is not their fault, but yours" (1283).¹⁸ For Berkeley, knowledge is objective in that it involves testing the truth of a thing, but it is subjective

¹⁷ As Boswell relates it, Samuel Johnson responded similarly to Berkeley:
 After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it,— 'I refute it thus.' This was a stout exemplification of the first truths...or...original principles...without admitting which we can no more argue metaphysics, than we can argue in mathematics without axioms. To me it is not conceivable how Berkeley can be answered by pure reasoning. (qtd. in Winkler 1)

Ruskin similarly wants to refute Berkeley's immaterialism with the collective force of human response to the material world.

¹⁸ Jerome Hamilton Buckley explains that Ruskin's "basic concepts of the true and the beautiful and rested upon a sure, though never clearly articulated, faith in the reality of spirit, in the power of the human mind to trace the patterns that unified the aspirations of a diverse culture" (160).

because the methods for judgment are situated in the individual's senses. Ruskin, by contrast, argues for a kind of collective knowledge. If we have accumulated knowledge about something through the gathered wisdom of the community, it is true:

Hence, I would say to the philosophers: If, instead of using the sonorous phrase, *It is objectively so*, you will use the plain old phrase, *It is so*, and if instead of the sonorous phrase, *It is subjectively so*, you will say, in plain old English, *It does so*, or *It seems so to me*, you will, on the whole, be more intelligible to your fellow creatures; and besides, if you find that a thing which generally *does so* to other people (as a gentian looks blue to most men) does *not so* to you, on any particular occasion, you will not fall into the impertinence of saying, that the thing is not so, or did not so, but you will simply (what you will be all the better for speedily finding out) that something is the matter with you. (1283)

Consequently, Ruskin will not believe in a difference between objectivity and subjectivity because such a belief both refuses the innate central essence of objects in the world and suggests that, to some degree, the world is unknowable because we can only know it perspectively. To this end, he determines to “meet our German friends in their own style” (1283) by arguing,

[W]e also, who suppose ourselves the objects of every arrangement, and are certainly the subjects of every sensual impression, thus uniting in ourselves, in an obverse or adverse manner, the characters of obness and subness, must both become metaphysically dejected or rejected, nothing

remaining in *us* objective, but subjectivity, and the very objectivity of the object being lost in the abyss of this subjectivity of the human. (1283)

According to Ruskin's intentionally garbled paraphrase of the German argument, in order to describe something objectively—a descriptor that for Ruskin equates to describing it “accurately” because the description is verifiable according to its likeness to the object's essence—the observer must “become metaphysically dejected or rejected.” According to Jürgen Habermas, Immanuel Kant—the “German” whom Ruskin felt he had to combat—

focused on objectivity, that is, on the necessary subjective conditions of possible knowledge of nature. For Kant believed that accounting for the validity of the most exact empirical judgments (that is, the theoretical propositions of contemporary physics) would at the same time account for the transcendental bases of experience in general. (23)

Although their philosophies differed greatly, Kant, like Berkeley, was not challenged by the process of interpretation that might separate the objective and subjective because, in the sublime process—for example—imagination fails to capture the force or magnitude of the moment. The mind contains within it the ability to be overwhelmed. When one's objective capabilities are exceeded by the enormity of the situation or the contemplation, the individual can join, for a moment, the supersensible that cannot be experienced—let alone represented—in any other way. As Werner S. Pluhar describes,

[W]e must settle for a metaphysics that confines itself to the synthetic a priori principles (along with their universal applications) that are presupposed by, and hence stay within the range of, what experience is

possible for us. Hence, immanent metaphysics, which the *Critique of Pure Reason* shows us to be capable of, will be a metaphysics of nature. Such a metaphysics cannot tell us anything about the supersensible: about objects in themselves, about a God, or even about ourselves as subjects in themselves (souls), as distinguished from how we appear to ourselves through our “inner sense”; in particular, it cannot tell us whether, despite the necessity inherent in nature’s universal laws (the mechanistic laws regarding efficient causes), our will has the kind of freedom that is needed for morality. All we can do, as far as the *Critique of Pure Reason* goes, is *think* a “nature in itself,” a God, and such freedom. (xxxviii-xxxix)

For Berkeley, the connection between the mind’s processes and divine revelation is much clearer. As he explains in *A New Theory of Vision*, rather than threatening his spiritual beliefs, his theory validates the human biological mechanisms that allow us to learn about our world and that reveal their divinely organized purpose:

Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude, that the proper objects of vision constitute a universal language of the Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions, in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It is by their information that we are principally guided in all the transactions and concerns of life. (81)

Conversely, there is a metaphysical truth for Ruskin that unites the subject to objective vision, leading him to fear that the empiricists' dependence on subjectivity displaces the metaphysical reality with "the abyss of this subjectivity of the human."¹⁹

When Gerard Manley Hopkins later develops his poetry of inscape, his mission parallels Ruskin's.²⁰ For instance, in "as kingfishers catch fire,"

each hung bell's
Bow swung finds tongue to fling out broad its name;
Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I do is me: for that I came.* (3-8)

Each "mortal thing" has an essence for Hopkins that resounds in the life that being lives.

Even an inanimate object shakes the surrounding air with the declaration of its existence.

¹⁹ Recently, Amanda Anderson has argued that the Victorians had "a prevalent ... preoccupation with distinctly modern practices of detachment, a preoccupation characterized by ambivalence and uncertainty about what the significance and consequences of such practices might be" (*The Powers* 3). Anderson contends that, inheriting the ideals of the Enlightenment, the Victorians endeavored to cultivate detachment. She describes "a dialectic between detachment and engagement, between a cultivated distance and a newly informed partiality" (6). Anderson focuses on both non-fiction and fiction in her work, so the debate about subjective and objective observation in poetry does not enter into her argument. I would like to build upon her argument, using Hardy's image of advancement: "never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit," "drawing back for a spring" (1445). As later Victorian poets begin to reconsider the values of subjective stances, the epistemological ground of the earlier Romantic subjective poetics has tilted. New theories about ontology and spirituality give a new foundation to the later Victorian philosophical return.

²⁰ For Hopkins, this theory also originates in the writings of Duns Scotus and his notion of God's presence in all things. As Hopkins wrote in his journal, "when I took in any inscape of the sky or sea I thought of Scotus" (qtd. in Phillips xiv).

For Hopkins, it is this performance that validates and verifies the metaphysical meaning of existence. When “the just man justifies” (9), he “Acts in God’s eye what in God’s eye he is—/ Christ” (11-12).²¹ The poet’s job, then, is to record the existence of the small pieces of God in the world, the objects that cry out the truth of their own existences. By contrast, Berkeley believes that the spiritual power of the world is located in the interpretative power of the individual, not in the material world itself.

Ruskin believes the poet should be an objective observer, nurturing the health of the individual and of the community. The pathetic fallacy, then, is “caused by an excited state of the feelings, making us, for the time, more or less irrational” (1284). This fallacy signals a sort of derangement for Ruskin, admitting a “temperament ... of a mind and body in some sort too weak to deal fully with what is before them or upon them” (1285). Ideally, the poet can overcome the force of passion “and the whole man stands in an iron glow, white hot, perhaps, but still strong, and in no wise evaporation; even if he melts, losing none of his weight” (1285). Keats and Shelley fall into the second order, that of “the man who perceives wrongly, because he feels,” “generally themselves subdued by the feelings under which they write, or, at least, write as choosing to be so” (1286). The ideas are “diseased or false,” but a sort of truth remains if the “*feeling* is true” (1286).

²¹ As this line shows, Hopkins’s concept of human inscape requires the individual to live up to his or her most virtuous state. Aristotle advocates this sort of fulfillment in his *On Rhetoric*: “The deeds are signs of the person’s habitual character, since we would praise even one who had not accomplished anything if we believe him to be of the sort who could” (85). A speaker’s *prepon*, or propriety, depends upon the ability to communicate a character according to his or her *hexis* (moral state): “[F]or lives do not have the same character in accordance with [each and] every moral state. If, then, a person speaks words appropriate to his moral state, he will create a sense of character” (236).

Ultimately, for Ruskin, “the greatness of a poet depends upon the two facilities, acuteness of feeling, and command of it” (1288). Ruskin’s ideal poet is both objective and subjective because to see the world accurately means to observe the true essence of an object, to portray a right reaction to stimuli, to reflect self-consciously on this experience, and to weigh one’s feelings against others’. To be subjective is to be objective—to join a chorus of voices who verify the universality of life and of feeling.

Early writers of the dramatic monologue at this time take part in this conversation by exploring minds enthralled in passionate emotions—losing the distanced vision of objectivity in the rush of subjective reflection—including poems like Alfred Tennyson’s “Mariana,” “St. Simeon Stylites,” and *Maud*. Tennyson explains,

This poem of *Maud or the Madness* is a little *Hamlet*, the history of a morbid, poetic soul, under the blighting influence of a recklessly speculative age. He is the heir of madness, an egoist with the makings of a cynic, raised to a pure and holy love which elevates his whole nature, passing from the height of triumph to the lowest depth of misery, driven into madness by the loss of her whom he has loved, and, when he has at length passed through the fiery furnace, and has recovered his reason, giving himself up to work for the good of mankind through the unselfishness born of a great passion. The peculiarity of this poem is that different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters. (qtd. in Collins and Rundle, 254)

Robert Browning focuses on extreme forms of this subjective deviancy in his poems such as “My Last Duchess,” “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” “Porphyria’s Lover,” and

“The Laboratory.” As we saw in the introduction, representations of subjectivity in the monologue change throughout the period.

In Browning’s “Preface” to Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poetry, the objective poet sees the world from the perspective of humanity, while the subjective poet reaches the heights of an attuned philosophic pitch. In a similar way, Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* describes the importance of poetic “double vision” (V.184), necessary in this “full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age” (V.216). Revealing the poet’s expanded perspective, this “double vision” blends the subjective and objective to incorporate external vision with perspectival epiphany. As evident in Ruskin’s passionate response to the “German” arguments about subjectivity and objectivity, the debate about epistemologies challenged accepted notions of the poet’s function in society and of the best form of healthy communities. If individuals are always already subsumed into their own subjectivities, unable to respond to the world in similar ways for similar reasons, what is the common ground for society? In the middle of the century—from Browning’s (1852) publication of his preface, through Ruskin’s (1856) essay on the pathetic fallacy, and Barrett Browning’s (1856) publication of *Aurora Leigh*—this crisis grew and the poetry of the period increasingly reflects it.

Ruskin’s essay deviates from earlier voices in the debate that claim the importance of subjective poetry. Summarizing some of these earlier arguments clarifies the movement of the critical conversation. Arthur Henry Hallam’s “On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry” (1831) to which Ruskin seems to respond, takes a different view of poetic subjectivity. In his essay, Hallam argues that Keats’s and

Shelley's poetry could not become popular because popularity necessitates readers' identification—readers must identify and feel with the poet:

For since the emotions of the poet, during composition, follow a regular law of association, it follows that to accompany their progress up to the harmonious prospect of the whole, and to perceive the proper dependence of every step on that which preceded, it is absolutely necessary *to start from the same point* i.e. clearly to apprehend that leading sentiment of the poet's mind, by their conformity to which the host of suggestions are arranged. (1193)

Because regular readers cannot "*start from the same point*" in order to verify the experience empirically, as Ruskin might advocate, or to at least verify the feeling's truth, Keats and Shelley will never be popular. To Hallam, the magnificence of the poetry of Keats and Shelley is due to their ability to embody in their poetry the senses they have experienced, the mark of a subjective poet for Browning. Hallam explains,

Susceptible of the slightest impulse from external nature, their fine organs trembled into emotion at colors, and sounds, and movements, unperceived or unregarded by duller temperaments. Rich and clear were their perceptions of visible forms; full and deep their feelings of music. So vivid was the delight attending the simple exertions of eye and ear, that it became mingled more and more with their trains of active thought, and tended to absorb their whole being into the energy of sense. Other poets *seek* for images to illustrate their conceptions; these men had no need to seek; they lived in a world of images; for the most important and extensive

portions of their life consisted in those emotions which are immediately conversant with the sensation. (1192)

The inward focus he attributes to Keats and Shelley means that their poetry cannot be popular because the readers cannot relate and because the culture has shifted into one that requires this relationship between poet and reader. Armstrong explains,

Unlike Kant, for whom “reflection” might be glossed as epistemological ideas (in the third critique at least) and “sensation” as the unique representations of the data of experience by consciousness, Hallam was not exact and left unquestioned a dichotomy between thought and sensation which was filtered through Schiller into categories which actually construct the division they describe. For Kant and for Schiller (who simplified Kant) the aesthetic mediates ideas and immediate experience, but for Hallam unique, unmediated sensation *is* the aesthetic. Its uniqueness, and thus resistance to appropriation and abstraction is what appealed to him. The essay rescues itself from incoherence time and again by its paradoxical conviction that to destabilise fixed positions is a reconstructive act. (66-67)

Hallam’s process of literary evolution follows logically. Hallam outlines the culture’s move from a “youthful period,” one of the “expansive and communicative tendency in mind which produces unreservedness of communion and reciprocity of vigor between different orders of intelligence,” into a “period of degradation”: “With the close of the last century came an era of reaction, an era of painful struggle to bring our overcivilised condition of thought into union with the fresh productive spirit that brightened the

morning of our literature” (1194). Hallam argues that the kind of Romantic intellectual vigor he now observes belatedly emerged from the alignment of the “poetic impulse” and the “general impulse of the nation”; by contrast, the “spirit of modern poetry” reflects “that return of the mind upon itself and the habit of seeking relief in idiosyncrasies rather than community of interest” (1195). This current movement results in “a checking action for conservation against a propulsion toward change” (1195). Although Hallam notes that some tie this movement to the Industrial Age, specifically, that the “diffusion of poetry must be in the direct ratio of the diffusion of machinery” (1195), he disagrees. He expresses concern that these changes to the expectations of poetry’s function in society reveal a larger danger:

But this notable argument forgets that against this *objective* amelioration may be set the decrease of *subjective* power, arising from a prevalence of social activity, and a continual absorption of the higher feelings into the palpable interests of ordinary life. (1195)

The “continual absorption of the higher feelings into the palpable interests of ordinary life” destroys the ability to feel deeply, degrading the literature of the period, as well as the health of the society. In contrast with Hallam’s, Ruskin’s argument seems quite populist: Experience is universal, and so should poetry be. The best poetry is that which speaks to the greatest number of people, reflecting their personal experiences. Between Hallam’s article in 1831 and Ruskin’s in 1856, many critics published on this issue, revealing a gradual shift to Ruskin’s position that—in turn—seems affected and impossible by the 1870s.

In John Stuart Mill's "What is Poetry?" (1833), he argues that poetry is "the exhibition of a state or states of human sensibility" (1213). Poetry "is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation" (1216).²² The poet must turn to his or her internal life to write. As a result, although poetry may respond to human truths shared by others, poetry "is truth": "The truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly" (1214). By nature, poets must not pose for their audience or struggle to fit the audience's expectations. Poetry must stay within the bounds of its production. Consequently, although "eloquence is *heard*," "poetry is *overheard*" (1216). The truth of poetry originates in its just representation of the mind. While Ruskin argues for poetic vision that replicates truths others can verify, Mill defines poetry as internally focused as a result of its production and by nature of its unique purpose as a literary form. Thus, the world that poetry describes must be filtered first through the mind:

Descriptive poetry consists, no doubt, in description, but in description of things as they appear, not as they are; and it paints them, not in their bare and natural lineaments, but seen through the medium and arrayed in the colors of the imagination set in action by the feelings. (1215)

Like Hallam, Mill describes poetry that originates in the mind of the poet, who shares these silent musings with readers who never can exactly replicate the moment of meditation. However, such poets, and thus, such poetry still exist for Mill.

²² According to Jerome Buckley, Mill "was guided from the first by a quite 'unscientific' faith in natural goodness and a trust in the basic rationality of man, which made him quite unable to grasp the anti-intellectual implications of the new biology. But his shortcomings and errors as a systematic philosopher detracted not at all from the candor of his judgment, the force of his attacks on bigotry and prejudice, or the strength of his plea for the liberated intellect" (189).

Anticipating Ruskin's argument, in "Recent English Poetry: A Review of Several Volumes of Poems by Alexander Smith, Matthew Arnold, and Others" (1853), Arthur Hugh Clough suggests that perhaps poetry better serves its own purposes when it reaches a wider audience. He first questions how poetry might attain the popularity of the novel, asking whether it should

deal more ... with general wants, ordinary feelings, the obvious rather than the rare facts of human nature? Could it not attempt to convert into beauty and thankfulness, at least into some form and shape, some feeling, at any rate, on content—the actual, palpable things with which our everyday life is concerned ...? ... Could it not console us with a sense of significance, if not of dignity, in that often dirty, or at least dingy, work which it is the lot of so many of us to have to do, and which some one or other, after all, must do? (1255)

Clough argues that poetry can tie communities together in a celebration of the beautiful, reminding people that they have a spirit that is worth uplifting:

Cannot the Divine Song in some way indicate to us our unity, though from a great way off, with those happier things; inform us and prove to us, that though we are what we are, we may yet, in some way, even in our abasement, even by and through our daily work, be related to the purer existence. (1255)

The novelist, by contrast, "does try to build us a real house to be lived in and this common builder, with no notion of the orders." Consequently, the novelist "is more to our purpose than the student of ancient art who proposes to lodge us under an Ionic

portico” (1255). Poets should uplift the spirit by first describing the situation in which the readers actually live.²³

Clough’s poetry attacks socially constrictive practices, validating everyday experience outside of the performance of morality. For example, in “Duty—that’s to say complying,” performing a role outside of authentic experience might be proper socially, but ends in the murder of individuality:

Moral blank, and moral void,

Life at very birth destroyed,

²³ Clough categorizes the poetic approach he advocates as hardier, more fit to represent the needs of the people of England. In this way, Clough continues the feminization rhetoric which began in the eighteenth century, coding Englishmen as more masculine than their European counterparts:

There is something certainly of an over-educated weakness of purpose in Western Europe—not in Germany only, or France, but also in more busy England. There is a disposition to press too far the finer and subtler intellectual and moral susceptibilities; to insist upon following out, as they say, to their logical consequences, the notices of some single organ of the spiritual nature; a proceeding which perhaps is hardly more sensible in the grown man than it would be in the infant to refuse to correct the sensations of sight by those of the touch. (1266)

E. J. Clery describes eighteenth-century rhetoric as gendered in the feminization debate that negotiated civic humanism’s view of virtue as masculine and corruption as feminine (6) and its opponents’ attempt to rewrite national progress as positive and feminine (12). The opponents to the civic humanism argument that equated the feminine with corrupt progress and national degradation connect femininity in their discourse to economic innovation by suggesting that true masculinity and therefore civilization requires treating women as equal because of their weaker state (6). Feminization became linked with characterizations gained by women’s influence, as Clery notes, such as “sociability, civility, compassion, domesticity and love of family, the dynamic exercise of the passions and, above all, refinement, the mark of modernity” (10). Clery, using Thomas Laqueur’s work, explains that gender had a central place in eighteenth-century rhetoric because the conception of gender as a one-sex model, in which women were lesser forms of men, changed to a two-sex model (10). Thus, understanding women as separate from a male continuum provided a way to consider femininity as a positive natural attribute (Clery 11).

Atrophy, exanination!

Duty!—

Yea, by duty's prime condition,

Pure nonentity of duty! (39-44)

Ironically, the performance of social norms alienates the individual, while a life of noncompliance returns the individual to real living, which can bond people together in a healthier community.

Matthew Arnold, too, argues for a dynamic poetry that responds to real life (1853). He laments the disappearance of “the disinterested objectivity” and the introduction of “the dialogue of the mind with itself” (1270). For Arnold, losing “disinterested objectivity” means losing the “particular, precise, and firm” for “a representation which is general, indeterminate and faint” (1270). Poetry’s function in society is to bring joy through representing actions:

The Poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action; and what actions are the most excellent? Those, certainly, which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time.
(1272)

Art should emanate from the action of real lives in order to uplift society.²⁴ In this way, the particular experiences of humans translate to the general stories of humanity, the

²⁴ Arnold’s poetry often does not reveal the same optimism. Poems like “Dover Beach” and “The Buried Life” suggest that beneath the social bonds to which we cling

narratives that swell into myth, inspiring and directing those to come. “The dialogue of the mind with itself,” by contrast, spins poetry centrifugally downward into the individual’s psyche, into the nuances of idiosyncratic particulars.²⁵ Walter Bagehot decidedly agrees with Arnold, claiming that “the business of the poet, of the artist, is with *types*; and those types are mirrored in reality” (1312). Poets are to “describe what is *in* them, but not *peculiar* to them—what is generic, not what is special and individual” (1312). Browning represents Bagehot’s category of grotesque literature because his poetry “takes the type, so to say, *in difficulties*” (1316). Hallam, Ruskin, Clough, Arnold, and Bagehot all express grave concerns about poetry’s progress into the individual mind, into the realm of the subjective. At the same time, all five authors optimistically call poets to use poetry to illustrate the individual’s experience in order to bring attention to the universal. This sort of universal vision encompasses the experiences of all people, absorbing everything into a central unity. The ideal poet is both subjective and objective, able to feel deeply and see clearly and capable of stepping outside of the particulars of his or her life to connect experience to the rest of society. At this point, most poets and

lies a fundamental alienation we can never quite overcome, epitomized by “ignorant armies clash[ing] by night” (37).

²⁵ Armstrong compares Kant’s and Arnold’s approaches to the aesthetic: Kant’s category of the aesthetic, of course, is behind Arnold’s grand style. The freedom which subsists in the disinterested play of mind over the object, its severance from the practical and instrumental, this is familiar Kantian ground. Arnold’s grand style, standing over and against morals and religion but nevertheless *being* them, transcending the inessentials of politics and passion, achieves the detachment of Kant’s aesthetic while associating it with ethics, something about which Kant was far more doubtful. Indeed, Arnold’s grand style *is* the aesthetic. It *enacts* the aesthetic state, the end product, the work of art’s results, rather than working on the experiences which produce that result. Hence its concern with effect. (211)

critics seem to consider this sort of “double vision” necessary socially and possible poetically.

The controversy regarding Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s *Jenny* (1870) marks a shift in the way critics evaluated the possibilities of objective poetry. Robert Buchanan argues in “The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D.G. Rossetti” (1871) that *Jenny* is too personal—too subjective—while Rossetti responds in “The Stealthy School of Criticism” (1871) that he was using a technique that would allow him to imagine another person’s mind—thus blending the subjective and objective. The “*inner standing-point*” (1343) Rossetti advocates seems precisely at issue here. Buchanan doubts the possibility of objectivity that allows an author to inhabit a character’s mind while judging it from the outside. As we have seen, when Rossetti read the last few lines of Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*, he became “convinced that Browning had joined the conspiracy against him, and he flung the book from him and broke off a friendship of twenty-five years’ standing” (DeVane, *A Browning Handbook* 366). Browning sharply censured Rossetti to Isa Blagden: “‘Yes—I have read Rossetti’s poems,’ he wrote Isa Blagden, ‘you know I hate the effeminacy of his school, —the men that dress up like women, —that use obsolete forms, too, and archaic accentuations to seem soft’” (qtd. in Knoepfelmacher 157). When Browning responds through *Fifine at the Fair* (1872), he has changed his earlier stance on the viability of blending objective and subjective art. He lays bare the mechanisms of feigned objectivity through his use of the dramatic monologue in the poem, validating Ruskin’s fear of “the very objectivity of the object being lost in the abyss of this subjectivity of the human” (1283).

At the end of the Victorian period, a balance of objective and subjective art seems no longer possible. Instead, the only truth available is in the particularities of the individual's experience, especially in the concentrated expression of experience available through an author's created character. Accordingly, critics such as Amy Levy and Alice Meynell endorse the value of the subjective poet, especially the idiosyncratic, minor poet. For example, Levy (1883) praises James Thomson thus:

He is distinctly what in our loose phraseology we call a minor poet; no prophet, standing above and outside things to whom all sides of a truth (more or less foreshortened, certainly) are visible; but a passionately subjective being, with intense eyes fixed on one side of the solid polygon of truth, and realizing that one side with a fervour and intensity to which the philosopher with his birdseye view rarely attains. (1358)

The value of Thomson's work is his ability to tell a very subjective, internal, individual truth. His pain—because it is his individual pain—reveals something previously unknown about the human condition: “No, this is not the highest utterance, the word of the great artist struggling towards completion; rather is it the under, courser cry of the imperfect human being, crushed beneath a load which he is not formed to bear” (1361). Levy values Thomson's poetry for the very same limited vision Ruskin would have seen as flawed and socially useless.

Meynell explains that Tennyson's work has come to be seen as not subjective enough (1917), while modern readers (in 1880) appreciate in Browning's poetry the characteristics that Bagehot thought “grotesque” and considered evidence that Browning “takes the type, so to say, *in difficulties*.” According to Meynell, Tennyson's “quality of

ease, has come to be disregarded in our day” (1424); readers complain that Tennyson’s poetry reveals “too much show of the hiding of his art” (1425).²⁶ Current readers want authentic poetry—poetry too raw to be carefully sculpted—allowing them to participate in the interpretive process. Readers “seem to find much merit in the manifest difficulty; they will not have a key to turn though closely and tightly, in oiled wards; let the reluctant iron catch and grind, or they would even prefer to pick you the lock” (1424). By contrast, with Tennyson, “[i]t is not only, with him, that the wards are oiled, it is also that the key turns loosely” (1424). The readers Meynell describes seem to find this ease of interpretation unsatisfying personally and philosophically. To such readers, Tennyson’s poetry presents a truth that does not require the type of strenuous lock picking they find necessary in their personal progression through lives experienced as a series of formidable bolted doors.

Browning’s strength comes from his willingness to respond to life as it is. In this way, Browning represents a “scientific” mind, one able to remain steadfast in the goal of testing out life’s truths: “A mind less serene, whole, scientific, and independent might oftener be touched, or hurt, or discouraged into seeking a lofty and lovely ideal which is rare in his poetry. Not that Browning cannot conceive it, but that he is too closely and intently at work with things as they are to attend to it” (1431). What seemed quite subjective in Browning’s poetry to Bagehot has become objective and scientific to

²⁶ Tennyson’s transparent aesthetic proves fundamentally British for Meynell. In fact, his honesty sets him apart from other British poets and literary critics: “French poetry in our Swinburne, of French criticism in our Arnold, Tennyson shows the effect of nothing French whatever” (1425). Consequently, his British leadership compliments his poetry, his work eschewing the temptations of other cultures and thereby strengthening the nation.

Meynell. While to some degree “greatly to be lamented,” his willingness to internalize the act of writing poetry—to use obscure references and complicated rhythms—authenticates his struggle with and through language. The readers can then join him in the struggle, prying apart the phrases to get at some internal truth. So, in the later decades of the Victorian period, literary critics estimate poetry’s function differently than did Clough, Arnold, and Ruskin in the middle of the century. Later critics still believe that poetry should uplift the people, but the kind of objectivity previous critics considered possible and positive—the sort that takes the reader through particular feelings and validates universal experience—seems trite and idealistic now. The only truth is the one individually experienced. Poetry binds these experiences together to portray a myriad of truths, each authentic, and each verifiable through the process of interpretation. Writers of the dramatic monologue develop models for subjective poetry by increasingly experimenting with allusive methods and building upon the “different phases of passion in one person [that] take the place of different characters” that Tennyson develops in *Maud*. Later speakers are polyvocal, actually embodying different characters at once.

In these examples of literary criticism across the period, we can see the debate progress. For Ruskin, subjective art seems simply idiosyncratic and socially immature, objective art elevated to a sort of universal language that validates our experiences in the world and bonds society. Then, suddenly, subjective art seems most real and reliable because of its double authenticity. First, it portrays a real individual’s experience of the world, and next, it offers a different kind of verifiability through the experience of interpretation. This movement from valuing the objective to praising the subjective parallels the shift between what we have labeled High Victorian to *fin de siècle*

aesthetics. A change in paradigm underpins this shift in aesthetic theories. Later critics like Meynell and Levy think the world works differently. They do not accept the premise that verifiability means a sort of universalizing principle—if I see correctly, what I see as blue, everyone sees as blue. They do not accept that there is an a priori truth discovered by the majority. Instead, objectivity results in distanced vision unnatural to the human experience and therefore inauthentic. Thus, Meynell and Levy return to a framework like Berkeley's—I can only rightly recognize the existence of the world around me through my own senses. Likewise, they reject a priori truth for a system more akin to Jean-François Lyotard's decentralized network of relationships exemplified in *petit récit*.

In this way, late-Victorian poetry represents a sort of return to the individual. However, the epistemological and ontological frameworks supporting these ideas have changed dramatically. The subjective aesthetic elevated in Romantic poetry supports a centralized system of inspiration, the point of contention being the source of that inspiration and the means of its transmission—transcending or emanating—such as in William Wordsworth's *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*.²⁷ The human heart, whether through joy or sympathy, works the

²⁷ At the beginning of the *Ode*, Wordsworth describes his feeling of loss. He can no longer connect to nature as he once could, and the tight rhyme scheme, combined with the polyrhythmic form, emphasize the loss of connectedness to regular natural rhythm. In stanzas one through four, the speaker endeavors to locate the problem, to determine why for him “there hath pass’d away a glory from the earth” (18). The fourth stanza ends with the speaker’s mournful cry: “Whither is fled the visionary gleam? / Where is it now, the glory and the dream?” (56-57). Coleridge answers these questions in *Dejection: An Ode*, a poem written mostly in iambic pentameter with an intricate rhyme scheme. Like the speaker in the *Ode*, Coleridge’s speaker wants nature to “startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!” (20). The speaker responds to the weariness in the *Ode*, sympathizing with the sense of loss, but then shifts and suggests, responding to

same way for Coleridge and Wordsworth to connect the poet with natural meaning.

Carol T. Christ similarly explains this characteristic of Romantic poetry: “Because the Romantics believed in the universality of the imagination, their creation of a poetry that portrays the movement of the individual mind resulted in a particularity with a correspondent universality” (12). For Coleridge, subjectivity is the position of a human as part of a natural system always already linked to it through the capacity for joy. For Wordsworth, subjectivity is transcendental connectivity to the divine.

By the time Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde, and Amy Levy are writing, the return to the individual’s experience has a different valence. The moment is not valued because of the way it reveals Truth to the world, but because of the way it continuously captures and elicits human experience. These “spots of time” hold meaning in their positivist, not representative, value. Christ links Victorian subjectivity to Romantic subjectivity through particularity: “The observation of minute particulars comes to signify both the solipsism the Victorians feared and their last attempt to discover a universal order in the

Wordsworth directly (“O Edmund!” [25]), that “we receive but what we give” (48). Inspiration emanates for Coleridge from internal joy, “the spirit and the pow’r” (67) to reflect on natural forms.

Wordsworth responds to Coleridge’s conjecture about inspiration in the additional seven stanzas of the *Ode*. Using neo-Platonic theory, Wordsworth suggests that as we age, we drift away from our closeness to Heaven, shifting from the child he apostrophizes, “Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep / Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind” (110-11), to the adult, the “Creature / Moving about in worlds not realiz’d” (147-48). When the closeness of Heaven drifts from the earth-bound body, it leaves behind a “primal sympathy” (184) and through “human suffering” (187), we see nature and feel the “[t]houghts that do often lie too deep for tears” (206). For Wordsworth, “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting” (58), and so the loss he has felt, the sensitivity that has passed away from his experience of nature, is an unavoidable change in subjectivity as his soul struggles to respond through the layers of humanity that thicken with age.

world of things” (13). I would like to argue that the way these observations occur reveals a blending of various vantage points of poetic observation that result in multiplied subjectivity. Decentralized subjectivity, if we return to the tripartite definition at the beginning of this chapter, radically alters Romantic schemas of epistemology. In the earlier definition, subjectivity assumes a centralized subject position. Here, it posits a different model. The individual is still a subject in his or her own life and accepts experience as the totality of the access to existence; however, experiences do not bond to create a central representation of him or of her. Rather, the individual is the messy conglomeration of different experiences, and thus, is multiple. Subject-hood multiplies with different vantage points because there is no longer a Self central to the world. Instead, subjectivity—one’s reflection on one’s own mind’s process—splinters with different experiences and interpretations of sense data. This is the beginning of a post-humanist philosophy later developed more fully in existentialist, post-structuralist, and constructivist theories. It dominates *fin de siècle* poetry because as an aesthetic position, it suggests that the only route to the world is through the individual’s experience. Objectivity and disinterestedness play no part here—there is only the sense experience of the individual, the constant burning with a “hard, gem-like flame” (Pater 1353). The rest of my project tracks this shift, including the models of subjectivity and objectivity proffered by Victorian poets of the dramatic monologue.

Language itself is a continual balance between subjective and objective vantage points. Through the relationship between a speaker and hearer, the dramatic monologue portrays the way that communication requires imagining a hearer, someone who can make meaning of the utterance. In fact, Amanda Anderson claims, “As a genre that

displays at once the situatedness of speech and the solipsism of the individual speaker, dramatic monologue often seeks to reveal the many distortions, imbalances, and manipulations, both conscious and unconscious, that attend any speech act” (*Tainted* 141). The critical history of theories about the relationship between speaker and interlocutor stretches from the nineteenth century into our own time. For Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, language presupposes hearer and superaddressee. The stages of objectification include 1) expression: the actualization of consciousness and 2) reflecting the attitude of ourselves as objects. Outsidedness happens in self-reflexivity, or self-objectification:

To express oneself means to make oneself an object for another and for oneself (“the actualization of consciousness”). This is the first step in objectification. But it is also possible to reflect our attitude toward ourselves as objects (second stage of objectification). In this case, our own discourse becomes an object and acquires a second—its own—voice.
(110)

Likewise, for Emmanuel Levinas, language “presupposes interlocutors, a plurality”:

This discourse is therefore not the unfolding of a prefabricated internal logic, but the constitution of truth in a struggle between thinkers, with all the risks of freedom. The relationship of language implies transcendence, radical separation, the strangeness of the interlocutors, the revelation of the other to me. In other words, language is spoken where community between the terms of the relationship is wanting, where the common plane is wanting or is yet to be constituted. It takes place in this transcendence.

Discourse is thus the experience of something absolutely foreign, a *pure* “knowledge” or “experience,” a *traumatism of astonishment*. (73)

This model resembles Bakhtin’s in the way language requires entering into a relationship. According to Steven Hendley, Habermas shares the sense of language requiring a self, other, and third party, which for him, leads to the groundwork for justice (21). Victorian poets seem to understand language’s power in similar terms. Through the experience of communicating, the speaker in a dramatic monologue must recognize the existence of the hearer and superaddressee, to use Bakhtin’s language—the others who make meaning of the communication. Perhaps building upon Habermas and Bakhtin, W. David Shaw identifies in his description of the monologue’s double irony a similar dynamic in monologue form, which contains an other, who functions as a censor, and a third person: “But what if the process if destabilized? If I subdue the Third who subdues the Other, does the Other still subdue me or do I subdue the Other? Can the god Setebos whom the Quiet overthrows still subdue Browning’s Caliban, or is Caliban now able to subdue Setebos and other authority figures like Prospero?” (“Masks of the Unconscious” 441). Victorian poets gravitate to the dramatic monologue because it allows them to construct language relationships that reveal modes of subjectivity and that dramatize their ethical concerns.

The poet takes part in the relationships with the reader, multiplying the possibilities of the language games. The double helix structure of subjectivity and objectivity in the dramatic monologue makes it an ideal medium for dramatizing the theories of epistemology Victorian literary critics find so important. For the critics, these theories offer new purpose to poetry, claiming for it a central place in the development of

modern society. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Magdalen character allows poets to emphasize the tensions between subjectivity and objectivity that makes the monologue a powerful tool for exploring and dramatizing models of subjectivity and modes of ethical relationships.

Chapter Two:

“Proud Mary’s Gone Mad”:

Magdalen and the Monologue

When the title character in William Blake’s “Mary” puts on simple clothing to defuse the growing jealousy in her community, a child exclaims, “Proud Marys gone Mad” (33). Although she tries to avoid being the “Angel” (5) or the “whore” (17), Mary is caught within the townspeople’s characterizations of her. The poem ends with “proud Mary” in a state of madness, unable to find an identity in which she feels powerful but still accepted. Later in the nineteenth century, in the moment when a palpable shift occurred between valuing objective art and subjective art, poets using the dramatic monologue began to experiment with the Magdalen character, who often assumed the role of the speaker, dramatizing a powerful shift from object to subject. The Victorians inherited the Romantics’ fascination with Mary figures. The dual figures of Madonna and Magdalen, depicted by Blake, among others, reappear in Tennyson’s “Mariana” and *Maud*, Rossetti’s *Jenny*, Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*, Webster’s “A Castaway,” and then, in later years, in Michael Field’s “The Magdalen,” Amy Levy’s “Magdalen,” and Charlotte Mew’s “Ne Me Tangito” and “Madeleine in Church.” Tracking these poetic configurations in the late Victorian period, I will demonstrate how these poetic conversations directed the evolution of Victorian literary criticism.

Victorian writers inheriting Romantic representations of the complex Magdalen character interpret the solution differently. Rather than portraying women lost in a search

for identity and surrounded by distorted images of their femininity, later poets reveal how agency is possible through the negotiation of these gendered discourses of identity. This realization comes in the 1870s to poets like Levy and Mew after a conversation between Rossetti, Browning, and Webster about the Magdalen character and the nature of subjectivity. Because these chapters are organized by conversation, not chronology, the first conversation does not fully take place before the second one. Rather, this first conversation provides a frame for the second one. It provides a broad view of the development of the Magdalen figure, but it also deviates from the second conversation in the chosen depictions of this figure in the monologue. Through the next conversation, Webster, Rossetti, and Browning created a model for contrasubjectivity. I am defining *contrasubjectivity* as a process of self-consciousness in which people define themselves through contrast, positing their humanity against another person's. I would like to focus here both on an early form of multiple subject positions through the character of Mary and on the ways late Victorian writers reinvent a new form of intersubjectivity, in which people understand themselves so intimately tied to other people that they internalize other voices and build their self-conceptions from a series of social discourses.

The multifaceted Magdalen character has featured in a variety of narratives throughout its history. It originated in the New Testament in stories that gave rise to a Victorian reincarnation as the female sinner. Susan Haskins explains,

With the disappearance of . . . “heretical” writings, Mary Magdalen, heroine of the Gnostics, chief disciple, “companion to the Saviour,” his “spouse,” “consort,” and “partner,” vanished too, to re-emerge in orthodox eyes briefly as a witness to the resurrection, and “apostle to the apostles,”

but, more significantly for the history of Christianity, and women, more enduringly as a repentant whore. (57)

Mary of Magdala remains an extremely controversial figure, especially because of the Gospel of Mary of Magdala, a Gnostic text. The name of Magdala, a town on the Sea of Galilee (“Magdalen”), describes the town’s fortifications. “Magdēlā” is Aramaic for “tower.” Mary Magdalen’s first name links her, of course, to another central female figure in the New Testament, Jesus’s mother. Although most scholars do not believe that the historical Mary Magdalen depicted in the gospels was a prostitute, the medieval authors and the Victorians certainly saw her this way. Her connection by name to the Virgin Mary served them in two ways: 1) it clarified the differences between the women, with virginity as the ultimate foil to sexual depravity and 2) it suggested that holiness was possible for the fallen woman because, after all, she shares Mary’s name and her capacity for spiritual vision. However, her ability to change—to become a type of the Virgin Mary—was very much at issue. As Amanda Anderson explains, many prominent Victorians debated whether the fallen woman could be rescued, as William Acton argued, or whether “prostitution itself [was] an extensive economic and social system, into which the fallen woman was entirely absorbed” (*Tainted* 49). As if to distance “Mary” from “Magdalen,” common usage cut off “Mary” altogether. Through the long period spanning the history of this character, the Aramaic word for “tower,” then, effectively became the word for “prostitute.”

We might read this fascinating shift in a number of ways. For example, the Magdalen is an overt monument to impropriety, a tower of sin. At the same time, the Magdalen is a woman ironically without protection, without the tower to protect the

maiden from lusty suitors. In this reading, the Magdalen subverts the image her name represents. She escapes from the tower, the place of normative power and protection, creating her own system of support blatantly in opposition to the norm, economically and morally. Some critics, like Felicity Nussbaum—writing about the eighteenth century—have read the prostitute thus, as an economic free agent who subverts patriarchal narratives delineating acceptable means of economic gain and the uses of the body. Although many Victorians instead saw the Magdalen as the woman in distress, needing help to re-ascend to her lofty place as pious, chaste, Victorian woman, some poets used the Magdalen figure in way that resembles Nussbaum's formulation, by creating a space for non-normativity, a competing tower providing an outsider's perspective of normative Victorian power.

Because of her involvement in the sale of her body, describing the Magdalen figure as a social agent proves complicated. Can a woman who objectifies herself find a new subjective position through her objectification? Can a woman step outside of a dominant system using the system's definition of her, or has her subjectivity already been shaped absolutely by this system?²⁸ Poetic responses to these questions vary, but the extreme example of the woman whose symbolic value is enmeshed in important religious types and whose body has commercial value certainly exemplifies shifting ideas of

²⁸ Anderson addresses this issue in more detail in *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces*. In this text, she

demonstrate[s] [that] the discourses on fallenness, which clearly serve to codify behaviors, negotiate political threats, and wage political protest, also constitute an intricate and overdetermined engagement with some of the most vital and consequential Victorian ideas about agency, representation, and social transformation. (6)

subjectivity and objectivity. Defining the agency possible for any individual proves challenging. A short statement about agency and subjectivity will help to clarify my approach to the Magdalen figure, an approach that reflects a modified position between poststructuralism and liberal feminism. Building upon the work of Beauvoir, Foucault, and Butler, among others, we could argue that the social forces surrounding us shape our subjectivity, truly rendering us subjected. However, building upon the work of Cixous, Rich, hooks, and Freire, we could also argue that individuals can find ways to mediate these forces, to navigate the possible paths of action and thought, in order to find some agency. The history of the Magdalen figure I will chart runs somewhat similarly. For Blake, Mary's madness is her escape from the bounds of the social forces that determine her social value and, eventually, her understanding of herself. By contrast, Levy and Mew endow Magdalen with the power to see these forces and to navigate them. She has the power to rise above the possible narratives of her identity and to manipulate and exploit them.²⁹

²⁹ In reading the Magdalen character in this way, I am building upon Anderson's argument about Victorian prostitution. She explains,

If feminine virtue could symbolize or help promote normative models of inherent, autonomous, or self-regulating identity, fallenness represented manifold challenges to those models and did not bespeak simply a form of aggressivity or sexuality that threatened to disrupt a symbolic purity. Moreover, the relation between the categories of purity and fallenness took highly complex forms, with purity sometimes figuring and shoring up coherent, normative forms of identity, sometimes figuring alternate or ideal conceptions of identity, and sometimes displaying—as selflessness or sympathy—the attribute of attenuated agency that typically defines fallenness. (*Tainted* 15)

I am most interested in the monologue's capability of portraying such "alternate or ideal conceptions of identity." Anderson claims that the monologue "invites one to analyze intersubjective relations between the lines, so to speak, and here provides the opportunity

My theoretical framework also builds upon Pierre Bourdieu's work with "body hexis." As cultural notions of ontology changed in the Victorian period—with constructivist theories battling religious teleological theories of being—more character types became possible. The individual could find agency in the extent to which he or she could negotiate and modify these new types. For Bourdieu, "hexis" comprises communication through multiple signifying gestures, such as clothing choice, dialect, pronunciation, behavior, and language use. He explains,

The close correspondence between the uses of the body, of language, and no doubt also of time is due to the fact that it is essentially through bodily and linguistic disciplines and censorships, which often imply a temporal rule, that groups inculcate the virtues which are the transfigured form of their necessity, and to the fact that the "choices" constitutive of a relationship with the economic and social world are incorporated in the form of durable frames that are partly beyond the grasp of consciousness and will. (89)

Virtues, then, are communicated through behavioral norms that represent pathways to social and economic worth in a community and become themselves cultural capital. For this reason, I have paired my readings of the complex performances of Magdalen characters in late Victorian monologues with corresponding visual representations.

These images help to reveal the discourses of femininity the speakers negotiate. Frank

to show with particular vividness the several ways projected anxieties about agency overpower encounters with fallen women" (*Tainted* 141). In this chapter, I will examine such anxieties through the work of women poets.

Mort calls for “accounts of how these resistances [gendered modes of understanding sex] were formed just as complex as our work on official discourse” (6). He cautions, “Resistances did not just drop from the sky, nor were they formed by spontaneous eruptions from below. They were dependent on the languages available, which could endow such struggles with meaning” (6). I will begin to delineate the “languages available” in monologues featuring Magdalen in order to develop a nuanced account of the changing theories of subjectivity. For Victorian women living in the midst of cultural change and confronted with competing definitions of their physical, emotional, and intellectual abilities, Madonna and Magdalen could embody at once traditional norms for women’s successes or failures and subversive power possible by redefining those norms.

Among the numerous examples of the Magdalen figure in Victorian art and literature, I will focus on those in monologues by women at the end of the period, when many of the movements for women’s rights were being realized. The form allowed these poets to portray complicated accounts of women’s power, especially in the intersection points between agency and objectification. The form allowed them to explore how subjectivity functions in this vexed environment in which women had little access to agency, but they navigated the avenues to power available to them through what agency they had and through their limited, but sometimes strangely liberating, objectification. Particularly influential to Victorian writers, Romantic writers like Blake used the figure to examine a multiplicity of female identities, which they portrayed through poetry and painting. Bradley and Cooper, writing as “Michael Field,” built upon Blake’s work through a series of ekphrastic poems that reveal the loss of vitality in the biblical Magdalen. Through the structure of these poems, Bradley and Cooper distanced the

reader from the mind of the Magdalen character, creating a subjective emptiness that Levy and Mew later filled when they rewrote Magdalen poems from the Magdalen's perspective. Levy and Mew returned to the multiple subject positions Blake created; however, rather than multiplying her body, they internalized the positions in the Magdalen speaker's subjectivity. In this way, poetry both responded to and guided the critical conversations described in the previous chapter. As Victorian literary criticism moved from valuing ethical objectivity to valuing the authenticity of subject positions, Victorian poetry moved from objectively evaluating the Magdalen as social pariah and as sex symbol to subjectively portraying the Magdalen's mind.

Blake's "Maries":

Inherited Traditions of the Magdalen Figure

Blake actively engaged in the aesthetic discourse about androgyny in the late eighteenth century by depicting bodies that split and coalesce. As Thomas Laqueur has explained, the debate about whether androgyny could occur without violently subsuming one ego into another corresponds to ongoing debates in the period about the nature of gender and sexual difference. However, Laqueur argues that the one-sex and two-sex models co-existed in the nineteenth century, creating ethical debates corresponding to these paradigm shifts (193):

I will argue here that [the two-sex model] was produced through endless micro-confrontations over power in the public and private spheres. These confrontations occurred in the vast new spaces opened up by the

intellectual, economic, and political revolutions of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They were fought in terms of sex-determinant characteristics of male and female bodies because the truths of biology had replaced divinely ordained hierarchies of immemorial custom as the basis for the creation and distribution of power in relations between men and women. But not all confrontations of sex and gender were fought on this ground, and one-sex thinking flourished still. The play of difference never came to rest. (193)

As we have seen, such shifting discourses about gender threatened the stability of models of subjectivity, precipitating the experimentation this project traces. Because these heated discussions of the Romantic period resulted in the Victorian movements for social justice for women, it is important to note how poetry participated in them. When late-Victorian poets like Mew and Levy brought innovations to the Magdalen tradition, they clearly built upon Blake's work. Their modifications reveal the new model of subjectivity they offered through these poems.

Many critics of the Romantic period contend that the very notion of androgyny privileges males and places women as Other, "an idealized mother, a second self, a submerged double, an inspirational muse or mentor, or a demoniac *femme fatale*," as Diane Hoeveler describes her (2).³⁰ Alicia Ostriker argues that Blake's androgyny

³⁰ In 1981, Hoeveler referred to the "ideal of androgyny" (qtd. in Vesely 10), and her recognition of androgyny's inherent sexism, in its subsuming the feminine into the male, represents the change in the greater debate by feminists about Romantic androgyny. For more discussion on Blake and androgyny, also see Tom Hayes's "William Blake's Androgynous Ego-Ideal."

presents the desire for containment and erasure of female identities (Connolly ix).

Blake's emanations and spectres do seem to follow a binary pattern of male normativity and female alterity. However, Blake also seems to have worked to maintain individual identity. After all, his multiplied bodies reify the sense of continual Otherness; his literary and artistic projects reinforce schism and difference.³¹ In Blake's texts, humanity's post-lapsarian split into gendered identities creates the need for an ego-ideal. In facing the Other from the splintered position of a gendered identity (in the two-sex model), one gains a further division of identity—a pluralism that results from one's inability to conceive of the Other—creating subject wholeness through multiplicity.³²

³¹ Connolly historicizes Blake's language related to incorporation. She argues that the cosmic language related to Albion reinforces, as Dörrbecker explains, an eighteenth-century conception of plants and comets with sunspots originated in solar volcanoes (156). Connolly connects this belief to the idea of androgyny, and the possibility that "once separated those bodies can forget their derivative origin and claim primacy" (156). See *William Blake and the Body* for a thorough discussion of these issues.

³² These multiple subject positions permeate Blake's textual and visual work, reinforcing his belief in multiplicity as symptomatic of human existence and necessary for his poetic vision. Blake responds to the gender rhetoric of his day, in which the female body can become Other in the two-sex model and national identity further shatters into gendered discourse, by envisioning aesthetic, spiritual, and national unification that preserves the autonomy of the individual. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, as Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant explain, "the chief idea in Blake's counter-system is the expansion of sense perception" (82), what they call "a vision of infinity" (82). The preface to *Milton* reinforces the notion of incorporation and eternity by stating that Jesus provides "Worlds of Eternity" that one can reach through Imagination (1.20). Likewise, in *Jerusalem*, the speaker refers to Imagination as portal to Eternity and multiplicity, and as his "great task" (5.17): "To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity / Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination" (5.18-20). The ideal incorporative figure, Jesus, contains both multitudes and subject wholeness: "we live as One Man; for contracting our infinite sense / We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one" (*Jerusalem* 38.17-18). Although human multiplicity—such as in the genders—is symptomatic of fallenness for Blake, it also provides a glimpse of the infinite in the expanse of multiplied finites.

Blake's two versions of "The Entombment," Numbers 143 and 144 from his *Illustrations to the Bible*, vary in revealing ways. In Number 143, painted with tempera on canvas, darkness shadows most of the characters' faces. A male figure—Nicodemus, according to a note in the text—stands in the center above the coffin, flanked by two women. The figures around the coffin curl toward the floor, clutching their knees, with their faces cast downward. In Number 144, drawn with pen and painted with watercolor, the central male figure is no longer present. Instead, three women stand in this central location, looking down at the coffin. In this painting, the central female figure has her face covered mysteriously, with a candle highlighting the shadows on her face. The faces of the females on either side of her are fully exposed. The characters around the coffin stand and are well lit. Blake develops a narrative about gender and enlightenment through the two visual texts, which differ in their portrayal of the mood of the entombment, the reactions of those present, and the gender of the central figure.

Perhaps we can attribute the difference in color to the fact that the tempera does not seem to age as well as the watercolor and seems darker in nature. However, the positions of the characters are so different that it seems that Blake used these versions to

Thus, multiplication represents fallenness, division, and the finite, and provides an image of incorporation, unity, and infinity. Division through multiplication enables vision. Similarly, the argument of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* states, "Without Contraries is no progression" (3.6). Thus, the divisiveness and perhaps destructiveness in Blake's poems provides the glimpse of infinity. The demonic narrator explains that he prints "in the infernal method . . . melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (14.9-11). The womb provides a female space in *Milton*, that simultaneously contains and expands perception: "The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs / Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite" (10.6-7). Similarly, the story of *Milton* ends in the search for a space for the incorporation of Milton and his six-fold emanation, and their incorporation results in Jesus (Johnson and Grant 235).



Fig. 4: Blake's *The Entombment*, Number 143



Fig. 5: Blake's *The Entombment*, Number 144

create multiple meanings through multiple bodies at Jesus's entombment. The addition of a mysterious female with a candle and the classical body shapes of the figures create a sense of hope in the second version of the entombment. Blake adds to the Bible's account a triune woman who carries with her the spiritual knowledge the people in Number 143 weep to have lost. Although the central female's face remains hidden beneath the veil, her light brightens the room, including the face of Jesus. When one scans the image from left to right, one sees the triune woman first, then Jesus. Jesus's body faces the other direction in Number 143, so one sees Jesus's face and then the patriarchal male's. Details in the image, such as the man's beard in Number 143 and the white light's reflection on the veiled woman's chin in Number 144, create intertextual coherency linking the two images, doubling them further. Thus, the images multiply the meanings of the Bible's accounts of Jesus's entombment, the female characters in Number 144 seem to form one body, and the triune characters link both pieces visually. In this way, Blake uses multiple images in his Entombment series to emphasize the spiritual enlightenment through multiple meanings, rather than only through one meta-system. The womb-like structure of the tomb is the liminal space of Jesus's spiritual transformation and the space for the intermixing of bodies and of meanings.

Women presented for Blake the fundamental bodies by which to express self-annihilation. In Levinasian theory, this act is the shattering of ego that occurs when considering the Other, or God.³³ For Blake, the female symbolized the power to break

³³ To escape the earthly body in Levinas's theory, one must engage in self-annihilation. Levinas uses the tradition of death as a state of nothingness to underpin his ideas about fear, especially that the fear of death equates to the fear of the Other

subject positions through her Otherness and through her embodiment of replication and difference.³⁴ The three Mary characters—also featuring in *The Three Maries at the Sepulchre*—typify this multiplication of beings and the power of the womb to provide profusion of meaning. Blake revealingly titles this painting *The Three Maries*, not *The Three Marys*. In other words, we might read this title as a plural form of “Mary” (“Maries”). In this case, he uses this plural form to posit simultaneously the unity of their names and the plurality of their typological representation. The women are all types of Mary, joined in an ideological system. His portrayal of multiple Marys was not the first; Haskins explains that before the Middle Ages, two Marys were the norm, and afterwards, three Marys became traditional in Christian iconography (61). Two unusual features of Blake’s *Maries* are the inclusion of the more complicated tradition of Mary Magdalen as an Apostle—the carrier of the light—rather than the representation of her as the repenting

overtaking one’s life, not the fear of the loss of ego (232-33). As Levinas explains it, “the negation of the I by the self is precisely one of the modes of identification of the I” (37). In *Milton*, Milton calls his Negation an “Incrustation over my Immortal / Spirit” (40.35-6). Self-annihilation must occur for one to obtain a greater knowledge of the soul—for Levinas, a greater understanding of obligation. This can also be seen in Blake’s use of the idea of circumcision as a “cutting away [of] the surface to reveal what is hidden” (Johnson and Grant 336). Patricia Beal describes self-annihilation in Blake’s poetry as “a process that requires that the subject both approach and resist the erotic object as it is manifested in the two females” (78). She argues that Blake’s characters must endure self-annihilation to gain “the capacity to maintain plasticity in relation to the empirical world and to experience what [Beal calls] ‘transcendental eros’” (78). For Beal, the womb image represents simultaneous wholeness and emptiness: “The womb serves as protection from the void. The knowledge that a void lies at the center of one’s system of meaning or one’s identity must be hidden” (87). See Richard Boothby’s work for more discussion of the death drive and self-annihilation.

³⁴ See Irene Taylor’s “The Woman Scaly” for an elegant account of Blake’s approach to the female body, the Female Will, and Human Forms.



Fig. 6: Blake's *The Three Marys at the Sepulchre*, Number 149

sinner, and the manipulation of the characters' gender through the visual echoes between Mary and the bearded man. The three women, identically dressed and positioned, look fearfully at a male angel who apparently explains the open tomb door. Because Mary gave birth to a part human, part spiritual being within the Christian story, her womb intermixes the physical and spiritual. Blake draws the viewer's attention to this circular space of intermixing through the arced doorway of painting Number 144, which takes the viewer's eye down to the three spherical urns at the women's feet. Blake heightens the sense of spiritual procreation in the three characters of Mary, the three versions of femininity.

This sort of liminality promises symbolic freedom through the dislocation of signs from signifiers and the self from socially constructed identity. Blake drew the biblical illustrations between 1799 and 1810 (Keynes ix). He wrote "Mary" around the same time, at least as early as 1803 (Johnson and Grant 201).³⁵ In "Mary" (see Appendix A),³⁶ the title character faces many different social expectations for her and experiences a crisis of identity. Even the title of the piece complicates the notion of autonomy. If one by name becomes a type of Mary and thus becomes located within the myth of Jesus's birth and resulting stereotypes of virginal femininity, every action one takes has already been evaluated by a cultural norm regulated by the signification of a name.³⁷ Although

³⁵ According to David V. Erdman, "Mary" was included in "a collection made for some friend or patron" now known as the Pickering Manuscript because of its owner in 1866, B. M. Pickering (859).

³⁶ I have used Erdman's version of the poem.

³⁷ Similarly, Diana Hume George explains, "Blake's portrayals of women ... are problems of symbol formation that express themselves in the limitations of language" (qtd. in Connolly x).

Blake's earlier use of multiplied Marys proves hopeful, the woman facing such replication must fight to maintain a subject position. As we shall see, Mary cannot escape the deterministic symbolic spaces in which her society tries to transfix her.³⁸

The poem begins in the ballroom, where she quickly gains everyone's attention:

Sweet Mary the first time she ever was there
 Came into the Ball room among the Fair
 The young Men & Maidens around her throng
 And these are the words upon every tongue
 An Angel is here from the heavenly Climes
 Or again does return the Golden times
 Her eyes outshine every brilliant ray
 She opens her lips tis the Month of May (1-8)

However, this praise soon and inexplicably turns to jealousy. Mary must struggle to adapt to a confusing social situation in which the villagers' representations of her are always changing:

Some said she was proud some calld her a whore
 And some when she passed by shut to the door
 A damp cold came oer her her blushes all fled
 Her lilies & roses are blighted & shed (17-20, sic)

³⁸ According to G. E. Bentley, Blake might have written this poem with Mary Wollstonecraft in mind: "It has been suggested frequently that 'Mary' is in some sense a reflection of Mary Wollstonecraft" (349). Bentley links the poem to Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or The Wrongs of Woman*.

When she endeavors to “humble [her] Beauty” (29), she receives worse treatment: a child calls her “Mad” (33), and “she [comes] home in Evening bespatterd with mire” (36).

Through depicting the torment of a beautiful woman scorned by envious people, Blake explores the destructive power of society’s representation of the individual. At first, the villagers’ descriptions of her inscribe Mary as an Angel, an ideal Greek woman, the sun, and the spring. This metonymic movement of signifiers entraps Mary in a system of replicated representation that prevents any true public effusion of her self. “Mary” describes a Christian womanly ideal and it further reflects a system of representation tied up in symbols of representation (“weak as a Lamb & smooth as a Dove” [25]). Caught within this network of signification, Mary spirals into a sort of madness, perhaps realizing that her self is merely a collection of signifiers with no true center:

She trembled & wept sitting on the Bed side
 She forgot it was Night & she trembled & cried
 She forgot it was Night she forgot it was Morn
 Her soft Memory imprinted with Faces of Scorn
 With Faces of Scorn & with Eyes of disdain
 Like foul Fiends inhabiting Marys mild Brain
 She remembers no Face like the Human Divine
 All Faces have Envy sweet Mary but thine
 And thine is a Face of sweet Love in Despair
 And thine is a Face of mild sorrow & care
 And thine is a Face of wild terror & fear
 That shall never be quiet till laid on its bier (37-48)

She cannot find a means by which to understand herself outside of these systems of signification that move metonymically away from an individual human located in a particular time. Mary receives her traits from the villagers, from cultural traditions, from her name, and from the speaker's description of her. Her identity multiplies and dissolves with each of her encounters.

Mary "remembers no Face like the Human Divine" (43), but the trouble with memory lies in the difficulties of representing ideas. Even this line (43) reflects language's inherent ambiguity.³⁹ It could describe Mary's inability to remember any faces that approach the Human Divine, or her inability to remember any faces but the Human Divine's. The last twelve lines pile onto each other with a series of commas and semicolons, metonymically linked by this punctuation. The reader must allow the lines to move laterally into some meaning. For instance, the reader must make sense of consecutive, but disparate lines: "She remembers no Face like the Human Divine" (43) and "All Faces have Envy sweet Mary but thine" (44). The reader links the faces in the two lines, but the lines do not build logically. After all, seeing envious faces does not necessarily cause lack of memory. The lines shift from third person to second person

³⁹ Blake infuses his texts with liminality in order to create generative spaces that portray elements of gender embodiment. Using Victor Turner's anthropological work, Bryan C. Nudelman writes about liminality in Blake's writing, especially how liminality functions in ceremonies to create a separation between participants and society (35). Liminality, according to Turner, creates "a blurring of social distinctions" (qtd. in Nudelman 35) and it provides a space for "'the doffing of masks, the stripping of statuses, the renunciation of roles' and the 'demolishing of structures'" (qtd. in Nudelman 37). Nudelman argues that Blake uses liminal spaces in order to "put forth an original image of revolution born out of the freedom the space provides" (35). Part of this "doffing of masks," perhaps, is the joining of bodies in Blake's work. Vesely contends that this process occurs in a non-sexist way as both sexes learn how to rid themselves of a rationality that obscures their vision (33).

within this long, three-stanza sentence, which further complicates the lines' meanings. The poem moves through ideas metonymically, laterally, from signifier to signifier, dramatizing Mary's impossible search for a central identity.

The poem further emphasizes replication in the repetition built into the lines, linking it to Blake's replicated Marys in *The Three Maries*. Lines ten and thirteen—which both contain the phrase “the joys of the night”—depict the moment when Mary leaves the ballroom and her public judgment shifts from positive to negative and from a limited audience to the general population. This repetition accents the outward movement of gossip about Mary and the subsequent creation of Mary's socially located identity. In lines twenty-six and twenty-seven, the phrase “raise Envy” repeats when Mary defines herself according to Christian doctrine and social norms:

To be weak as a Lamb & smooth as a Dove
And not to raise Envy is calld Christian love
But if you raise Envy your Merits to blame
For planting such spite in the weak & the tame (26-29)

These self-definitions thus seem destined to fail. When they do fail and the village still ridicules her, Mary loses the possibility of agency through self-definition because all such avenues have been closed to her. This trauma destroys Mary's stable knowledge of the world. The phrase “She forgot it was Night” repeats in lines thirty-eight and thirty-nine and “she forgot it was Morn” echoes it in line thirty-nine. In this climactic moment of realization, Mary loses teleological understanding of all time, including any coherent narrative of her history. Social norms provide her with means to interact with the Other in a common language of signification, but when this process fails, she finds herself cut

off. In every experience with the Other, Mary attempts to fit herself into ideological roles that will successfully win her a socially recognized selfhood. The failure of her attempts calls into question the cultural norms of identification and the viability of signifying any central truths of being. Pluralism, such as the broken self that Levinas describes, seems inevitable when facing the Other. Although multiplied subject positions disrupt unitary identity, perhaps this pluralized self represents to Blake an ideal in a fallen world. At least a multiplied subject position offers broader vision and a multi-faceted identity.⁴⁰

The speaker's description of Mary's face spirals from "sweet Love in Despair" (45) to "wild terror & fear" (47) and continues to define Mary's corporeal reality in terms of social norms and literary tropes. Shifting to second person, the lines attempt to figure Mary's face in terms of emotions. Mary's portrait may lack envy, but it contains the horror of alienation that the speaker claims she can only escape in death. Ideally, the speaker's description would finally figure Mary's individuality and give shape to the Selfhood she seeks. However, the descriptions of her face fit traditional gender characteristics of the suffering female and, as if to accentuate the literary precedents for Mary's figuring, the speaker's vision of her freedom from despair and terror only includes her silenced, dead body. The poem's language itself traps Mary's identity within a linguistic order of signification, forming and replicating her identity through

⁴⁰ Although Levinas's philosophies differ from Blake's in many ways, they both share a similar notion of envisioning infinity. Levinas explains that "multiplicity is a fall of the One or the Infinite, a diminution in being which each of the multiple beings would have to surmount so as to return from the multiple to the One, from the finite to the Infinite" (*Totality* 292). This movement from the multiple to One, embodied in many of Blake's works in Jesus, comprises Blake's artistic project. If "Without Contraries is no progression" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 3.6), without multiplication there is no incorporation; without finitude, there is no infinity.

symbols, metonymic descriptions, and literary tropes. Mary's name perhaps symbolizes this inscriptive power. However, through her multiplied identity, Mary recedes to the edges of the poem and disappears from the traps of its signification.⁴¹ She cannot overcome these traps; she can only escape them.

Writing as "Michael Field," Bradley and Cooper draw the reader's attention to artistic depictions of the Magdalen figure in "The Magdalen" and "A Pen-Drawing of Leda," both published in 1892.⁴² Like Blake's work, their poetry reveals the long history of this sort of female figure who, while human, physically embodies the divine. Their pairing of the two ekphrastic poems reveals by contrast that Leda, not the converted Magdalen, maintains her spiritual power. "The Magdalen: Timoteo Viti" (1892) describes the Viti painting which, like Blake's *The Three Maries at the Sepulchre*, frames the Magdalen figure in a stone tomb. She awaits God's visit in quiet solitude, "remote": "She knows that when God needs / From the sinning world relief, / He will find her thus with the wild bees" (53-55). Although she is "infinitely clean" (35), she is also infinitely separated from the world she knew before her cleansing, a world that made her feel needed and whole:

⁴¹ Dee Drake similarly argues that Thel's "litany of multiple likenesses" creates in her character a "multiplicity [of] voice and body" (220).

⁴² Kenneth Ireland describes the scope of the book and discusses the genre of ekphrastic poetry in "*Sight and Song: A Study of the Interrelations between Painting and Poetry*." He argues, "*Sight and Song* emerges . . . as a set of thirty-one variations upon the theme of tension between life and death. On the one side are the forces of love, beauty, and art; on the other, the forces of cruelty, sorrow, and pride" (15). For more recent discussions of Field's poetry, see Holly Laird's "Contradictory Legacies: Michael Field and Feminist Restoration" (1995), Yopie Prins's "A Metaphorical Field: Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper" (1995), Ana I. Parejo Vadillo's "*Sight and Song: Transparent Translations and a Manifesto for the Observer*" (2000), and Marion Thain's "*Michael Field: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Fin de Siècle*" (2007).



Fig. 7: Viti's *St. Mary Magdalene*

She is shut from fellowship;
 How she loved to mingle with her friends!
 To give them eyes and lip;
 She lived for their sake alone;
 Not a braid of her hair, not a rose
 Of her cheek was her own:
 And she loved to minister
 To any in want of her,
 All service was so sweet:

Now she must stand all day on lithe, unsummoned feet. (41-50)

Her “ministry” dissolved, Magdalen waits on “unsummoned feet” for a chance to live in the fullness of her vast love, her greatest gift while “God is a great way off” (62).

Magdalen counts away the hours while the cave surrounding her bears witness that God is distant and she is alone. In Bradley and Cooper’s poem, Jesus is dead. Although these seem like the moments before—in the biblical text—she finds him raised in the empty tomb, this discovery has passed. She has traveled to find this “destined grot” (97), stricken dumb by the Jesus’s rejection, “Musing on those great days before she at first grew sad” (100). Keats’s earlier version of “La Belle Dame sans Mercy” resonates in these lines:

She took me to her elfin grot,
 And there she gaz’d and sighed deep,
 And there I shut her wild sad eyes—
 So kiss’d to sleep. (29-32)

Like the Belle Dame, Magdalen rests on moss, and the speaker describes her body as if flowers drape it. If Bradley and Cooper are rewriting Keats's poem in the Magdalen tradition, they link Keats's speaker with Jesus. In this case, Jesus is like the lover scared away by dreams of "pale kings, and princes too" ("La Belle" 37), a legion of patriarchal figures warning him of the possible dangers of this woman. The poems, then, speak to each other, with Keats's speaker presenting one perspective and the Magdalen, alone in her grot, the other perspective.⁴³ Keats's poem ends with the speaker waiting in the silence:

And this is why I sojourn here
 Alone and palely loitering,
 Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake,
 And no birds sing. (45-48)

“The Magdalen” ends similarly:

In her heart there is a song
And yet no song she sings.
Since the word *Rabboni* came
Straightway at the call of her name
And the Master reproved,

⁴³ As Ireland notes, Bradley and Cooper developed the title of the book (*Sight and Song*) from a line in Keats's "Ode to Psyche" (14): "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired" (43). In fact, they placed this quotation at the beginning of the book. The thematic connection between their work and Keats's seems to have been immediately apparent to their contemporary readers. According to Ireland, a reviewer from *The Academy* described the book in June of 1892 as "'one of the most Keats-like things that has been produced since Keats himself'" (19).

It seems she has no choice—her lips have never moved. (85-90)

Magdalen has not failed; God has failed. We will see a very similar dynamic in Levy's Magdalen. God is distant, cold, reproving; she is warm and loving, but now clothed in "new-born loveliness" that marks the loss of her place in her world: "no place for her pure arts is longer found" (70). It is for this reason that she has wandered to this "destined spot" (97), the place allotted her by the weight of God's will.

Bringing "La Belle Dame" into the poem allows Bradley and Cooper to build upon the earlier Magdalen poems, leaving the same gap that Keats allows that suggests that maybe the kings and princes are wrong and the romantic moments he had at the elfin grot were better than what he could ever have had either being welcomed into the presence of the distant royal fraternal order or "palely loitering / Though the sedge is wither'd from the lake" (46-47). Correspondingly, Jesus, the knight, has "reproved" (89) her in the name of patriarchal religion, leaving for a pure white and distant heaven. Additionally, by building the poem on the painting, Cooper and Bradley accentuate her isolation. An inviting home beckons in the distance, but Magdalen turns her back to it, preferring her rocky tomb. The fur trim of her undergarment aligns her images with those of John the Baptist, but she is not carving out a life in the wilderness; she waits piously next to a book and an urn, perhaps filled with her tears. Because this is not a dramatic monologue, we never hear Magdalen's voice. Even her most intimate desires are revealed as her story has always been told, in the third person and from a distance.

Bradley and Cooper published "A Pen-Drawing of Leda," another ekphrastic poem, the same year. In direct contrast to their depiction of Magdalen, they portray Leda as luxuriating in the warm feathers of the swan, her lover. She is "lovely, wild and free"

(1) and able to “[draw] the fondled creature to her will” (7). While Magdalen attempts to remain “infinitely clean” (35), Leda “joys to bend in the live light / Her glistening body toward her love, how much more bright!” (8-9). Like Swinburne, Bradley and Cooper looked to past religions to create an alternative to the purity and impotence of Christianity. While Magdalen languishes in the cold, dark cave, Leda feels the force of “Heaven’s concentrated rays” (14) as she “the sunshine lies / And spreads its affluence on the wide curves of her waist and thighs” (10-11). This drawing, *Leda kneeling towards the swan*, was originally thought by Giovanni Morelli to be the work of Antonio Bazzi—who also went under the name “Il Sodoma”—but it has since been attributed to Leonardo (Cust 366), who depicted the mythological story in a series of drawings and in *Leda and the Swan*. The drawing at the palace at Weimar, to which Bradley and Cooper refer, is Leonardo’s drawing that prefigured the painting. Contessa Lilian Priuli-Bon’s description of the drawing replicates the painting’s main features: “It is a kneeling figure of Leda bending to the left towards the crouching swan, while the twins, Castor and Pollux, lie beneath some rushes to her right” (37).

In the painting, the swan looks hungrily up at Leda, while she gazes adoringly at her sons, whom Bradley and Cooper describe as “[c]ertain round eggs without a speck” (3). Their union has resulted in the two sons; an image in sharp contrast to Magdalen’s empty womb encircled by her living tomb. In both poems, the readers are distanced from the female characters by the use of the third person. Readers are positioned to gaze at the



Fig. 8: Leonardo Da Vinci's *Leda and the Swan*

female characters, without inhabiting their minds.⁴⁴ Bradley and Cooper seem purposely to avoid the dramatic monologue for this reason. Perhaps responding to Levy's "Magdalen" (1884), they build upon Blake's work with the Mary characters by creating a space for Mary's subjectivity to fill. They seem to be working in concert with other writers to build up the mythical structures that have filled in the character's delineations in the past in order to draw the reader's attention to the human lack in the center. Because of projects like these, Levy's and Mew's use of the monologue to express Magdalen's thoughts radically departs from the literary tradition.

From the Ball to the "Hideous Masquerade"

And there is neither false nor true;

But in a hideous masquerade

All things dance on, the ages through.

And good is evil, evil good

– "Magdalen," Amy Levy, 70-73

In 1893, in a letter to Lucy Violet Hodgkin, Mary Elizabeth Coleridge wrote about visiting Margaret Duckworth just after the birth of her son:

⁴⁴ See Hilary Fraser's "A Visual Field: Michael Field and the Gaze" for more discussion of the function of the gaze in the poetry of "Michael Field."

Her cheeks had a pink flush afterwards, & she looked lovely. She says she can hardly bear to leave her sweet bedroom & the Madonna di San Sisto over the fireplace. (87, f. 2b)⁴⁵

Although Margaret was married to Henry Duckworth, she shared an intimate bond with her cousin Ella Coltman. Because Margaret had already given birth to a daughter, this child was to be Coltman's, according to Susan Chitty's biography of Henry Duckworth (96). In the *Madonna di San Sisto*, or the *Sistine Madonna*, the Madonna figure holds the Christ child. Beside her are two kneeling figures, a man and a woman. They are identified by the full title of the painting as Pope Sixtus II and Saint Barbara. Knowing that she was about to give her son to be raised by Ella, she might have been inspired by the image of the martyred Saint Barbara, looking away bravely but humbly. However, the two kneeling figures also recall two important people in Mary's life, Joseph and Elizabeth, Mary's cousin. In this way, Margaret could be identifying with the Virgin Mary. At the foreground of the painting are two cherubs and in the background, a sea of faces looking toward Mary and the child. The painting that transfixes Margaret, then, mirrors her own domestic life, Margaret corresponding to Mary, and Joseph and Elizabeth representing her own husband and cousin, Henry and Ella. Adding another layer to this multiplication of relationships, Mary Coleridge has just described holding Margaret's baby, perhaps herself doubling the image of Mary and the infant in the painting. She comments that while holding the baby, she wondered "what it was that I held, —a conqueror or a shepherd," mirroring Mary's imagined sentiments about the

⁴⁵ Quoted by permission of the Provost and Fellows, Eton College.



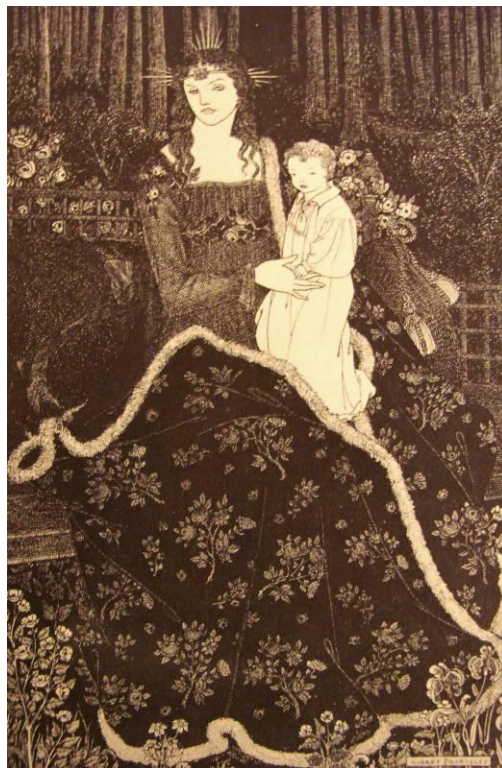
Fig. 9: Raphael's *Sistine Madonna*

baby Jesus.

Margaret was no virgin mother and her tripartite marriage was certainly not a socially—or religiously—approved arrangement. By identifying with Mary—desiring not to leave the painting and gazing at it while holding her infant—Margaret identifies her relationships with Ella and Henry with those of Mary, Joseph, and Elizabeth. Through her radical reinterpretation, she sees Mary as her double, gaining for herself the roles of both virgin mother and sexual agent. Edith and Katharine once visited a gallery to view the same painting, resulting in a similar moment. As Hilary Fraser describes, Edith gazed at Katharine, blending Katharine—in her eyesight—with Mary: “I lie back in the cushions, feel in invalid for the time being + love *her*” (qtd. in Fraser 566). Levy and Mew similarly endeavored to overlap the possible modes of identity for the Magdalen character. They interpreted the Magdalen figure as a type of Mary, both figures types of women that the modern woman, the antitype, encompasses—forms in which she can transmogrify.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Aubrey Beardsley’s famous drawing, *A Christmas Card* (1896), prefigures “Madeleine in Church” with a similarly dark interpretation of the Madonna, a woman who has become complicit in a system that uses her body in order to create a baby she might think “strangely made.” In the drawing, she seems at once glorified and condemned. She wears a spiky aureole that pushes outward into the wilderness just at her back. The flowers surrounding her spill into the fabric of her dress, further signaling an affinity between her body and nature. The trim of her dress curls like a snake, as Casteras points out (170). Furthermore, it gapes just at her pelvis like an exaggerated vagina surrounding the child. It is as if the child has been born to a woman still connected to untamed and spiritually dangerous wilderness. The pain of childbirth and pleasures of sexual intercourse doubly represent her natural depravity, which made her a follower of Satan’s temptations and a temptress, by turn. Beardsley visually depicts the discourses that Coleridge, Levy, and Mew portray through literary texts.

In Amy Levy's "Magdalen" (1884), the speaker, dying in a Magdalen hospital, addresses her absent lover. Cynthia Scheinberg reads the poem as a rewriting of religious discourses, Mary Magdalen addressing Jesus: "One of Levy's major poetic projects is to deconstruct a central metaphor that governs both Jewish and Christian traditions of religious poetry: the symbol of the divine/human relationship as heterosexual romance" (*Women's Poetry* 217). As Scheinberg points out, Levy's dual identities as lesbian and Jewish gave her important reasons to desire this sort of rewriting. I would like to build upon this reading by considering how multiple elements of the Mary/Magdalen character inhabit the poem's speaker, a woman who navigates all of these discourses in a



Beardsley's *A Christmas Card*

multiplied subjectivity. Ultimately, this performance—this “hideous masquerade” (71)—reveals the inconsistencies and paradoxes in life, the great grey that governs all. One might hear in the background Fra Lippo Lippi, a similar portrayer of religious discourses, “There’s the grey beginning. Zooks!” (392). For the Magdalen, the grey is all that is left. She has lost even her name beneath the “masquerade” that has become her life, in which “there is neither false nor true” (70). This ambiguous state disrupts even the ethical frameworks that form the categories of falsity or truth: “good is evil, evil good” (73). As in Blake’s *A Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, we might read this disruption as positive. After all, it leads to her freedom, which she wishes she could claim to him in person:

I fain would see your face once more,

 Look in your eyes and tell you this:
 [A]ll is done, that I am free;
 That you, through all eternity,
 Have neither part nor lot in me. (79, 82-85)

As we shall see, Magdalen’s escape into pain, the only thing “known or understood” (74), frees her to see into eternity.

The pain she experiences is the pain of being violated emotionally and physically. Levy uses a Wordsworthian allusion to describe the impact of this pain. *Ode: Intimations of Immortality* ends with the claim that there is hope that despite disconnectedness with full spiritual energy, humans can still experience the infinite in the subtle movements of the heart:

Thanks to the human heart by which we live,

Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears. (205-08)

For Magdalen and for Wordsworth, experiencing the infinite means moving past structures of spiritual power, like good and evil, into the realm of pure experience and pure pain:

At night, or when the daylight nears,
 I hear the other women weep;
 My own heart's anguish lies too deep
 For the soft rain and pain of tears. (48-51)

This pain serves two functions in the poem. First, it directs the reader's attention to the cause of the pain, the absent lover who "knew what thing would be" and yet "wrought this evil" (11-12). The speaker, then, is innocent of any real moral violation, desiring only for oneness with her lover. In contrast to his betrayal, she claims her steadfastness:

I wonder do you know
 How gladly, gladly I had died
 (And life was very sweet that tide)
 To save you from the least, light ill?
 How gladly I had borne your pain. (35-39).

Her willingness to have "borne [his] pain" responds to a popular Victorian attitude about women's natural sympathy that, according to some, could lead to sexual vulnerability, if not prostitution. William Rathbone Greg argued in 1850 that prostitutes had given in to women's natural "sympathetic selflessness," as Anderson terms it (*The Powers* 62).

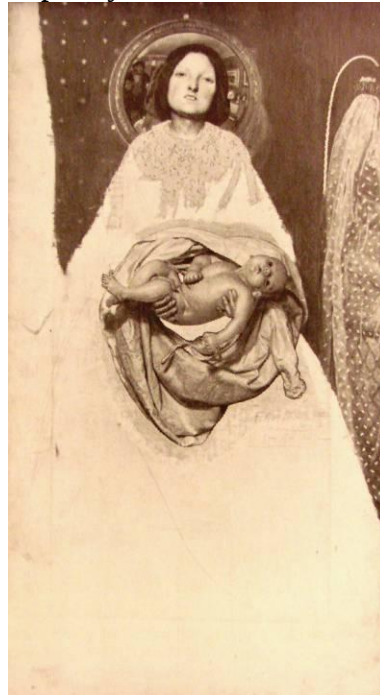
However, sexuality for Levy's Magdalen is the physical expression of a love that rivals heavenly goodness, her only opportunity for an earthly glimpse of heavenly unity. In this way, she is perhaps overly compassionate, but she is not entirely selfless. She gains agency and power through her claim to martyrdom. For the Victorians, her pain could have represented God's retribution, the just suffering of the sinful. However, Levy fights this interpretation of Magdalen's situation by revealing the woman's noble self-sacrifice and innocent realization of her lover's betrayal: "It is so strange to think upon" (20).

Like the Virgin Mary and Jesus, willing to make bodily sacrifices for divine love, the Magdalen reveals herself as a martyr for love. Ironically, the very trait that differentiates her from the Virgin Mary is her lack of virginity. In this way, the speaker embodies the roles of Madonna and Magdalen, navigating roles in this "hideous masquerade"—like Mary's ball in Blake's "Mary"—that leaves her lonely and dying.

As a dramatic monologue, the speaker addresses the lover as "you." The lack of his presence in the poem as a hearer within the poem's frame draws the reader's attention to his absence from the poem and from the woman's life. However, other Magdalen women surround her: "At night, or when the daylight nears, / I hear the other women weep" (48-49). The reader's knowledge of the women's presence draws them nearer, revealing the speaker as one woman in a room with other women just as desperate, just as betrayed, on the other side of the walls. This poetic method effectively multiplies the impact of the story because every woman in the building could be recounting a story very

similar. In effect, the building fairly shakes with the resounding voices of women's sorrow that pour forth in weeping late at night.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ An oil painting by Ford Madox Brown, *Take Your Son, Sir!*, prefigures Magdalen monologues such as Levy's. In the unfinished painting, one can see similar a dynamic occurring. The woman stares directly at the painter. The mirror above her reveals that she is also looking at a man before her, to whom she offers the son. The positioning of the figures resembles that of Rossetti's "In an Artist's Studio," written in the same year (1856), revealing complicity between the male lover and painter. In the



Brown's *Take Your Son, Sir!*

same way, the "selfsame" face looks from the canvas, the Madonna and Magdalen in one. The mirror behind her forms an aureole, as does the garment that surrounds the child. As the faces look toward the title figure in *Madonna di San Sisti*, the stars surround this woman, her head tilted back in anguish, her arms lowered as if at any moment she will drop the child who stares blankly, his head also tilted back, his neck unprotected. The man in the mirror raises his hands as if to deny that the child is his. As if from stigmata, the fabric around her neck and around the garment surrounding the child bleeds onto her dress, as does the wallpaper in the background, as the Madonna, Magdalen, and Christ child stand in the nexus point of the ethereal and the everyday, heaven descending into the bourgeois bedroom.

Charlotte Mew similarly blends of the roles of Madonna, Magdalen, and Savior in “Ne Me Tangito.” In the title, she re-conjugates the traditional Latin phrase from Mary Magdalen’s visit to the tomb, “Noli me tangere,” “Touch me not.” Mew’s version, “Never touch me,” implies a greater distance between Jesus and Mary Magdalen, or closeness so intense that they must enforce physical distance. To heighten the allusion to Mary Magdalen, Mew adds the passage from Luke, “This man . . . would have known who and what manner of woman this is: for she is, a sinner (vii: 39)”. However, the poem is a love song between parent and child. It is a song between both Jesus and his sinful daughter, Magdalen, and Madonna and her small but “most divine” son (22).

The two stanzas reveal the perspectives of two different speakers. The first stanza, from the perspective of Mary Magdalen, describes the striking power of the title phrase:

Odd, *You* should fear the touch,
 The first that I was ever ready to let go,
 I, that have not cared much
 For any toy I could not break and throw
 To the four winds when I had done with it. You need not fear the touch,
 Blindest of all the things that I have cared for very much
 In the whole gay, unbearable, amazing show. (1-7)

On one hand, this seems clearly from Mary Magdalen’s perspective, a woman who, according to religious tradition, was a sinner who lived a dangerous and haphazard life, “not car[ing] much / For any toy [she] could not break and throw” (4-5). The word “blind” carries spiritual force here, describing the touch of a prostitute reaching for any

flesh to help her survive and Jesus, who will not be tempted by her touch. In the next line, she depicts her life as one “gay, unbearable, amazing show” (7). “Gay” at this time referred to a lifestyle of prostitution (Casteras 139). In this way, the stanza seems like a response to Jesus’s final words to Mary Magdalen, which according to Mew’s changes, separate Magdalen from Jesus forever. The threat of eternal separation leads the reader to expect one of two outcomes from the second stanza. Jesus will either condemn her or save her. What happens is therefore quite shocking.

Jesus explains that Mary Magdalen tried “to hide the ugly doubt behind that hurried puzzled little smile” that yet contained the “shade of something vile” (9-10). Then, he relates a dream in which he walks through a field and hears “the far-off bleat of sheep,” an image of the lost Magdalen crying for help. At this point, the dream mirrors images of both the Madonna and the Magdalen, naked and holding a child:

Someone stood by and it was you:

About us both a great wind blew.

My breast was bared

But sheltered by my hair

I found you, suddenly, lying there,

Tugging with tiny fingers at my heart, no more afraid:

The weakest thing, the most divine

That ever yet was mine (16-23)

The Magdalen/sheep/lost soul becomes a child in his arms, a child “strangely made” (24) and forgotten, “The child for which [he] had not looked or ever cared, / Of whom, before, [he] never dreamed” (26-27). At the same time, he takes the form of the naked

Magdalen—protected only by flowing locks—and the nude Madonna, covered in the glory of God, both women marveling at the unexpected child. Magdalen receives neither condemnation nor forgiveness, but instead, the story of a dream that reveals no emotion at all. Although he claims her for his own, he has not cared for her and does not seem to do so now. A child can be “strangely made” by a woman’s body, but yet remain something she has not ever desired or imagined. The relationship between mother and child that makes the Madonna images emotionally powerful is unhinged, then, at this moment. After all, how does the Virgin Mary have agency in the annunciation or control over the child that she has “strangely made”? Jesus’s unitary identity and role as antitype are threatened by the gender-bending description that makes him a type of Madonna, who is also a type of Magdalen.

In Mew’s “Madeleine in Church” (1916), Magdalen is not in church to pray for forgiveness for her sins and rejoin traditional religious structures. Instead, she dreams about a saint more human than the “plaster saint” before her, one who “[b]efore he got his niche and crown, / [h]ad one short stroll about the town” (10-11). In this way, she dreams of the saint she will someday be, one to whom people can look to find a model from someone who has lived, who has a “taint”: “And anyone can wash the paint / Off our poor faces, his and mine!” (13-14). At the same time, her use of language is clearly modern, so Mew seems to be drawing our attention as readers to the fact that this is a timeless story, sadly replicated by many Magdalens.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ See Linda Mizejewski’s “Charlotte Mew and the Unrepentant Magdalene: A Myth in Transition” for a description of Mew’s many poems about this figure.

The speaker describes herself as a “rip,” a form of *reap* and of *reprobate*. A “rip” is “unthreshed grain or hay,” “a disturbed state of the sea,” and a “person or thing of little or no value” (“Rip,” 2.1, 5.1.a, 6.3). In religious terms, she is a mixture of the good and bad, the wheat and the chaff. She is both the current that drags others down and the ship sinking in it:

It seems too funny all we other rips
Should have immortal souls; Monty and Redge quite damnably
Keeps theirs afloat while we go down like scuttled ships.—
It’s funny too, how easily we sink,
One might put up a monument, I think
To half the world and cut across it, “Lost at Sea!”

I should drown Jim, poor little sparrow, if I netted him to-night— (24-30)

Like “scuttled ships,” their drowning is self-imposed. In this way, she admits to a sort of failure, the loss of her value through her damaging tendencies. However, she also describes herself as a powerful force. She is Mary of Magdala—of Tower—standing outside of the fortress of religion, observing it from an outside perspective and threatening it with contrary force.

What others see as her sin is a result of her intense feeling, one that sets her apart from the coldness of the saints and the disconnected piety of Christian religion. To the speaker, Jesus is “quiet,” and “never knew / [t]he poisonous fangs that bit us through / [a]nd make us do the things we do” (39-41). He is distant, hanging “high” (44) on the cross. However, she felt such focused emotion in response to everything around her, “joy and pain, like any mother and her / unborn child were almost one” (53). Because of her

deep connection to the world around her, she could not separate her physical acts from an outside idea of righteousness: “I think my body was my soul” (63). She does not have Jesus’s emotional distance, so she cannot have his piety. To be found as a lost sheep is to be “stripped and done” (125), taken back into the fold by agonizing force:

So we are won:

Then safe, safe are we? in the shelter of His everlasting wings—

I do not envy Him his victories. His arms are full of broken things. (126-28)

Consequently, she stands separated, unwilling to be broken, desiring for Jesus to come to her on her terms as he did for Mary Magdalen, to share a kiss that was “in her own way” (177): “You can change the things for which we care / But even You, unless You kill us, not the way” (185-86). She wants her openness to be returned by his affection, or at least his acknowledgment, “if, for once, He would only speak” (223).⁴⁹ If he will not, she is unwilling to give up even her lonely life for the wish of brokenness.

As a monologue, the poem draws attention to Madeleine’s situation in the silent room, sometimes talking about God, sometimes talking to him. She does not doubt God’s existence, but she does not have faith in their relationship or even in a belief that he is always listening. The church—the place of her weddings and confessed failures—figures in the title, but she is in a “doll’s house looking on the Park” (150-51). Her “blue

⁴⁹ Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle explain that the treatment of emotions is the core and the subject is tormented by what she cannot have The elusive identities of lover and loved one codify the same-sex passion. . . . Mew’s biographers agree that her secret love for women remained unresolved and is projected on to her representations of mental conflict. (74)

and gold box of a room,” then, doubles as a church in her mind, her “plaster saint” her only ecumenical detail. She would rather pray “here, in the darkness” (1) than “over there, in open day” (5), under Christ, hanging overhead, looking down from a distance and refusing to speak.

According to Madeleine’s conception of life, no forgiveness is available, only brokenness. Those willing to be forced into the fold must give up the ability to feel. They must numb themselves to the intensity of life for the dubious blessing of a large, wounded, and crushing hand attached to a body infinitely higher containing a mouth that will never speak. The Magdalen figure in the Bible, according to her namesake in the poem, survives the religious acceptance of Jesus only because she communicates in the way she knows and he allows it. These poets build upon their literary history to direct the coming cultural changes that will free women to imagine new social, religious, and personal roles. Linda Mizejewski similarly argues that this development of the Magdalen figure had important social and political implications: “If the Victorian imagination delighted in the surrender of the Magdalene, the conversion from sensuality to spirituality upon which was modeled dozens of fictional magdalene-conversions, then Mew is striking at the heart of the myth” (294). These poems reveal anxieties caused by structures of social discipline like the Contagious Diseases Acts, systems that when put into practice, made any woman vulnerable to the appellation of “whore.” Through the monologue, they dramatize how a woman must navigate such discourses in order to figure herself as a social agent, and their poetic experimentation leads to a new form of poetic subjectivity.

Chapter Three:

Contrasubjectivity and the Crisis of the 1870s

The Magdalen character, as “fallen woman,” featured in the poetry of the 1870s, when Rossetti’s *Jenny* was followed by responses like Webster’s *A Castaway*, Buchanan’s “The Fleshly School of Poetry,” and Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*. The later Magdalen poems by Bradley, Cooper, Levy, and Meynell reveal the influence of these conversations. As we have seen, Victorian writers dramatized a shift in models of subjectivity from a type of objectivity that relied upon concurrence within a community to a type of subjectivity defined against the views of others. We could call the initial objectivity “intersubjective,” because the relationship with others determines the process of judging the world. However, we could also call late-Victorian subjectivity “intersubjective,” because its literary representations portray the process of intersubjective thought through the intermixing of subjectivities.⁵⁰ The shift from one kind of intersubjectivity to another—which occurs through the internalization of the process of intersubjectivity and the self-conscious representation of this process—results from a crisis in the 1870s. The representations of the Magdalen character in poetry mirror the evolution of intersubjective poetry from Blake to “Field” to Levy and Mew.

⁵⁰ My approach to intersubjectivity builds upon the theoretical work of writers like Irigaray, Husserl, Habermas, Lacan, and Kristeva. As Sara Heinämaa explains, Irigaray’s theory of intersubjectivity responds to Husserl’s work with objectivity, in which “[t]he sense of objectivity proves to depend on our experiences of other experiencing subjects” (246). According to Heinämaa, Irigaray criticizes Husserl’s and Merleau-Ponty’s theories by “argu[ing] that phenomenological and postphenomenological thinkers neglect the fundamental difference between two sexual types, and that their descriptions, explications, and analyses of otherness and intersubjectivity suffer from the identification of human with male” (248).

The poets who engaged in this literary discussion attempted to determine the possibility of a type of contrasubjective judgment, in which the individual's subjectivity functions against—not through—another person's subjectivity. As a type of Magdalen character stripped of her biblical significations, the prostitute in her self-objectified position provided the perfect subject for such contrasubjective experiments.

I am using the term *contrasubjective* to describe subjectivity formed through denying the interrelationship of the self and the other. As we have seen, for Habermas, the relationship of self, Other, and third party create the intersubjective awareness necessary for communicative action.⁵¹ Habermas describes intersubjectivity as the experience of a “shared world in which I live, speak, and act together with other subjects” (24): “Intersubjectively communalized experience is expressed in symbolic systems, especially natural language, in which accumulated knowledge is pregiven to the individual subject as cultural tradition” (24). As Habermas explains Edmund Husserl's position, intersubjectivity depends upon the “appresentation” of the other that allows for identification:

The living body of the other “appresents” a life of conscious acts that is at first inaccessible and foreign to me. This life of the conscious acts of the other, mediated by his living body, is the absolutely first foreign object that comes into being in my primordial world. This constitutes the meaning of another subject whose body is associated with her as a living body just as my own living body is associated with me. In the second step

⁵¹ Steven Hendley develops this thesis in *From Communicative Action to the Face of the Other: Levinas and Habermas on Language, Obligation, and Community*.

of his argument, Husserl tries to make the case that the meaning of the appresentation of the other's inner life unproblematically gives rise to the community [*Vergemeinschaftung*] of monads. (38-39)

This chapter focuses on the breakdown of such identification and its consequences for intersubjectivity. As Vincenzo R. Sanguineti explains, *intersubjectivity* represents “a field of intersection of two subjectivities” (128):

Benjamin expands on Stolorow's definition and points to the difference between perceiving the other as objectified—an object separate from us, that has actually been expelled from our intrapsychic world—and the other perceived as a subject, a center of our being equivalent to us and interconnected to us in complex ways. (128)

Non-intersubjective behavior works in contrast with biologically-originating intersubjective mechanisms. As he explains,

I am of the opinion that the original imprinting of the first “other” in the self is a normal, necessary, inevitable evolutionary process, essential to survival. Its roots are very ancient, running through the programs of parental bonding as it appeared at a certain point in evolution. ... We carry this “other-within-us” as an imprinted image of the primary source of life and safety and order: not purely *necessity*: a true archetypal construct in a Jungian sense. The template imposes that its dictates ... are

to be followed; they are life-saving; if we get disconnected we get lost and will not survive. (131)⁵²

His blend of neuroscientific and psychological methods reveals the need for intersubjectivity and the dangers of contrasubjectivity. The person who does not identify intersubjectively, who does not “carry this ‘other-within-us,’” will not, by implication, find safety in the group. If the non-identification leads to violent exclusion of the other; the victim marked Other and denied intersubjective identification will be excised from the group.

During the 1870s, immense social changes were occurring. As we have seen, Eliza Lynn Linton published “Girl of the Period,” then John Stuart Mill published *Subjection of Women*, and Cobbe, “Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors.” Women’s civil rights were indeed greatly expanded during this time, because of the efforts of

⁵² Lacan might describe this “other-within-us” as desire:

Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the “privilege” of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love. . . . Thus desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the phenomenon of their splitting (*Spaltung*). . . . The gap in this enigma betrays what determines it, namely, to put it in the simplest possible way, that for both partners in the relation, but the subject and the Other, it is not enough to be subjects of need, or objects of love, but that they must stand for the cause of desire. . . . The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it. But since this signifier is only veiled, as ratio of the Other’s desire, it is this desire of the Other as such that the subject must recognize, that is to say, the other in so far as he is himself a subject divided by the signifying *Spaltung*. (1306-09)

writers like Mill and Cobbe. Even in the midst of legal changes for women's rights,⁵³ the debates about the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 raged through this period, until the act was finally repealed in 1886.⁵⁴ According to Patricia Rigg, "[t]he issues of prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts, with economic rather than moral implications, fuelled the woman's movement in the seventies and eighties as much as did the question of suffrage" ("Augusta Webster: The Social" 96). Consequently, when Rossetti published *Jenny*, in newspapers and journals, in churches, and in parlors, people debated women's physical and mental equality to men and they discussed the degree of physical danger women like Jenny might pose to the population. Of course, there was no real consensus about the nature of humanity, the shape of ethical relationships, or women's capabilities. However, the frequency of public responses to these issues reveals their importance in this time of social change.

Jenny presented just the sort of subjective struggle Sanguinetti describes. Rossetti vacillates between representing intersubjective identification and contrasubjective rejection. I do not mean to appropriate Rossetti's project, which is epistemological and aesthetic, and force it solely into an ethical discourse. Instead, I wish to pull these disparate threads—epistemological, formal, and ethical—together in order to describe how this particular conversation through which Rossetti, Webster, and Browning experiment with the monologue to portray subjectivity in terms of gender relationships.

⁵³ In 1870, the Married Women's Property Act was passed, building upon the Matrimonial Causes Act and Divorce Act of 1857. Women were admitted unofficially to Cambridge in 1872.

⁵⁴ For more discussion of the Acts and of Victorian sexuality, see Sutphin's "Human Tigresses, Fractious Angels, and Nursery Saints: Augusta Webster's 'A Castaway' and Victorian Discourses on Prostitution and Women's Sexuality."

Although he had been writing it for decades, the publication of *Jenny* was timely and the response was explosive. It elicited passionate and immediate reactions from critics and poets. Browning, for one, poured out two thousand lines of poetry in response. By terming this a “crisis,” I am building upon Julia Kristeva’s use of the term: “I wish to point out that, far from being a minor, marginal activity in our culture, as a general consensus seems to have it, this kind of literature, or even literature as such, represents the ultimate coding of our crises, of our utmost intimate and most serious apocalypses” (*Powers of Horror* 208). This moment of crisis in the 1870s is between old and new paradigms, between the traditional gender politics and radical legal changes. As such, the crisis reveals both individual, “intimate” conflicts and patterns of social discourses that contributed to changing the cultural paradigm. Blake’s representations of the problems of gendered identity begin the paradigm shift early in the century. The poetry of Bradley, Cooper, Levy, and Mew represents a conclusion to the crisis and the beginning of the new gender paradigm. Rossetti, Webster, and Browning participated in the cultural paradigm shift by offering different perspectives on, respectively, the process of contrasubjectivity, the damage of contrasubjectivity on the person marked as Other, and the inherent violence of contrasubjectivity.

Contrasubjectivity represented for these poets a theory of the mind at once ethical, because it preserved the uniqueness and otherness of fellow human beings, and unethical, because it relied on a natural disconnection that separates people subjectively from each other. In a moment in which the political and social structure of the country was changing, this theory of the mind suggested that the very social changes that permitted people to fight for equal rights also separated units of the society. After all, if—as the

Victorian feminists argued—women and men were alike in their capacities, but women were separate from men in their gender, the common ground for humanity found in the one-sex model, albeit a complicated common ground, was rejected. In other words, the crisis of the 1870s corresponded to the ongoing tensions between the paradigms of the one-sex model and the two-sex model that Thomas Laqueur describes as persisting throughout the nineteenth century (193). As a result, it was important to develop contrasubjective modes of thinking in order to maintain the respect for difference that led to civil rights legislation, such as the Reform Acts, compulsory education, and women's suffrage. If women were different from men, their lack of legal representation apart from men through the practice of coverture led to legal movements for women's civil rights such as the Married Women's Property Act. However, these same modes of thinking depended upon the process of recognizing difference, a process that could lead to the violence of objectification.

“It makes a goblin of the sun”:

Jenny and the Construction of Contrasubjectivity

In three hundred and ninety lines, much longer than the majority of his poems, Rossetti's monologue traces the thoughts of a young man visiting a prostitute, Jenny, who sleeps on his lap for most of the poem. Rossetti wrote the poem over the course of twenty-three years, buried it with his wife, disinterred it seven years later, and, finally, published it in 1870 (De Vane, “The Harlot” 468, 472). I argue that this poem was so important to Rossetti because of his intricate balancing of aesthetic, epistemological, and

ethical positions. He wishes to portray a speaker who can separate himself from his surroundings in order to drink in its beauty because, epistemologically, this is the only access we have to meaning. He designs a poem, building upon the tradition of Browning, in particular, in which the speaker does not merely gaze at the body of a woman, but also actively seeks to know her thoughts. The impossibility of this sort of mind-reading does not necessarily doom it to be meaningless; the search for human interconnection is itself meaning, perhaps the most profound meaning we can attain and certainly the shared pursuit that bonds us all.⁵⁵ However, for Rossetti, this sort of connection is precluded by our limited abilities to know our world and by the frames we use to give us some access to cognitive response, mental paradigms that always distance us from pure knowledge and certainly from pure intercourse with others.⁵⁶ Furthermore, he highlights the process of contrasubjective response, defining the self against the other, through this poem. Thus, even as the speaker strives to empathize with her, he describes Jenny in the famous opening lines in deprecating words that emphasize her failures:

Lazy laughing languid Jenny,

⁵⁵ Anderson similarly contends that the poem “disrupts the monologic vision of the speaker” through moments that “thwart the speaker’s attempt to objectify and stabilize his apperception of her, and indirectly suggest a more open-ended dialogical ideal” (*Tainted* 144).

⁵⁶ Anderson explains,

In general terms, then, “Jenny” is a poem about uncertain agency, thwarted recognition, and the profound unreadability of otherness. To center such concerns on the figure of the prostitute at once heightens and deflects the anxieties that attend these epistemological and intersubjective predicaments. For in the case of the Victorian prostitute, the problems in readability that attend the intersubjective moment are part of a complex configuration; . . . these problems are inextricably linked to economic and sexual anxieties about agency. (*Tainted* 165)

Fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea (1-2)

According to the speaker's wording, we can surmise that Jenny lacks energy ("lazy"), serious consideration of her situation ("laughing"), and the energy to act on her own behalf ("languid"). Furthermore, she first desires physical affection ("a kiss"), and next, she desires money ("a guinea"). In other words, Jenny is a prostitute because she will not act to change her situation and because she enjoys it. She enjoys sexual encounters with strangers and she appreciates the money that results from them. As we have seen, many Victorians thought that prostitutes were women weak from a frailty deemed naturally feminine. They were women who could not avoid giving in to their desires to please men. However, according to the speaker's description, Jenny does not fit this model. She is not weak because of a greater impulse toward self-sacrifice; instead, she merely gives into her inclinations toward slothfulness and sexual depravity.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I this reading, I am building upon Anderson's work with the poem. She reads this poem as

not so much as an interior monologue as the negation of dramatic monologue. The "speaker" repeatedly decides not to talk to the prostitute; and I argue that his failure to speak to her emerges precisely out of the extreme intersubjective distortions that characterize encounters with the fallen. While actual speech is no guarantee of mutual recognition, and while ordinary dramatic monologue itself explores imbalances of power, this poem heightens the failure of mutuality and reveals the anxiety over the prostitute's uncertain status by repeatedly negating the possibility of speech. . . . Rossetti's poem . . . displays how the mutually imbricated forces of sexual desire and commodification also unsettle deliberative action, private identity, and sympathetic communication. (*Tainted* 143)

I am most interested in the poem's depiction of "private identity," rather than "sympathetic communication." In fact, I would argue that the two are mutually exclusive in the model of subjectivity Rossetti depicts in the poem. Sympathy itself disrupts the development of subjectivity that must be fostered in contrast with the other.

The speaker feels confident in his ability to “read” the prostrate woman. He transfers his scholarship from books to Jenny, whose thoughts he imagines:

You know not what a book you seem,
Half-read by lightning in a dream! (52-53)

Conveniently, perhaps, he imagines that she would not comprehend his words. Her brain has even decayed with misuse:

Suppose I were to think aloud,—
What if to her all this were said?
Why, as a volume seldom read
Being opened halfway shuts again,
So might the pages of her brain
Be parted at such words, and thence
Close back upon the dusty sense. (157-62)

Jenny, then, becomes to the speaker an object of study. Even her mind is an object filled with penetrable openings, enclosed by the dying flesh of a woman who objectifies herself. At this moment, he realizes that she has fallen asleep, and her sleeping form emphasizes her inert fleshliness, the object status of the wilting “lily” (97).

Throughout the poem, he has been comparing their lives: “This room of yours, my Jenny, looks / [a] change from mine so full of books” (22-23). At this point in the poem, the comparisons take on a new urgency. Not only are their lives very different, but Jenny seems a separate being altogether, something nearly inhuman, sleeping—as he is surprised to report—“[j]ust as another woman sleeps!” (177). Although Rossetti might have considered the speaker sensitive and humane to consider her well-being, I would

like to argue that the speaker is never able to be truly sympathetic because he cannot imagine himself in her position. As we have seen through the work of Habermas and Sanguineti, intersubjectivity depends upon identification, in this case, empathy.

Rossetti's design allows the poem to foreground the speaker's struggle to empathize, perhaps more so than any previous monologue speaker, and his ultimate failure.

However, we could argue that empathy is merely the projection of the self onto the other's form, thus complicating any discussion of the ethics of subjectivity.⁵⁸

Fundamentally, Rossetti's speaker must consider her Other. After all, her close resemblance to "another woman" is "[e]nough to throw one's thoughts in heaps / [o]f doubt and horror" (178-79).

Her mimicry of womanhood reveals that the "potter" has "[o]f the same lump (it has been said) / [f]or honour and dishonour made, / [t]wo sister vessels" (182-84). The speaker's hedging—"(it has been said)"—uncovers his secret hypothesis that perhaps Jenny and his cousin Nell are two different beings altogether, not framed from the "same lump" at all. Otherwise, "[i]t makes a goblin of the sun" (206). Yet, the speaker and Jenny are connected in their common need for money, and their realization that life is but a spending of the bounty of our time on earth:

Yet as to me, even so to her
Are golden sun and silver moon,
In daily largesse of earth's boon,

⁵⁸ As we shall see, psychoanalytic theories of non-violence such as Jessica Benjamin's describe the necessity of both intersubjective identification and the recognition of difference.

Counted for life-coins to one tune.
 And if, as blindfold fates are toss'd,
 Through some one man this life be lost,
 Shall soul not somehow pay for soul? (223-29)

As we shall see in the course of the poem, this does not mean that there is an even exchange rate. Any connection between the speaker and Jenny results from his largesse: his willingness to “read” her, his approximation of these “two sister vessels,” and, finally, his coins dropping into Jenny’s hair, his soul paying for hers. None will see “[w]hat man has done here” (242) to such a beautiful person; women even will forever shun her, refusing to notice her presence: “Like a rose shut in a book / In which pure women may not look” (253-55).⁵⁹ However, there is almost nothing left of Jenny to see, only the shell of her body that can betray but traces of the soul that once inhabited it:

Yet, Jenny, looking long at you,
 The woman almost fades from view.
 A cipher of man’s changeless sum
 Of lust, past, present, and to come,
 Is left. A riddle that one shrinks
 To challenge from the scornful sphinx. (276-81)

⁵⁹ Robin Sheets argues that the narrator occasionally senses that he himself has made Jenny into what she is: in social terms, a prostitute; in verbal terms, the subject of his monologue. But the general inability to name himself as agent reflects profound guilt and confusion, not only about his participation in prostitution but also about his objectification of women in art (332).

Thus, in his own estimation, the speaker is not guilty of objectifying Jenny because there is no subject left or because that subject is unknowable.

Lawrence J. Starzyk explains this process differently:

Like the veiling of a dead duchess's portrait, the silence of a sleeping Jenny similarly minimizes the disconcerting messages likely to be delivered by objects suddenly given voice. But attenuation never fully relieves pain, nor does it prevent these protagonists [the narrator of *Jenny* and Browning's *Pictor Ignotus*, *Child Roland*, and the speaker of "Pauline"] from taking three important steps in aestheticizing their respective idols. Silencing a potentially threatening voice is the first step. The second is a consequence of the first: the idol must be rendered inanimate and thus an object. The third step discloses the ultimate reason for silencing and thus rendering inanimate the idol: to appropriate the object to self and in the process resuscitate the object by solipsistically assuming the "idol's empery" ("Sordello" 1.515). What is broken by the self is reconstituted as objective correlative self. (232)

I agree that the narrator of *Jenny* configures an identity for Jenny from his own thoughts, thus projecting a version of himself into his representation of her. However, he constantly distinguishes between the self he recognizes in his thoughts and the version of himself he projects onto Jenny's sleeping form and "reads" as her identity. Jules Paul Seigel understands this process as "a dialogue of the mind with itself, a dialogue of heart and head" (685). By contrast, I think that Rossetti is dramatizing a kind of subjectivity in the poem that requires this other self, the "objective correlative self," to provide contrast

with the familiar self and to contradict the self's desires and motivations. In other words, I disagree with the order that Starzyk suggests. In Starzyk's scheme, there is a central subject implied who acts to silence and objectify the other. In the model detailed in this chapter, the central subject cannot attain a fully developed subjectivity—cannot exist fully in terms of a self he recognizes—without the synchronous process of building subjectivity in the self and objectifying the Other.

Immediately after his philosophical meanderings, the dawn breaks, Jenny stirs, and he sings to her, "Poor little Jenny, good to kiss" (299). He sees their reflection, Jenny's face layered by the etchings of her lovers' names on the mirror. The speaker's gaze moves to the visual layers in the mirror of the names, the diamonds that etched them, and Jenny's face, which all equate to her body's economic value. Accordingly, he fulfills what he imagines are her dreams, inserting in the mirrored image the shine of golden coins:

I lay among your golden hair

Perhaps the subject of your dreams,

These golden coins.

.....

Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams.

.....

Jenny, my love rang true! for still

Love at first sight is vague, until

That tinkling makes him audible. (340-42, 364, 380-83)

Finally, he admits that he “mock[s]” her because he is “[a]shamed of [his] own shame” (383, 384). However, he is not truly connected to her; *his* soul is not irrevocably lost. She reminds him of their differences⁶⁰:

Well, of such thoughts so much I know:
In my life, as in hers, they show,
By a far gleam which I may near,
A dark path I can strive to clear. (387-90).

The “far gleam” of her soul contrasts the darkness that envelopes her body. Jenny’s body symbolizes her “dark path” because, to the speaker, she has allowed its value to be economic. The interweaving of commercial and spiritual allusions in the poem makes it apparent that the speaker’s payment of golden coins represents his soul paying for hers: “Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?” (229). At the same time, perhaps these models of exchange represent our limited avenues to intimacy; if soul cannot know soul, it can only “pay” for it. Although through Buchanan’s criticism, Rossetti would be associated

⁶⁰ My reading of the narrator’s enlightenment—his walk home in the sunshine and his supposed moral reformation—goes against a line of criticism that interprets this ending as ultimately morally uplifting or as ambivalent. According to Sheets,

[T]his young man experiences moments of insight, guilt, and even despair. ... D. M. R. Bentley and others argue that the narrator develops moral insight as the night proceeds, attaining “a measure of spiritual regeneration” at the end (“RFW,” p. 192). However, it seems to me that the narrator’s commentary, like his conduct, is fraught with contradiction. The young man cannot explain how his past is related to his present.... (320-21)

I would like to argue that this ending is the only natural conclusion to the narrator’s construction of contrasubjectivity. He must end in light and Jenny in darkness; he must be on one path and she another; he must be in nature and she in a small apartment. Otherwise, he cannot have a fully developed subject position built upon the differences between them. This walk into the light is the dramatization of the philosophical distancing he has worked to cultivate throughout the monologue.

with the speaker and pay dearly for it, as we shall see, Rossetti rejects this association. After all, he stayed beside *Jenny* despite the horrific circumstances (i.e. burial and resurrection) for twenty-three years. By contrast, the speaker can leave; he can “strive to clear” the “dark path.” In this way, even the exchange happens at a distance psychologically. He does not engage with the system of exchange; presumably, he has not even slept with her. Throughout the poem, he continues to form his subjectivity against hers, his easy walk home in the light against her paralytic sleep in persistent darkness.

As a dramatic monologue, the poem leads the reader to view the whole situation outside of and within the speaker’s subjective gaze. Although the speaker cannot always discern Jenny’s humanity, the reader presumably can. In this way, Rossetti cannot be said merely to reveal his objectification of women. Instead, he positions the reader to identify the consecutive mechanisms of the speaker’s judgment of Jenny. For Rossetti, this poetic method allowed the reader access into the speaker’s mind, the “*inner* standing-point,” as he explains in “The Stealthy School of Criticism” (1343), an essay he wrote in response to Buchanan’s public criticism. Buchanan, a poet and critic, published a scathing review of the recent poetry by William Morris, Algernon Charles Swinburne, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti the next year in his essay on “The Fleshly School of Poetry.” He describes the speaker of the poem as “never a true lover merging his identity into that of the beloved one; never spiritual, never tender; always self-conscious and aesthetic” (1336). While Buchanan takes an ethical stance against Rossetti here, I am more interested in analyzing *Jenny* to find Rossetti’s contribution to a larger poetic conversation about ethics, genre, and gender. Rossetti’s poetic self-consciousness

seemed sexually self-gratifying for Rossetti to Buchanan, who, just before this section, describes reading Swinburne's poetry with disgust:

Here is a full-grown man, presumably intelligent and cultivated, putting on record for other full-grown men to read, the most secret mysteries of sexual connection, and that with so sickening a desire to reproduce the sensual mood, so careful a choice of epithet to convey mere animal sensations, that we merely shudder at the shameless nakedness. (1332)

Buchanan does not object to "sexual connection," but he fears the perhaps contagious power of "fleshliness," a drive he also locates in Rossetti's *Jenny*: "We detect its fleshliness at a glance; we perceive that the scene was fascinating less through its human tenderness than because it, like all the others [the poetry of Swinburne and Morris], possessed an inherent quality of animalism" (1336). "Fleshliness" threatens to corrupt private acts, to flood with light the "secret mysteries." For Buchanan, the implications are revolutionary and dangerous:

Fully conscious of this themselves, the fleshly gentlemen have bound themselves by solemn league and covenant to extol fleshliness as the distinct and supreme end of poetic and pictorial art; to aver that poetic expression is greater than poetic thought, and by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense; and that the poet, properly to develop his poetic faculty, must be an intellectual hermaphrodite, to whom the very facts of day and night are lost in a whirl of aesthetic terminology. (1330)

Such an act separates expression from thought, sound from sense, and body from soul. For Buchanan, Rossetti's "self-conscious and aesthetic" (1336) poetry commits several distinct errors. First, it embarrassingly reveals Rossetti's relationships with prostitutes and attempts to pass juvenile lust for profound human meaning. Next, it bares the author's presumption to focus only on the object of his musings, the body of the sleeping woman, while pretending to understand her spirit. Finally, it consists of half-formed thoughts better imagined in visual form (1334) and so separates crafted language from depth of meaning.⁶¹

Dante Gabriel Rossetti quickly shot back in "The Stealthy School of Criticism," also in 1871, that Buchanan missed the point of the dramatic monologue altogether. The genre allows the poet to stand back, not self-consciously in the reality of an autobiographically scripted event, but within a fictional mind:

But the motive powers of art reverse the requirement of science, and demand first of all an *inner* standing-point. The heart of such a mystery as this must be plucked from the very world in which it beats or bleeds; and the beauty and pity, the self-questioning and all-questionings which it brings with it, can come with full force only from the mouth of one alive to its whole appeal, such as the speaker put forward in the poem, —that is, of a young and thoughtful man of the world. To such a speaker, many

⁶¹ For a brilliant and thorough description of the impact of Buchanan's attack on Rossetti's psychological stability and his health, see William Clyde De Vane's "The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man." He writes, "Buchanan's pamphlet changed the course of Rossetti's life. The crisis was immediate. To cure his insomnia and anguish Rossetti took enormous doses of chloral and whisky" (466).

half-cynical revulsions of feeling and reverie, and a recurrent presence of the impression of beauty (however artificial) which first brought him within such a circle of influence, would be inevitable features of the dramatic relations portrayed. (1343)

Rossetti's ability to enter the speaker's psyche so persuasively in his execution of finding the poetic "*inner standing-point*" unfortunately provided the grounds for Buchanan's attack. The great irony for Rossetti is that Buchanan wrote his essay under a pseudonym (Thomas Maitland) and then attacked his poetry as dishonest.⁶² For Rossetti, the

⁶² Reeling from Buchanan's essay, Rossetti and Swinburne quickly attempted to ascertain the name of the author, who used the pseudonym "Maitland." D. G. Rossetti wrote to William Michael Rossetti on October 17, 1871,

Dear W-

What do you think? Ellis writes to me that Maitland is-----
 Buchanan! [Rossetti's writing takes up the whole line here.]
 Do you know B's prose, & can you judge if it be so? If it be, I'll not deny myself the fun of a printed Letter to the Skunk. E. says he has it "on very good authority."

Yours, Gabriel. (Ashley A294, ff. 183)

D. G. Rossetti apparently also informed his brother of his intention to write a letter in response to Buchanan's essay. As W. M. Rossetti explains in a letter to Swinburne, Gabriel naturally takes such "criticism" in a reasonable spirit of disdain: but he is somewhat displeased with it too, & had thoughts of printing a letter (he has written a little of it) to Mr. Buchanan, not ill adapted to produce a tingling sensation on that individual's hide. However my advice to G is not to print anything; & to make very sure that is Buchanan (tho really I suppose it is) before he definitely fixes any responsibility on him. G has persuaded me on two very good rhymes also—one about

"Buchanan

Who the pseudo prefers to the anon":

I am sorry I can't quote it fully—.... (Ashley A294, ff. 89)

W. M. Rossetti would later write in his *Memoir*, "From his wild ways of talking—about conspiracies and what not—I was astounded to perceive that he was, past question, not entirely sane" (qtd. in De Vane, "The Harlot" 467). The "good rhymes" to which W. M. Rossetti refers are as follows:

As a critic, the poet Buchanan

Things the Pseudo worth two of the Anon.
 Into Maitland he's slunk;
 But what gift in the skunk
 Guides the shuttering nose to Buchanan!

And the Lord stuck His Thumb into His Nose
 And spread His everlasting Fingers out.
 A fivefold Shadow blacken'd Heaven. The depths
 Yelped. One small Scotchman with a mangy Muse
 Twang'd his Jew's harp on Earth, till Silence cried,
 "By God, O god, this is unbearable!" (Ashley A1880, ff. 52-53)

Swinburne's response was even more virulent. He was fielding complaints from clergy at this time, and he presents himself as being both energized and angered by the constant criticism:

The little reptile's hide demands the lash—his head the application of a man's heel, his breech, of a man's toe I believe it is a habit with the verminous little cur to sneak into some other hide as mangy as his own and pretend to tell on himself as well as his betters to keep up the disguise. (Ashley A294, ff. 71)

As if to ensure that Browning would not take Rossetti's side against him, Buchanan wrote him in March of 1872, just after the publication of *Fifine at the Fair*:

I am delighted to hear you say what you do say, I have to ask to be forgiven for troubling you with a matter so contemptible. On one thing I was certain: that these men would poison even your mind if they could.

My pamphlet is just ready, & be its literary merit what it may, I am convinced that it will do good . . . perhaps even saving them from going headlong to Hell. You will see the whole matter there put in its perfect form of simple & artless truths, & you will moreover see their allusions to yourself. In this matter of the Fleshly School, I know every great-minded & honest man will stand on my side; and, come what may, a Snake is scotched effectually & his entire scheme ruined.

In the whole finale of the affair, I will only plead guilty to one instance of recrimination. When these men, not content with outrageous literature, violated the memory of the poor boy who went home from me twelve years ago to die, I made a religious vow to have no mercy; & I have had none. Thus far I have been revengeful. The main cause is nevertheless righteous & good. (Ashley A4374 ff. 91-92)

Buchanan later wrote of the incident,

I published many years ago an article called the "Fleshly School of Poetry." It created a tremendous stir and provoked endless recriminations, and the questions which I am about to answer not is, Was it an *honest* article, *i.e.*, did it actually represent my honest belief? To answer that question I must refer to the *fons et origo* of the whole affair. Not long

dramatic monologue allows the poet to trace a speaker's mental movements and motivations, and this makes the poem beneficial socially—although that was not his only interest—whether the speaker acts humanely or not. However, the aesthetic issue at this point had become political and the genre itself seemed like a form of violence. If the poet silences the female figure, such as in *Jenny*, in order to adumbrate human mental processes through a speaker, how could poetry engage ethically with society?

before its publication Mr. Swinburne the poet had gone out of his way to print, in a note to one of his prose essays, an insulting allusion to the friend of my boyhood, David Gray, whose premature death I still mourned deeply. He spoke contemptuously and cruelly of Gray's "poor little book," an allusion emphasised, I was assured, by other spiteful comments of the Coterie to which Mr. Swinburne belonged. ... Whatever motive inspired the allusion, it seemed to me the most ill-timed, offensive, and cruel; and I vowed then and there to avenge it if ever I had the opportunity. I am not justifying my conduct; I am simply describing it. I am not naturally revengeful, but remember I was very young and my dead friend was very dear to me. Well, I bided my time. I forgot the provocation I myself had given by my review of Mr. Swinburne's "Poems and Ballads" in the *Athenaeum*. ... The retort came, not merely in Mr. Swinburne's fierce exculpatory brochure, but in Mr. Rossetti's pamphlet defending his friend, in the opening passage of which I was called "a poor and pretentious poetaster who was causing storms in teacups," the allusion being to the success of my "London Poems." From that instant I considered my self free to strike at the whole Coterie, which I finally did, at the moment when all the journals were sounding extravagant paeans over the poems of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. (qtd. in Jay 159-61)

Buchanan professes that other writers agreed with his estimation of Rossetti's work. He claims, "Tennyson avowed me *vivâ voce* that he considered Rossetti's sonnet on 'Nuptial Sleep' the 'filthiest thing he had ever ved' [and] Browning in private talks had been equally emphatic" (qtd. in Jay 161).

“[T]he woman’s superfluity”:

Contrasubjective Response in *A Castaway*

As if directly responding to the differences between Nell and Jenny that the speaker of *Jenny* identifies, *A Castaway* begins with a comparison between Eulalie’s life now and that of her childhood, which had been recorded in a diary she reads sadly:

Poor little diary, with its simple thoughts,
Its good resolves, its “Studied French an hour,”

.....

And did *I* write it? Was I this good girl,

This budding colourless young rose of home? (1-2, 7-8)

In this immediate response to *Jenny*, Webster sets up a dialogue through the monologue through her rereading of Jenny’s character in Eulalie’s. Although *Jenny* and *A Castaway* were published in the same year, with four editions of Rossetti’s *Poems* published in 1870, Webster would have had time to read *Jenny* and respond to it in her poem. While Jenny wears “Yesterday’s rose,” which “now droops forlorn,” (324) and is the “rose shut in a book” (253) with “crushed petals” (269), Eulalie has now developed into the full rose from the “budding colourless young rose” (8). Jenny is crushed by her circumstances and trapped in a narrative—a book—“[i]n which pure women may not look” (254).

Furthermore, she is trapped by the speaker’s narrative of her and crushed by his suffocating “reading.” Eulalie, on the other hand, looks back on her sheltered life with disdain, her Nell-like existence:

Did I so live content in such a life,

Seeing no larger scope, nor asking it...? (9-10)

The speaker believes that he knows Jenny's dreams of golden coins: "Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams" (364). However, it is only as an adult who has escaped her mundane and trifling domestic existence that Eulalie knows the fallacy of her early dreams:

For gaiety, to go, in my best white
 Well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,
 No wishes and no cares, almost no hopes,
 Only the young girl's haze and golden dreams
 That veil the Future from her. (18-23)

Of course, just as the speaker in *Jenny* rationalizes his relationship with her to condone it implicitly, Eulalie strives to create a narrative for her life that gives her agency and justification. At times, the mask slips for both speakers and they reveal the shame they feel in participating in prostitution. For example, the speaker of *Jenny* is moved to claim any kinship between Nell and Jenny "makes a goblin of the sun" (206) and Eulalie admits,

So long since:
 And now it seems a jest to talk of me
 As if I could be one with her, of me
 Who am ... me. (22-25)

These echoes of *Jenny* in *A Castaway* serve to put the monologues in dialogue. In many ways, Eulalie speaks with a voice we might expect from Jenny. Strikingly, Webster has brought the objectified woman to subjective life.

By using genre to analyze Webster's involvement in a conversation about subjectivity, I am building upon the arguments Cynthia Scheinberg makes about Levy's monologues:

I want to suggest that Levy's dramatic monologues incorporate into their generic structure an awareness of the problem I posed above, namely that readers, auditors, and critics have deep moral and personal commitments which necessarily affect their capacities for identification or sympathy with poetic speakers. ("Recasting 'Sympathy and Judgment'" 179)

Furthermore, I am disagreeing with Rigg, who argues that this poem represents Webster's work with monodrama, not the dramatic monologue. For Rigg, "the female speakers are delineated not through re-presentation or reconstruction, but through representation or image" ("Augusta Webster: The Social" 82). She explains that *A Castaway* and "The Happiest Girl,"

with their focus on social context instead of on a specific historical figure, are monodrama. The common ancestry makes the distinction subtle, but the speaker in a monodrama adopts a series of poses that reflect the inner life of the speaker at the same time that they indicate the social, political, and philosophical climate in which the speaker exists. In other words, the integration of speaker and situation presents a complete "portrait" and is the point of Webster's monodrama. (83)

Although I too see the generic relationship between Webster's poem and monodrama, I believe that rather than writing in another genre, Webster takes part in the conversation with Rossetti through the dramatic monologue. After all, the interlocutor in *Jenny* is

sleeping, and Elvire's position as interlocutor is debatable. For example, Clyde De L. Ryals suggests, "It may be that Elvire [and Fifine are] not even present" (212). As we have seen, these generic categories can be flexible. By tracing these poetic echoes, we can identify how Webster sought to shape the poetic conversation about contrasubjectivity.

Webster's writing reflects her social interests; in her literary work, she questions her culture's gender narratives. According to Angela Leighton, "Webster's journalism, like her poetry, is ultimately concerned with the political truths behind life's pleasing myths, with the real, listless, ill-educated girls behind the spell-bound beauties of fairy-tale" (*Victorian Women Poets: Writing* 172). Her experience traveling on her father's boat and moving with his career (Sutphin, Introduction 10) probably helped her to gain a more panoramic view of British culture. She seems to have reacted to her distance from English society by challenging gender stereotypes; she was expelled from the South Kensington Art School for whistling, and she taught herself Greek and began translating (Sutphin, Introduction 10). Later, Webster worked to produce social and political change through her writing and political involvements (Sutphin, Introduction 12).

In tacit agreement with the traditional misogynistic thought that equates women's worth with their beauty, the speaker of *Jenny*—as Rossetti, of course, has situated him—notes that her beauty is worthy of artistic re-creation. More specifically, such rendering is necessary for people to see her beautiful spirit, the results of "what God can do":

And the stilled features thus descried
As Jenny's long throat droops aside,—
The shadows where the cheeks are thin,

And pure wide curve from ear to chin,—
 With Raffael's, Leonardo's hand
 To show them to men's souls, might stand
 Whole ages long, the whole world through,
 For preachings of what God can do. (233-40)

Eulalie similarly recognizes her own beauty. However, she is under no illusions that her outer beauty just needs to be appreciated as linked to some capacity for inner beauty. All beauty is performance for Eulalie, and it has a price:

Aye, let me feed upon my beauty thus,
 Be glad in it like painters when they see
 At last the face they dreamed but could not find
 Look from their canvas on them, triumph in it,
 The dearest thing I have. Why, 'tis my all,
 Let me make much of it: is it not this,
 This beauty, my own curse at once and tool
 To snare men's souls, (I know what the good say
 Of beauty in such creatures) is it not this
 That makes me feel myself a woman still [?] (34-44)

For “the good,” the prostitute’s beauty is an aberration because it used as a “tool,” rather than remaining a symbol of God’s goodness unencumbered by social utility. However, as Eulalie will point out, women who are not prostitutes use their beauty in just the same way—to attain economic stability. After all, “who wants his wife to know weeds’ Latin names? / who ever chose a girl for saying dates? / or asked if she had learned to trace a

map?” (373-75). In fact, she darkly suggests that “to kill off female infants, ’twould make room” for more women to find jobs (302). Outer beauty protects all women in such a world, in which “the woman’s superfluity” (298).

According to Slinn, the poem reveals that “[t]he difference between wife and mistress is a difference of economic function rather than inherent (or internal) moral condition” (172).⁶³ By continuing to interweave *Jenny* into her poem, Webster suggests that men actively contribute to women’s struggles by valuing outward displays of beauty and the women who embrace such a system of value:

Yes, a new rich dress,
with lace like this too, that’s a soothing balm
for any fretting woman, cannot fail,
I’ve heard men say it ... and they know so well
what’s in all women’s hearts, especially women like me. (*A Castaway*,
456-61)

Of course, Eulalie cannot deny the appeal, one made even more attractive by her Victorian socialization as a girl and her pragmatic realization of the possible profits “a new rich dress” could yield in her profession. Reverberating in these lines is the speaker’s confident claim in *Jenny*, “Ah Jenny, yes, we know your dreams” (364). Eulalie’s sarcasm betrays her belief that men often know nothing of women, or they would realize that they are “poor fools” (99) whose wives “could keep their husbands if they cared, / but ’tis an easier life to let them go, / and whimper at it for morality” (109-

⁶³ See Rigg and Brown for additional discussion on Webster and the relationship between prostitution and marriage in Victorian England.

11). Because she recognizes the socio-economic forces that put her in the position of the “fallen woman,” she can declare, “I have looked coolly on my what and why, / and I accept myself” (135-36). E. Warwick Slinn argues,

Eulalie, like Rossetti’s speaker, is written by these discourses—not being able to elude them—but she is more aware of their function and of her difference (which is also produced by them). This interplay between identification and difference constitutes the dynamic process of the poem and the nature of Eulalie as female subject and courtesan. “A Castaway” thus offers one of the clearest examples in Victorian poetry of an interplay of reciprocation and alienation between speaker and society and hence between poem and culture—one of the conditions for poetry as cultural criticism (163-64)

I would like to add that Webster was engaging Rossetti in a conversation about “identification and difference” through *A Castaway*. As a result, the poems meet at several important points through direct allusion and through similar constructions of subjectivity.

Drawing on *Jenny*, Webster further develops the metaphor of the path that proved so important for religious rhetoric.⁶⁴ In *Jenny*, the speaker endeavors to use the figure of the woman to remind him to stay on the right path, in contrast to her “dark path [he] can strive to clear” (390). In *A Castaway*, that path is not chosen by the willfully sinful. It is

⁶⁴ See, for example, Christina Rossetti’s “Uphill.”

the horrific fate of those without other choices, who must “hurl [themselves] into a quicksand” (466) beyond the help of “some kindly people in the world” (464):

And how, so firmly clutching the stretched hand,
 as death’s pursuing terror bids, even so,
 how can one reach firm land, having to foot
 the treacherous crumbling soil that slides and gives
 and sucks one in again? Impossible path!
 No, why waste struggles, I or any one?
 what is must be. What then? I, where I am,
 sinking and sinking; let the wise pass by
 and keep their wisdom for an apter use,
 let me sink merrily as I best may. (470-79)

Reading *Jenny* from Eulalie’s perspective means recognizing that whether or not she wants it, the speaker in Rossetti’s poem does not even reach out to help. He is not one of the “kindly people.” In Webster’s rereading of Rossetti, the speaker of *Jenny* participates in the woman’s objectification and leaves her alone to “let [her] sink merrily.” Of course, their projects seem fundamentally different in this way; as we have seen, Rossetti’s poem addresses complicated epistemological, formal, and ethical issues while Webster’s poem focuses on the social implications. She seems to suggest that there are “kindly people” who can empathize; thus, empathy without mere projection is possible. While Eulalie often speaks from hopelessness and despair, Webster’s poem suggests that the speaker of *Jenny* acts from a position of privilege and chooses to avoid her in the future not because she is beyond his help, but because he wants merely to preserve his own morality. The

irony, of course, is that his willingness to enter her “dark path” for his own pleasure and then to eschew it for his moral improvement undermines any ethical standing he might choose to take.

Coins feature in *A Castaway*, as they also do in *Jenny* and *Fifine*. The speaker of *Jenny* asks, “Shall soul not somehow pay for soul?” (229), paying a piece of his soul to her in the form of his coins bouncing in her “golden hair” (340) and his soul’s deviation onto her “dark path,” if only for a night. Eulalie believes in an economic system in which soul cannot “somehow pay for soul”; instead, the cold and “indifferent world” (562) runs on a system of exchange⁶⁵ in which each body pays for its own poor investments:

I see clear now and know one has one’s life
in hand at first to spend or spare or give
like any other coin; spend it or give
or drop it in the mire,

.....

And if you spend or give that is your choice;
and if you let it slip that’s your choice too,
you should have held it firmer. (552-61)

Some women, “useless else” (566), from whom the world “buys [them] of [them]selves” (567), have a choice to make. They “could hold back, / free all of [them] to starve” (567-68), choosing not to sell their body to the world. However, others, although they “have done no ill and are in luck” (569), “slave their lives out and have food and clothes / until

⁶⁵ For more discussion on this system, see Slinn, Brown, and Nead.

they grow unserviceably old” (570-71). In this way, Webster reveals that the speaker of *Jenny* betrays two fallacies in his payment of coins. First, he believes that he knows her desires, i.e. new dresses, and the coins can buy them. Second, he believes that he has participated in a heavenly exchange, soul for soul, by participating in her trade. He does not realize that any woman who desires the accoutrement of the system of her objectification cannot form desires outside of this system. Furthermore, buying more dresses just provides her with more tools for her industry, rather than helping her individually. He also believes that paying for her time, rather than her body, makes the money less a token formed by and used within the economic system that values life as a good “to spend or spare or give / like any other coin” (*A Castaway* 553-54).

Eulalie’s subjectivity is that of a woman who realizes that the world has defined itself against her, and in doing so, has drained any non-economic value from her body. She has lost the luxury of fully expressing her feelings, so they surface in mingling emotions, a blend of laughter and tears:

I could laugh outright. or else,
for I feel near it, roll on the ground and sob.
Well, after all, there’s not much difference
between the two sometimes. (619-22)

At the end of the poem, she desires some human contact, even with “the cackling goose” (625), rather than sitting alone; “half a loaf / is better than no bread” (627-28). Slinn argues,

Thus [Eulalie’s] beauty becomes a focus for her interdependence with
established signs. And thus Webster dramatizes the dilemma of female

identity (or any gendered identity for that matter), where a woman asserts her separate definition and yet remains inseparable from her social environs. (165)

Indeed, Webster was interested in redefining women's social value through poetry that reveals women's—and Eulalie's—negotiation of these social codes. However, it is her literary conversation with Rossetti that most clearly elucidates her project. In order to explain the need for large-scale social change for gender equality, she needed to dramatize the subjective effects of the current system. Eulalie's miserable circumstances pathetically represent these effects, but speaking from the “margin” (184)—as Slinn argues—most clearly exhibits the subjectivity of the “other,” against whom other characters like the speaker of *Jenny*, and, later, *Fifine*, define themselves.

“[W]e put forth hand and pluck

At what seems somehow like reality—a soul”:

Metonymy, Contrasubjectivity, and *Fifine at the Fair*

Written a year later in response to *Jenny* and, I would argue, *A Castaway*, *Fifine* reveals Browning's perspective on the matter. De Vane explains, “Browning wrote *Fifine*, according to a manuscript in the library of Balliol College, between December 1871 and April 1872, the very time when the clamor aroused by the Buchanan-Rossetti controversy was at its height in London” (“The Harlot” 479). He suggests that Browning “meant no attack upon Rossetti's moral character” (“The Harlot” 481). Instead, “it was a

mere literary disagreement concerning a point of human nature, and he as master in those regions . . . was recording his own opinion” (481).⁶⁶ I concur with this assessment of the situation, and I would like to add that Browning’s text exhibits even more self-consciousness about the process of contrasubjectivity Rossetti explores in *Jenny*. Their view of “human nature,” then, was quite similar. They differed in their conclusions. Rossetti seems to have believed that art itself links people through the capacity to construct an “*inner* standing-point,” whereas, for Browning, this capacity corresponds to a truth of human nature that art reveals, rather than heals. In other words, Rossetti was more optimistic than was Browning about the possibilities for human connectedness despite—or through—their mutual epistemological limitations. To create a coherent conception of their identities, people must create “*inner* standing-points” for other people, constructing others in contrast to their construction of themselves. What serves as a creative capacity for Rossetti reveals a truth about human cognition—and human disconnectedness—for Browning. Browning thus depicts the violence of contrasubjectivity through *Fifine*.

De Vane reads this differently. He argues that there is an inherent connection between the two poems, but their connection is primarily in their subject matter and the possible biographical revelations of the poets:

⁶⁶ Charlotte C. Watkins argues,

At a time when Buchanan’s epithet “the Fleshly School” had currency, Browning appears to have dramatized his judgment of the “new” poetry of the 1870’s by placing an argument analogous to the criticism which defended it in the mouth of a speaker for whose character he chose as an image the very prototype of the fleshly, Don Juan himself. (431)

Indeed, Browning seems to have been almost as apprehensive about *Fifine* as Rossetti had been about *Jenny*, and for somewhat the same reasons.

The woman who gives title to Browning's poem is of the same ancient profession as Jenny, and the hero or speaker is, as in *Jenny*, a rather too thoughtful young man of the world who ponders upon the situation of the gypsy girl, Fifine, and upon his own emotions concerning her. ("The Harlot" 479)

For DeVane, the poem itself serves as "the speaker's justification, through some of Browning's most cherished principles, of his sensual yearnings for the handsome gypsy girl" ("The Harlot and the Thoughtful Young Man" 480). As he notes, "The casuist justifying sensuality by quoting Browning was Satan quoting scripture" (480).

Comparing the two speakers, he concludes that

Rossetti's young man leaves Jenny's lodgings at daybreak, innocent in act, compassionate in heart, after flinging gold into Jenny's hair; Browning's young man, in the midst of his musings, slips gold into Fifine's tambourine, and presently, in a most adulterous mood, goes off to encounter her. The moral philosophizings of these two thoughtful young men lead to totally dissimilar actions. (480-81)

I agree that Browning is building upon Rossetti's poem through speakers that respond differently. I would argue that in *Fifine*, Browning builds upon the idea of "reading" that Rossetti establishes in *Jenny* and Webster disrupts in *A Castaway* in order to explore how this "reading" functions from an ethical vantage point. The difference in Browning's

ending, I suggest, results from his desire to portray objectification taken to a physical conclusion.

My use of metaphor and metonymy here builds upon the work of Earl G. Ingersoll and Jane Gallop. Gallop explains the sexual connotations of metaphor and metonym:

Metaphor is patent; metonymy is latent. The latency, the hiddenness of metonymy, like that of female genitalia, lends it an appearance of naturalness or passivity, so that the realism [...] appears either as the lack of tropes, or as somehow mysterious, the “dark continent” (Freud’s term for female sexuality) of rhetoric. (qtd. in Ingersoll 547)

Ingersoll describes the differences thus: “Metaphor finds a signifier to represent the signified which has been repressed in the unconscious; metonymy finds a contiguous signifier to escape the significant signifier” (547). He explains that Lacan, building upon Roman Jakobson, “reads metaphor as an expression of Freud’s ‘identification and symbolism’ . . . [and] metonymy as an expression of Freud’s ‘condensation’ and ‘displacement’” (546). While *Fifine* is obviously not a realist text, we can use these descriptions to build a model of poetic metonymy in the poem.

The speaker develops an elaborate scheme of representation to depict his “reading” of *Fifine*, *Elvire*, and all women. Through the course of this long description, the speaker moves from metaphorically representing the women, finding a creative signifier for the signified of their existence, to metonymically representing the women, escaping from their signified identities through multiplying signifiers. While it may be impossible to represent someone else accurately, with any attempt resulting in a

collection of signifiers, the speaker in *Fifine* claims to see to the truth of women's existence. In this way, the poem reveals the problems with a philosophy in which one can purely represent the other's identity. The Platonic and aesthetic search for the true form beneath the representation certainly exists in *Fifine* through the speaker's philosophy:

I have not vexed in vain
 Elvire: because she knows, now she has stood the test
 How, this and this being good, herself may still be best
 O' the beauty in review; because the flesh that claimed
 Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed
 In me, for things extern, was all mistake, she finds,—
 Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,
 That, through the outward sign, the inward grace allures,
 And sparks from heaven transpierce earth's coarsest covertures, —
 All by demonstrating the value of Fifine! (329-38)

This philosophy loses its cogency because its mouthpiece, the sensual speaker, presumably Don Juan, maintains his "conquests of the soul" (840) which leads, of course, to the conquest of bodies. He ultimately compares women to inanimate objects in his art collection, altering their means of signification in his scheme from beautiful spirits, to beautiful bodies, to things that are his.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robyn Warhol defines metonymy in a very broad, and very helpful way: Unlike most scholars who have been trying assiduously to narrow down the precise meaning of "metonymy"—or, indeed, to discredit it as a

He “demonstrat[es] the value of Fifine” (338) by placing her in the role of many female characters. He uses the excuse of trying to see the “true” Fifine, to see the signifier beneath her sign, while trying to control her:

[W]e put forth hand and pluck

At what seems somehow like reality—a soul.

I catch at this and that, to capture and control. (1093-95)

The “pageant” (580) dramatizes the process of Fifine’s representation that moves from metaphor to metonym in the speaker’s mind. He first places Fifine’s “phantom” (298) in his pageant, but soon all of these women prove phantom figures under his control, all types of Woman. In this way, the speaker uses the women to prove to Elvire that his interest in Fifine is purely academic; the women (Helen, Lady Venus, Cleopatra, a Saint) serve as versions of Fifine that reveal something about her character that he is able to

rhetorical category altogether—I will use the term as broadly as possible. “Metonymy,” for our purposes, will include the substitution and association in discourse of terms related to each other by numerous kinds of contiguity: by (1) cause and effect (e.g., “that movie was a good cry”); (2) inventor and invented or maker and thing produced (e.g. calling a painting “a Rembrandt”); (3) user and instrument (e.g., “he’s the base guitar, she’s the drums”); (4) doer and thing done (e.g., “she’s management” or “he’s administration”); (5) passion and object of passion (consider the referent of “Lolita” in Vladimir Nabokov’s novel: not the littler girl Dolores Haze, but the passion Humbert Humbert has associated with her; or, consider Hugh Bredin’s helpful example: “she is my true love”); (6) container and contained (e.g., “that pot is boiling over”); (7) place and object, event, or place (e.g., “Woodstock,” “Pearl Harbor,” “Watergate”); (8) time and object, event, or institution in time (e.g., “68” for the latest “revolution” in Paris); (9) possessor and possessed (e.g., “ask the fur coat over there what she wants”); and (10) part for whole (otherwise known as synecdoche). A broader example of metonymy is the relation between (11) concrete object and abstraction, a strictly discursive relation that characterizes those situations where metonymy “blossoms into metaphor.” (76)

discern. This double objectification pushes the real Fifine even further in the background of the monologue as the speaker interprets her according to past interpretations of women in history.

He even begins to interpret his wife (Elvire) as she pulls away: “(Your husband holds you fast / Will have you listen, learn your character at last!)” (462-63).⁶⁸ As if she has to “learn [her] character” from her husband, Elvire is also denied an identity of her own. Her only power is through trying to evade the speaker’s controlling text—as she seems to do, despite her husband who “holds [her] fast.” He tells her to “play out [her] *rôle* / I’ the pageant” (579-80), that her “phantom” (580) cannot yet leave the stage, in an attempt to control even her soul. Elvire is a silent entity whose husband speaks for her. After he feels he has adequately explained the inner significance of Fifine’s soul, he places Elvire within the pageant as Fifine’s opposite.

For the speaker, art has the capacity to reveal a sort of truth otherwise impenetrable: “Art is my evidence / That something was, is, might be; but no more thing itself, / Than flame is fuel” (628-30). Of course, in these lines the “truth” he is trying to convince Elvire that “Art” reveals to him is that she is still beautiful, although he admits that she would argue,

My mirror would reflect a tall, thin, pale, deep-eyed

Personage, pretty once, it may be, doubtless still

Loving, —a certain grace yet lingers, if you will. (624-26)

⁶⁸ Donald Hair explains, “He cannot read ‘the slow shake of head, the melancholy smile’ (144) of Elvire, and so he turns to Fifine: ‘Here’s she, shall make by thoughts be surer what they mean! / First let me read the signs’ (149-50)” (284-85).

In other words, he tells her that she is not still beautiful at all, but the same “Art” that gives him a special vision into Fifine’s true nature allows him to see Elvire’s beauty. If Elvire denies the first, she denies the second, too. He goes on to explain, “I seem to understand the way heart chooses heart” (646). According to his theory, “instinctive Art” (688), “working with a will,” (692), unites the souls that “[go] on striving to combine / With what shall right the wrong, the under or above / The standard: supplement unloveliness by love” (681-83). In the end, the pairing successfully attains Plato’s ideal: “There’s the restored, the prime, the individual type!” (694). When he again imagines Elvire’s inevitable protests against his descriptions of her beauty—protests that he is putting in her mouth—he exclaims, “See yourself in my soul!” (808). At the same time, he desires the freedom to swim in the ocean of the real, according to his metaphor, attempting to “endure the false” (1059): “up we mount with a pitch / Above it, find our head reach truth, while hands explore / The false below” (1060-62). He can “swim” in both worlds, his head filled with the true beauty of Elvire while his “hands explore / The false below.”⁶⁹ His philosophy, then, serves to justify the way he uses women for his own “Platonic completion,” spiritually and physically. At the same time, his soul has become the receptacle of the phantoms’ representations, and very quickly, the women—as subjects—have disappeared. Browning draws the readers’ attention to the consequences of viewing women as missing parts to complete a man by echoing *A Castaway*:

⁶⁹ For a thorough description of the system of symbolism Juan develops for Fifine and Elvire, see Charlotte C. Watkins’s “The ‘Abstruser Themes’ of Browning’s *Fifine at the Fair*.”

No—'tis ungainly work, the ruling men, at best!
 The graceful instinct's right: *'tis women stand confessed*
Auxiliary, the gain that never goes away,
 Takes nothing and gives all: Elvire, Fífine, 'tis they
 Convince,—if little, much, no matter! —one degree
 The more, at least, convince unreasonable me
 That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem
 And be not; if I dream, at least I know I dream. (1352-59, emphasis mine)

For Eulalie, men remain oblivious or apathetic to women's suffering—due to their “auxiliary” status, as Don Juan terms it—because men can only gain from the arrangement of having both wife and mistress, “the gain that never goes away, / [t]akes nothing and gives all.” By changing “superfluity” to “auxiliary,” Browning further reveals the sociological and economical underpinnings of women's value, systems supported by philosophies like the speaker's.⁷⁰

The more he objectifies women, the more he touts his re-creative power. Through this interpretation of Elvire (and women in general), he gains creative dominance over her, calling her his “new-created shape” (587) and her face his “pearl” (613), which “fits into just the cleft” of his heart (609). Thus, from the mere sand of her individual existence, he has fashioned a pearl. Once he becomes “Art's judge” (628), he owns the artifact: “Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear, / Mine henceforth,

⁷⁰ Ten years later, Browning received an autographed copy of Webster's *A Book of Rhyme*, signed “To Robert Browning from the Author A. W.” (Kelley and Coley 205). According to Kathleen Jones, he was known to admire Webster's work (Jones 192).

ever mine!” (632-33). Of course, the speaker functions this way as an exaggeration of the Duke or Porphyria’s Lover. He does not admit to acknowledging that any individual women have beauty; instead, they only display an inner “type”:

Which, if in any case they found expression, whole
I’ the traits, would give a type, undoubtedly display
A novel, true, distinct perfection in its way. (652-54)

Their beauty, then, is in his “reading.” Through the speaker’s “reading,” Browning positions the poem to respond to Webster’s and Rossetti’s poems. Browning’s speaker forces his interpretation on the women around him—attaining creative and (he hopes) sexual dominance. Flesh is “meant to yield” (650) to the soul, the true “individual type” (694). Flesh is also, presumably, meant to yield to him as a sexually powerful man, and to his interpretation as an artist who restores the beauty of type to women.

Responding to *Jenny* and *A Castaway*, Browning complicates access to authentic representations of human life through Don Juan’s optimistic exuberance, which masks obvious ulterior motives. Furthermore, he explores the ethics of “reading” another human being. The speaker’s metaphoric interpretations of Ffine allow him to see “the absolute truth of things” (686) as those interpretations become metonyms for all women, with Ffine/Elvire as the all-encompassing dichotomous metonym. Furthermore, he discovers the inadequacies of speech, and he refers to words as “simulacra” (1736), a word that carries with it the understanding that such representations are faulty and lose original meaning. The sign cannot fully represent the signified. Baudrillard will later use the same word to denote the empty shell of a signifier that remains, the sign having vanished beneath it: “Thus perhaps at stake has always been the murderous capacity of

images, murderers of the real” (1735). For the speaker, Fifine is a signifying vessel waiting to be filled by his sign, as the words he puts in her mouth express: “I’m just my instrument, —sound hollow: mere smooth skin / Stretched o’er gilt framework” (404-05).⁷¹ However, he realizes the inadequacy of language: “Words struggle with the weight / So feebly of the false, thick element between / Our soul, the True, and Truth!” (943-45). He proposes to interpret Fifine in order to get to the truth of her being; however, through his interpretation, his funneling of thought into words, she is lost.⁷² Fifine and Elvire vanish beneath the monologue.⁷³ However, the speaker maintains the belief that truth can emerge from representation:

That’s the first o’ the truths found: all things, slow
Or quick i’ the passage, come at last to that, you know!
Each has a false outside, whereby a truth is forced
To issue from within: truth, falsehood, are divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for

⁷¹ U. C. Knoepfelmacher has described a similar dynamic in his important article, “Projection and the Female Other: Romanticism, Browning, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue.”

⁷² Thirteen years later, in the middle of the heated debate about painting nudes, Pen painted a nude of Joan of Arc that was rejected from Royal Academy (O’Neill 542). Browning responded through *Parleyings* “With Francis Furini,” according to Patricia O’Neill. She explains, “Browning’s defense of nude studies makes art the soul of experience. [...] The imaginative power of art becomes important in Browning’s poem not only to defend even a minor artist like Furini but to see through art the something different in humanity from an apelike body or activity” (551). Browning clearly understood the complicated nature of artistic creation and the thin line between creation and appropriation. These issues surfaced and resurfaced for him throughout the rest of his life.

⁷³ As Donald Hair explains the “blurring of speakers is partly a result of verbal echoes,” with the speaker attributing words to Elvire “that he also uses himself” (285).

The happy moment. Life means—learning to abhor
 The false, and love the true, truth treasured snatch by snatch,
 Waifs counted at their worth. (1504-10)

As he searches for their “truth” (1505) which is “forced to issue from within” (1506) despite their “false outside” (1505), his words become theirs, his identity superimposed upon them.⁷⁴

What I am terming the “crisis” of the 1870s occurs primarily in this dialogue through the monologues of *Jenny*, *A Castaway*, and *Fifine at the Fair*. Thomas Kuhn describes crises as “a necessary precondition for the emergence of novel theories” (77). However, a crisis does not always lead to paradigm shift; rather, “[t]he decision to reject one paradigm is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other” (77). The new paradigm is not magically invented; the old is “declared invalid only if an alternate candidate is available to take its place” (77). Thus, the new

⁷⁴ Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor has also suggested that Browning positions the reader to notice how these systems of power work:

My argument is that dramatic monologue thus constructs the image of the audience through the very silence it enforces upon the textual auditor. The genre self-reflexively figures its own problems of interpretation, and of the freedom of the reader in the effaced, voiceless shadow of the implied listener, who emerges from obscurity as the figure of the reader. . . . Through the performance of interpretation, the reader distinguishes her/himself from both the speaker and the auditor; in doing so, the reader both fulfills, but also ironically undermines, the speaker’s apparent tyranny over the communicate situation that makes up the discourse of the poem. (288)

I would like to argue that through metonymy, Browning draws the readers’ attention to the dangers of representation both for the speaker and for the poet, the possibility that poetic observation itself can be fallible, tenuous, and unethical by nature.

paradigm is already present. I would like to argue that the crisis of the 1870s encompasses the competing discourses of both the old and new paradigms. More specifically, it is “the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other.” As we have seen, Rossetti, Webster, and Browning each respond differently to these issues, positing through poetry, respectively, the process of contrasubjectivity, a contrasubjective response, and the dangers of violent contrasubjectivity. As we will see in the next chapter, another response to these concerns was the development of abject subjectivity. Poets like Christina Rossetti, Swinburne, Hopkins, and Coleridge experimented with abjected speakers, modifying the monologue to portray these moments of contact between the self and Other, in order to portray the power in decentralized subjectivity.

Chapter Four:

Abject Subjectivity and Generic Experimentation

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. . . . Unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsions places the one haunted by it literally beside himself. (Kristeva, Powers of Horror 1)

The previous chapter outlined the growing literary interest in contrasubjectivity as a response to the social changes that separated men and women into sexes, changes that ultimately afforded women equal rights. In the midst of these important changes, abject subjectivity provided a different philosophical response from contrasubjectivity, a response that dramatized the self made object to itself. As Julia Kristeva describes the process in the quotation above, the abject draws the individual through a “vortex of summons and repulsions” into “the place where meaning collapses” (2). Through this process, a version of the self is born:

During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system,

but which, without either wanting or being able to become integrating in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects. (*Powers of Horror* 3).

The self that Kristeva describes here is broken into vomit, spit, and feces; it is a disordered and disorderly self that reveals the process of ingesting and expelling that is existence, the “vortex of summons and repulsions”:

The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgments. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away—it assigns a source in the non-ego, drive, and death. Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance. (15)

My description of abject subjectivity in this chapter grows from Kristeva’s work. I am most interested in the abject as the “alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life” through the paradox of life in death and death in life. Victorian writers increasingly take up a position of abjection in order to find “new significance,” a self with extended powers and expansive presence in the world. Abject subjectivity results from the self released from a primary subject position and moved toward an intersubjective position. In the next chapter, we will explore this intersubjective position that fascinates poets at the end of the Victorian period, resulting in intertextual practices and polyphonic speakers. This chapter will trace the Victorian poetic conversation about abjection in two forms of generic innovation, Christina Rossetti’s modified monologue and Mary Elizabeth Coleridge’s duologue.

In the 1850s, Rossetti wrote a series of lyrics that in content explore the relationships between the lyrical “I” and the other and in form modify the monologue by complicating the relationships between the speaker and the interlocutor. Her experimentation resembles early monologues like “Porphyria’s Lover,” which lack any interlocutor but God, who “has not said not a word” (60). Building upon a long history of theories of abject sublimity, Rossetti’s modifications allow her to question the authenticity of the lyric voice and to pose alternative versions of subjectivity. Robert Langbaum has argued,

It is when we look inside the dramatic monologue, when we consider its effect, its *way* of meaning, that we see its connection with the poetry that precedes and follows Browning. . . . [W]e welcome as particularly illuminating just those “approximations” that distress the classifiers. We welcome them because, having without the mechanical resemblance the same effect as the so-called “typical” dramatic monologues, they show us what the form is essentially doing. (77-78)

I would like to extend Langbaum’s approach to include Rossetti in order to study “what the form is essentially doing.” As we saw in the previous chapter, Dante Gabriel used the monologue to reveal the process of contrasubjectivity. While he was revising and rewriting *Jenny*, Christina was writing and revising the lyrics that I will soon discuss. I would argue that rather than writing in a different genre altogether, Rossetti and Coleridge modify the monologue form to accentuate its features, particularly by positing alternative subject positions by dramatizing alternative relationships of the self and other, and speaker and interlocutor.

Many Victorian poets, like Hopkins, Swinburne, Bradley, and Cooper, also experimented with abjecting the speaker. Hopkins's subjectivity, for example, requires the individual to connect to God by focusing on the spirit, not the body, which is inherently depraved in its physicality. Some of Hopkins's "terrible sonnets" reveal his growing concern that God—as interlocutor—has disappeared, or, more specifically, that the speaker cannot reach God. In "The shepherd's brow," humans are a "scaffold of score brittle bones" (5), fragile and pitifully unable to reach to God, as our representative, Jack, demonstrates:

He! Hand to mouth he lives, and voids with shame;

And, blazoned in however bold the name,

Man Jack the man is (9-11)⁷⁵

In poems like "Hymn to Prosperine" and "Garden of Prosperine," Swinburne builds upon the religious tradition of spiritual purity through abjection. "Michael Field" creates an aesthetic abject—rather than a religious abject—through poems like "Embalment" and "A Portrait: Bartolommeo Veneto." For Swinburne, Bradley, and Cooper, focusing on the body's pain creates a new form of relationship. Like Hopkins, Swinburne desires this pain to make accessible a new religious order, for example in "Dolores." For Bradley and Cooper, the body's decomposition provides an erotic possibility for physical

⁷⁵ Kristeva similarly uses defecation to demonstrate the abject qualities of humanity:

These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit—*cadere*, cadaver. (3)

intermixing. Mary Coleridge inherits this poetic tradition, which she reinterprets by experimenting with a duologue form in order to dramatize the moment of contact with the other and the multiplicity of subject positions opened by abjection.

Christina Rossetti, like Hopkins, focuses on how one must go through the body—through our only means of experiencing the world—to escape it. The presence of death in her poetry is the *memento mori*, the knowledge of the body's constant decomposition that leads to the soul's increasing power. Bodies do not often touch in her poetry, and when they do, it is the slurping of Laura, the disgusting slap of flesh that typifies mortal desire. By contrast, sublimity is found in the distances between people, the echo, the wish for maternal communication. This for Rossetti is the realm of the soul, the body held in abeyance by the strength of another desire, the desire for spiritual wholeness.⁷⁶ Mary Coleridge's approach is very different. Laura's feasting upon the syrupy face typifies for her a mysterious moment of interconnection that fascinates her. She desires to dwell in these moments in her poetry, creating them repeatedly in poems like "Master and Guest" and "The Witch." Abjection for Coleridge is not an escape from the body, but an escape from an identity that holds others at a distance, that prevents interconnection. In this way, their projects are very different, but both use a modified

⁷⁶ Harrington explains that Rossetti's religious beliefs regarding a soul/body split changed over the course of her life:

[H]er vision of the afterlife becomes more earthly towards the end of her career. . . . Earlier work presented self-loss as holy; this late devotional prose revises that view. In earlier poems she implies that there is a difference between the unnecessary part of the self and the essential self. In these devotional works, she no longer wants to dissolve the self, but rather wants to define its essence. (59, 61)

version of the monologue to create related forms of abject sublimity. Even in their dissonance, they are in conversation.

“Pulse for pulse, breath for breath”:

Christina Rossetti and the Abject Sublime

In 1918, Virginia Woolf wrote, “If I were bringing a case against God, Christina Rossetti is one of the first witnesses I should call” (qtd. in Marsh, Introduction xxix). Such a charge implies that Rossetti weighed down her own literary genius with the burden of a religious, patriarchal narrative of proper religious behavior. In *Christina Rossetti: A Literary Biography*, Jan Marsh responds: “For the defence, we might ask what impelled Christina to choose such a fearful religion—and why, in her last years, she found in it so little consolation. Hers was assuredly a careful and very troubled heart” (556).⁷⁷ Kristeva might defend her as she defends other authors of the abject:

Does one write under any other condition than being possessed by
abjection, in an indefinite catharsis? Leaving aside adherents of a

⁷⁷ Recent critics have begun to explore how Rossetti’s religious beliefs helped shape her aesthetic projects. For instance, in *Recovering Christina Rossetti: Female Community and Incarnational Poetics*, Mary Arseneau uses Isobel Armstrong’s notion of the “double poem,” from *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics, and Politics*, to explore “how women poets express unconventional, subversive, and feminist elements while at the same time retaining conventional and pious themes” (2). Appending and expanding Armstrong’s methodology for reading Rossetti’s work, Arseneau describes the “mechanisms and motivations underlying Rossetti’s characteristically reserved poetic expression” (2). For Arseneau, Rossetti’s poetics and theology work together. My project adds to this growing body of scholarship by focusing on the issue of self-abnegation, or abjection, especially how this religious act takes on extra-religious valences in Rossetti’s shorter poetry.

feminism that is jealous of conserving its power—the last of the power-seeking ideologies—none will accuse of being a usurper the artist who, even if he does not know it, is an undoer of narcissism and of all imaginary identity as well, sexual included. (*Powers of Horror* 208)

At issue for current critics is how to frame Rossetti's aesthetics, which seem, throughout her career, a confusing mixture of self-abnegation and staunch individuality. I would like to suggest that in her lyric poems, Rossetti experiments with a form of the dramatic monologue structure by removing the interlocutor or making him or her unreachable and by creating in her speakers a form of abject subjectivity. She builds upon types of abjection in "Sappho"⁷⁸ (composed in 1846), "Song" (1848), "After Death" (1849), "Cobwebs" (1855), "From the Antique" (1854), "Echo" (1854), and "A Chilly Night" (1856). For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the poems in which she positions abjection not only as the loss of self, but also as the experience of alterity.⁷⁹

Critics have responded to liminality in Rossetti's work by characterizing it as evasive, erotic, religious, and liberating. In "The Secret of Christina Rossetti," Angela Leighton describes Rossetti's "in-between-time of twilight" as "a time [...] liberated from both life and afterlife, from both regret and expectation" ("When I am dead, my

⁷⁸ Tales of Sappho's lament underpin the poem, buttressing the literary history of expressive poetry, the realm of the female poet in Victorian culture, as Anne Jamison notes—building on Isobel Armstrong's work (259)—and a role with which Rossetti repeatedly plays. Jamison argues that Rossetti frequently uses her speakers ironically, letting the dead female that inhabits so many poems by male writers gain subjectivity while maintaining the role of gazed-upon object. For Jamison, this act constitutes an empowering transgression for Rossetti (260), "an *alternative* [sic] materiality, an alternative subjectivity, an alternative way of being in the world" (275).

⁷⁹ I have used Jan Marsh's dates from her edition of Rossetti's poetry and R.W. Crump's text from the 2001 edition.

dearest” 380). She contends that Rossetti creates these spaces in her work because, building upon “the Romantic tradition, the experience missed is the poem gained” (387); evasion creates philosophical action, and de-animation animates. Leighton responds in this way to Jerome McGann’s work with Rossetti’s religious belief in “soul sleep,” a limbo state of death that precedes entrance into Heaven or Hell (375).⁸⁰ However, Leighton does not consider these moments in Rossetti’s work as static:

The attitude of death, which is so dear to this poet, is not the attitude of being an object, but, rather, of becoming an autonomous subject, who dreams in a place between past and future, memory and goal, eroticism and grace, and makes it the place—Barthes’s slow, delighting, “dilatory space”—of poems. (388)

Suzy Waldman similarly envisions Rossetti’s use of the death drive as a freeing means by which to reach the symbolic (535). Brad Sullivan explains that critics have not explored Rossetti’s aesthetic complexities of alienation (227) and he contends that Rossetti’s poetry contains “a powerful tension between control and chaos [and] self-assertion and self-destruction” (227). He questions whether any hope exists in Rossetti’s death-driven poems, whether there one can find any opportunity of escape (240). I agree that her

⁸⁰ Leighton is also responding to Gilbert and Gubar’s description of Rossetti’s “Aesthetics of Renunciation.” She counters,

Behind Rossetti’s ‘Aesthetics of Renunciation,’ it is possible to discern an alternative aesthetics of secrecy, self-containment, and caprice. There opens up, at the very heart of this poet’s emotional and religious consolations, a vague, obsessional dreamland of uncertainty and delay. Poem after poem bears witness to the emotional and religious disorientation of that place—a threshold giving onto nowhere, spreading indefinitely. (376)

speakers hover between “self-assertion and self-destruction,” but, like Leighton, I contend that these processes happen together in a sublime moment in which abjection empowers. I would like to build upon this earlier critical work to argue that it is her experimentation with the dramatic monologue that allows for her innovative “self-assertion.”

To describe her “self-assertion,” I first need to explain the process of her “self-destruction.” She accepts the *imitatio Christi* inherent in the emptying act of *kenosis*, but she does not seek any redemptive *pleroma*, or the refilling of the soul through spiritual excess.⁸¹ Instead, her speakers desire the freedom of abjection, the abasement of selfhood and loss of identity. Absent from this form of sublimity is the linear narrative of the self’s journey to inspired self-realization that usually grounds sublimity discourses.⁸²

⁸¹ Emily Marie Harrington argues that Rossetti does seek the salvation possible through self-abnegation:

The chiasmus, save-lose-lose-save encloses self-loss within redemption, so that each of these seemingly mutually exclusive situations is not complete without the other. The purpose, then of self-sacrifice is to preserve the self. By calling that sacrificial self “oblation,” an offering to a deity and a more specific reference to the Eucharist, Rossetti understands the process to be an exchange between the self and Christ; He offered His body for her and so she offers her own in return. (32)

⁸² In 1674, Boileau translated Longinus’s *On the Sublime*, and opened a discourse on the nature and uses of the sublime that proved resonant to eighteenth century writers. John Dennis continues the discussion on Longinus, by analyzing the “great” in poetry, using Milton as a touchstone, in *Advancement and Reformation of Poetry*, published in 1701. Perhaps responding to Dennis, Joseph Addison, in numbers 267, 273, 279, 285 of - *The Spectator*, published over the course of 20 days in 1712, considers a version of sublimity in Milton. Edmund Burke published *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* in 1757, the longest study of the sublime of the period. Sublimity provides a means to discuss greater socio-political concerns, such as the nature of the relationship between an individual and power, the origins and uses of that power, and the value and function of individual experience.

Longinus's sublime, the starting point for most major philosophical epistemologies of sublimity, involves three stages: 1) stasis, 2) ekstasis and disequilibrium, and 3) recovery.

John Dennis and Joseph Addison both wrote about Milton in terms of the sublime, but they identified vastly different types of sublimity in *Paradise Lost*. Like Bunyan, Dennis focused on how to bridge the gap between Post-Lapsarian humanity and God and for Dennis, sublimity provided a way. In *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry*, published in 1701, Dennis joins the critical discussion begun by William Wotton in 1694 with *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*. In the spirit of proving that "we have the advantage of the Ancients" (8), Dennis claims that the primary advantage they had was true inspiration (8). In *The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry*, published in 1704, Dennis applies this claim to Milton. To Dennis, Milton fulfills the religious spirit of the Longinian sublime and because he uses Christianity, he surpasses the ancients. Addison, on the other hand, writing eight years later, focuses on the physical experience of the sublime, instead of its external situation in God.

For Addison, writing in 1712, the strength of *Paradise Lost* is Milton's use of "the natural and the sublime" (No. 279), allowing the reader to identify with the characters (No. 273), and feel awe from the scope of the "greatness" of the epic (No. 267). Addison mentions the pleasures of Milton's use of "what is delivered in Holy Writ" (No. 267), but his comments focus on the craft of *Paradise Lost* and its impact on the mind of the reader. This sublimity does not primarily transport the reader to the edge of spiritual power; it thrills the mind by helping the reader to identify and feel the effects of the action of the piece. John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, published in 1690, increased interest in the nature of understanding and moral behavior. Addison's secular focus on "greatness" as natural to an imagination that "loves to be filled with an Object, or to grasp at any thing that is too big for its Capacity" (No. 412) has Lockean overtones of the "empty cabinet" of the mind filled with sense data (14). Dennis, by contrast, yearns for guided transport to lost spiritual foundations through learned discourse.

Edmund Burke, who read Addison's essays on the sublime in *Paradise Lost* while at Trinity College (Phillips x), uses in *A Philosophical Enquiry* Addison's secularized focus on the physical experience of sublimity, rather than the reaching of a God figure. For Burke, writing in 1757, the sublime is that which reveals our limits as human beings, which "is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (36). Beauty provides continuity of the species and the social norms that connect it. Sublimity disrupts this continuity by allowing one to imagine the end of desire and sensation, and in the experience, feel the body brought to its highest pitch. Rather than considering sublimity as reaching up to the seat of power known a priori, as Longinus and Dennis conceive of it, Addison and Burke shift the focus to human physicality that provides sublime experience. Similarly, Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1759, suggests that we identify with our fellow human beings because through our original sense data that formed our ideas, we feel what others feel: "[W]e enter as it were into his body" (2).

The individual begins in stasis, has a sublime experience that creates disequilibrium and the sensation of standing outside of the Self, and then the individual recovers, in a different place psychologically.⁸³ In Edmund Burke's sublime, *ekstasis* results from the experience of terror, the impulse that inspires awe and self-preservation. Immanuel Kant's sublime works through imagination's failure.⁸⁴ In each of these influential theories of sublimity, an individual has an experience that empowers and transforms the psyche. This experience involves reaching toward a higher figure (Longinus), grappling with the mind's abilities and limitations (Kant),⁸⁵ or feeling the prick of mortality (Burke).⁸⁶

⁸³ Longinus's treatise on the sublime explains how to craft an oration in order to cause the listeners to feel *hypsous*, or transport to a high place of grandeur. However, although the orator in a way has "mastery" over the listener (114), the primary function of the sublime is to transfer power from the subject of the speech to the orator to the listener: "we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaunting joy, just as though we had ourselves produced what we had heard" (120). In this way, the listener can join in the speaker's power and gain a sort of agency through it.

⁸⁴ Kant explains,

[What happens is that] our imagination strives to progress toward infinity, while our reason demands absolute totality as a real idea, and so [the imagination,] our power of estimating the magnitude of things in the world of sense, is inadequate to that idea. Yet this inadequacy itself is the arousal in us of the feeling that we have within us a supersensible power; and what is absolutely large is not an object of sense, but is the use that judgment makes naturally of certain objects so as to [arouse] this (feeling), and in contrast with that use any other use is small. Hence what is to be called sublime is not the object, but the attunement that the intellect [gets] through a certain presentation that occupies reflective judgment. . . . *Sublime is what even to be able to think proves that the mind has a power surpassing any standard of sense.* (106)

⁸⁵ Jean-François Lyotard provides a detailed description Kant's sublime: In the event of an absolutely large object—the desert, a mountain, a pyramid—or one that is absolutely powerful—a storm at sea, an erupting volcano—which like all absolutes can only be thought, without any sensible/sensory intuition, as an Idea of reason, the faculty of presentation,

In Rossetti's poetry, the sublime works through the speaker's abjection and encounter with the other. Rossetti's sublime blends what Barbara Claire Freeman and Patricia Yaeger call a female or feminine sublime, which differs from a Longinian, Burkean, or Kantian sublime. In contrast to these previous models of sublimity, the encounter with other does not lead to integration, but to the continued recognition of alterity. Through her theory of the feminine sublime, Freeman explains how "women exert agency, even as they confront its limits" (6). Freeman uses the ideas of Lyotard, Žižek, and Levinas to describe the sublime as "the presentation of the fact that the

the imagination, fails to provide a representation corresponding to this Idea. This failure of expression gives rise to a pain, a kind of cleavage within the subject between what can be conceived and what can be imagined or presented. But this pain in turn engenders a pleasure, in fact a double pleasure: the impotence of the imagination attests *a contrario* to an imagination striving to figure even that which cannot be figured, and that imagination thus aims to harmonize its object with that of reason—and that furthermore the inadequacy of the images is a negative sign of the immense power of ideas. This dislocation of the faculties among themselves gives rise to the extreme tension (Kant calls it agitation) that characterizes the pathos of the sublime, as opposed to the calm feeling of beauty. (98)

⁸⁶ For instance, in "After Death," the speaker confronts her own dead body without emotion and in "A Chilly Night," the speaker looks into the face of her mother's ghost and meets the incommensurability of the self and the Other and the irretrievability of the past. Recent theorists, building upon Longinus, Kant, and Burke, have best described the sort of abjection that I argue Rossetti employs. For Lyotard, recognition of the failure of representation constitutes the sublime moment, and for Slavoj Žižek, it is in the gaps of the incommensurable. Rossetti's speakers' self-negation moves toward a Lyotardian sublime, which—building upon Burke—Lyotard explains as "kindled by the threat of nothing further happening" (99). In other words, representation's failure causes the reader to fear the disappearance of meaning. Although Rossetti's abject sublimity resembles a post-modern sublime, such as the sublime Fredric Jameson details, repetition and outward movement do not presuppose simulacra for Rossetti. Instead, they lead to clearer vision of human meaning. Altering the traditional notion of *ekstasis*, in which the disembodied experience strengthens subjective identity, Rossetti's *ekstasis* involves a self that remains disembodied and loses subjectivity. With the loss of self, meaning coalesces for Rossetti.

unpresentable exists” and as “an encounter with a radical alterity” (11). In the feminine sublime, the body multiplies when facing the other. For Freeman, the sublime is “the place where boundaries come apart and boundarylessness is at issue” (116). Even the boundaries that hem in the self are broken. Yaeger similarly explains that the female sublime works not as a vertical transference of power but as a horizontal unfolding of the self; the individual “refuses an oedipal, phallic fight to the death with the father, but expands toward others, spreads itself out into multiplicity” (191). For Kristeva, “the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here*, as dejects, and *there*, as others and sparkling. A divergence, an impossible bounding. Everything missed, joy—fascination” (*Powers of Horror* 12). Michael Lackey argues that sublimity differs in Romantic and Victorian poetry primarily because Romantic sublimity entails a Self that grows to cover everything around it—even the other (80)—while Victorian sublimity includes a true merging with the other, and the “sublime union reveals the infinite as it inheres within human flesh” (82). Rossetti’s short poetry seems to strain these categories by epitomizing both the Romantic lyric, depicting the expansive mind, and the Victorian monologue, depicting selves in contact. I would like to argue that Rossetti starts with the lyric to rewrite the monologue because it affords her more opportunities for manipulating the relationship of speaker/interlocutor in order to express the experience Kristeva describes above as “impossible bounding.”

Abjection allows Rossetti to reach a new space of negation; in “After Death,” for instance, through focusing on the dead female body, Rossetti’s speaker can escape the world and gain a panoramic consciousness—a form of subjectivity, but a fragmented,

non-Cartesian form.⁸⁷ As Leighton notes, Rossetti's "dead woman really harbors some ultimate knowledge which, arbitrary and noncommittal, is almost no knowledge at all, but a form of consciousness released from knowledge" (376). We might build upon this critical approach to describe Rossetti's sublime as allowing for the *ekstasis* to occur through the self's dispersion. Furthermore, the speakers recognize that the desire to fuse with the other requires refusing the other's alterity. Death in Rossetti's early poetry exists not merely as unavoidable, but ultimately preferable, in order to escape a constant pull toward an ordered identity.⁸⁸ She seeks the explosion of identity into a sense realm she codes as divine, collapsing a spiritual and sensual reality beyond physicality.

Rossetti's biographical critics have also noted her trajectory toward the abject. For example, Virginia Blain explains that Rossetti tried to "repress all signs of egotism" (111) from the beginning of her career. She notes the line "learning 'not to be first'" in Rossetti's poem "The Lowest Room" (111) as an example of Rossetti's interest in abjecting the ego. Other critics like Kathleen Jones—in her book *Learning Not to be First: The Life of Christina Rossetti*—and Alexis Easley—in "Gender and the Politics of Literary Fame"—also focus on the Rossetti's life within her family and its literary ramifications. Marsh suggests that Rossetti's fascination with writing poetry about death

⁸⁷ Kristeva argues, "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4).

⁸⁸ As we have seen, Levinas uses the tradition of death as a state of nothingness to underpin his ideas about fear, especially that the fear of death equates to the fear of the Other overtaking one's life, not the fear of the loss of ego (232-33). Thus, a subject can desire a freeing loss of ego, such as in the death drive, without desiring the violence of self-murder. The power of Rossetti's use of abjection is in this sort of death drive, the impulse to kill the ego.

and destruction began in the period after her family's financial difficulties in 1842 and before what Marsh sees as a new period of healing in 1860 (*Christina*, 258-64). Perhaps Rossetti's interest in the abject did begin in her violent reactions to strong feelings of guilt, emphasized by her self-mutilation at fifteen (50) and encouraged by the ascetic religious teachings of Edward Bouverie Pusey, a prominent figure at Rossetti's church and a man who advocated the use of hair shirts and five-tailed whips (63). Marsh suggests that Rossetti's death-focused poetry reverberated in terrifying dreams for years, perhaps resulting from incestuous experiences with her father (260-64). As Marsh suggests, the family's financial problems, the pain of puberty, and the frustrating and repressive experience of becoming a female adult in Victorian society were difficulties exacerbated by religious rhetoric, changing Rossetti's psychology fundamentally (55-64).

Additionally, James Collinson's conversion to Catholicism, which effectively ended their engagement (115), and her father's withdrawn behavior might have led to Rossetti's attraction to death and self-negation in her poetry of this period. Marsh refers to 1860-61 as "a watershed in her writing" when "she used her creative gifts to come to terms with childhood fears" (264). I suggest that Rossetti's healing began through the way she uses death in these early poems to imagine alternatives to her painful life and to envision a soul and Self within, unlimited by her gender or by any traditional notions of sin. Rossetti's approach feels more like Robert Browning's here, testing the boundaries of self and other, speaker and interlocutor, and pushing at the limits of traditional notions of identity.

In "From the Antique," the speaker receives an education from a female figure about the benefits of negation, benefits contrasted with her painful life:

It's a weary life, it is; she said:—

Doubly blank is a woman's lot. . . . (1-2)

As a solution for this “doubly blank” state, she proposes further negation. The woman gets to this negation by a double wish for a transgendered existence (“I wish and I wish I were a man” [3]), and this wish seems to counter her “doubly blank” existence in order to lead her to her true ideal: “Or, better than any being, were not” (4). The woman seeks absolute negation, not only from a body, but from nature as well:

I wish and I wish I were a man;

Or, better than any being, were not:

Were nothing at all in all the world,

Not a body and not a soul;

Not so much as a grain of dust

Or drop of water from pole to pole. (3-8)

She imagines that her negation would not change anything; all “would wag on the same” (9) and “none would miss [her] in all the world” (13). However, through her negation, she would find peace by escaping from cyclical existence: “I should be nothing; while all the rest / Would wake and weary and fall asleep” (14-15). The title—which suggests a statement from someone ageless and culturally important (that is, “antique”)—changes the valence of the statements from an effusion of self-pity to the concrete wish for escape from powerlessness. She does not merely desire death; she desires to escape a system that has already taken away her being, forced her to be “doubly blank” (2). No God-figure exists whom she wishes to subsume her. Instead, she wants negation from all systems and, through this negation, to see all and remain other from all. She momentarily

desires to intermix with this other, but then she recognizes that she craves ego negation: “I wish and I wish I were a man; / Or, better than any being, were not” (3-4). Further blending and erasing identities, the speaker quotes the “Antique,” but she disappears behind the other woman’s words, serving as her mouthpiece.⁸⁹ In the very first line we see a glimpse of this speaker: “It’s a weary life, it is; *she said*” (1, emphasis mine). The “Antique” has also disappeared, remaining only in her disembodied words. As an “antique,” her context has been reconstituted; she lives on in a form that haunts the present from the past. In the immediate moment of the poem, the only event that occurs is the memory of the brief instant of contact between the two figures who both act as speakers and interlocutors and who coalesce into a multi-generational female identity.

In contrast to “From the Antique,” in “A Chilly Night,” the speaker/interlocutor, mother/daughter meet in the poem, but because the mother is dead, they can have no real contact. She cannot hear the words of wisdom from an “antique.” The poem hinges on this moment in which the daughter strains to hear the voice of the mother only to realize that she is “indeed alone”: “Living had failed and dead had failed / And I was indeed alone” (49-50). This recognition of solitude, so welcome in “Cobwebs,” “Song,” and “From the Antique,” also here presents itself as a loss of contact, producing nostalgic desire for renewed communication.⁹⁰ Even the poem itself is in the past tense, existing as

⁸⁹ Leighton might describe the “Antique” as one of the “sister women” Rossetti used “as projections of the self” (374).

⁹⁰ Levinas contends that “[d]esire is desire for the absolute other” and it “is a desire that cannot be satisfied” (34). One cannot represent the Other, because, according to Levinas, “the Other would dissolve into the same” (38). The Other exists as a figure under a veil in “After Death,” patriarchy in general in “From the Antique,” and a ghostly Mother in “A Chilly Night.” This recognition of the alterity of the Other leads to the

a memory of a wish for contact. Gazing out of a window “at the dead of night” (1), she looks “for [her] Mother’s ghost” (3). As it does in “After Death,” the lattice represents the interpenetration of space and the intermixing of dead and living, the frame for the points of contact.⁹¹ The uppercase *m* in the word *Mother* in line three emphasizes that the speaker is looking for a female predecessor, not merely a relative. The speaker longs to gaze on the ghosts, claiming their kinship: “the ghosts were warmer to me / Than my friends that had grown cold” (7-8). “A Chilly Night” builds on “From the Antique.” In both poems, the speaker longs for a community with the dead. In “A Chilly Night,” this longing leads to a new stage of being. In “From the Antique,” the first narrator quotes the “antique,” imbedding the woman’s language in her own, speaking for the older female figure: “It’s a weary life, it is; she said:—” (1). However, in “A Chilly Night,” the older female figure cannot speak and so the two remain fundamentally separated:

I strained to catch her words
 And she strained to make me hear,
 But never a sound of words
 Fell on my straining ear. (37-40)

speakers’ sense of alienation and, more importantly, an expansive, alternative existence, one Levinas would call “the idea of infinity” (52). In the end, the loss of nostalgia and the recognition of alienation and disconnection redefines subjectivity in the poem.

⁹¹ Leighton similarly describes the importance of twilight for Rossetti: “The time of being dead, for Rossetti, is very often the in-between-time of twilight—a time of ambiguity, dream, delay. Such a time is liberated from both life and afterlife, from both regret and expectation” (380).

In this moment, the living narrator and ghostly mother figure lock in failed communication, the mother's unseeing eyes holding the narrator transfixed, her silent words disappearing into the night.

When we look this moment more closely, we realize that it is not just this communication that is failed; language is always already fallen. It is the speaker's experience with the ghost that creates meaning.⁹² The ghosts' actions have no reactions ("They spoke without a voice / And they leapt without a sound" [13-14]), but the speaker, remaining in the physical world, responds to the ghosts' actions. The Mother's "blank" eyes trap the speaker physically (24) and although the speaker cannot hear her voice, her body reacts: "my flesh crept on my bones / And every hair was stirred" (29-30). The ghosts disappear, leaving the speaker unable to understand them and completely alienated: "Living had failed and dead had failed / And I was indeed alone" (49-50). The night ends with her realization of the absolute alterity of the Mother/Other and her own isolation. After this moment when time stopped, it resumes its chronology, moving slowly "From midnight to the cockcrow" (41). At this point, the speaker tries to reclaim an ordered understanding of her life by ending the poem in a narrative summary ("Living had failed and dead had failed / And I was indeed alone" [49-50]).

In "A Chilly Night," the sublime experience overwhelms, but does not restore the self. The speaker gains a changed subject position of sorts by recognizing the other's

⁹² Suzanne Guerlac similarly describes the Longinian sublime by noting that the enunciation transfers the meaning (279). Guerlac differentiates between the *énoncé*, the factual meaning of a term, and the enunciation, the actions that accompany a word's deployment. Just as the ghosts represent disembodied selves, dislocated signs, the verbal interaction intensifies the disconnection in the breakdown of the *énoncé* and enunciation and creates a sublime moment of linguistic schism.

alterity and her own alienation. The kenotic emptying of the self renews a primal desire for synthesis with the other. The failures of the moment of communication, in which both women “strain” (“I strained to catch her words / And she strained to make me hear”), locks them in a communion of silence, a combination of mind and body, self and other that connects them while keeping them fundamentally separated. This Levinasian infinity of incommensurability creates a new plain of existence in which “alone” does not connote loss, but reconstitution. For Kristeva, abjection occurs in the pre-symbolic stage, “a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling” (*Powers of Horror* 13). As Kelly Oliver explains, Kristeva’s theory entails that

the child must break out of this identification with the breast by abjecting its mother. It must move from an identification with the mother’s nourishing breast to an identification with its own birth and the horrifying maternal sex, to an identification with an abjected and threatening mother. . . . The maternal body is what is off limits. For Kristeva, primary drive pleasure, which is associated with the mother’s body, threatens the symbolic, which is why it is repressed. (59)

Oliver points out that Kristeva’s focus on the male child makes this theory problematic for girls: “But what about the daughter? Whereas the son splits the mother in order to unify himself, if the daughter splits the mother, she splits herself” (63). For Rossetti, the mother participates with the daughter in modeling an empowering abjection. In “A Chilly Night,” the mother’s dead body—perhaps the most abject image for Kristeva—allows the daughter to create a sort of coherent subject position, the narrator of her story,

the “I” who was alone.⁹³ Thus, in these two lyric poems, Rossetti modifies the dramatic monologue by leaving a shadow of a speaker or an interlocutor to dramatize the moments of abjection fundamental to both poems.

“Echo,” a polyrhythmic poem like “A Chilly Night” and “From the Antique,” most strongly expresses the desire for and unreachable other. The speaker, “tho’ cold in death” (15), longs for an intimate encounter with her lover, the unhearing interlocutor that remains locked in the mind of the speaker. As in “After Death,” the female body becomes a locus of intermixing. In “Echo,” the speaker does not visit the lover as a ghost, but longs for the lover to visit her, to come in “the silence of the night” (1), “in the speaking silence of a dream” (2), and “in tears” (5). The speaker has discovered that Paradise contains, even imprisons, “thirsting longing eyes” (10) that await a glimpse of a lover.⁹⁴ The speaker wants, instead, to meet her lover outside of the structure of Heaven,

⁹³ Although my description of the abject sublime builds upon both Levinasian and humanistic ethics, it is important for me to note that these positions are intrinsically opposed. In the first, the self must remain broken in the face of the other; in the second, the self can maintain a unitary subject position. Rossetti’s poetry lends itself to both readings simultaneously, even though these readings are not complementary. For example, we might align the self’s dispersal in her poetry with Levinasian theory, but any resulting subject position moves her poetry away from a Levinasian reading.

⁹⁴ We might read “Echo” as being in conversation with Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s “The Blessed Damozel,” a poem written from the point of view of the earth-bound lover: “(I saw her smile.) . . . (I heard her tears)” (139, 144). Leighton, discussing “Day-Dreams,” notes,

It is as if Christina has taken that quintessentially pre-Raphaelite poem of Dante Gabriel’s, ‘The Blessed Damozel,’ and secularized it. Unlike the Damozel, who looks down from heaven and makes the “bar” she leans on “warm” with her flesh, Christina’s women are dead but unrisen, buried but unhopeful. They are not heavenly Beatrices, whose role is to lead the quester to salvation, but heartless, fixated dreamers, whose attention is directed elsewhere. (379)

“Echo” similarly contains a strange mixture of longing and apathy.

in dreams.⁹⁵ She desires not just an experience of love, but a regaining of her life. The last lines emphasize this inherent need for mixing with the other and its impossibility:

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
 My very life again tho' cold in death:
 Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
 Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
 Speak low, lean low,
 As long ago, my love, how long ago. (15-18)

Trapped between a physical and spiritual state, the speaker remains unfulfilled by Paradise; she still dreams. She seeks a *hypsous* that will vivify her and yet this necessitates a union with her lover that no longer seems possible. In this abject sublimity, the speaker fixes on her physical body, her pulse, her breath, in order to discover an existence beyond any structures in a state of *ekstasis*.

While the speaker never attains physical intimacy with the other, the *enunciation* implies a sort of intimacy as the speaker imagines their bodies intermixed, exchanging “pulse for pulse, breath for breath” (16). In these last few lines, the anaphora builds and the speaker seems literally lost in the moment, as she begs the Other/Lover to “lean low” (17), violating a spatial understanding of Heaven as high and earth as low. Time intermixes, past with present, the “long ago” (18) with the immediate moment. Although their union might not prove possible, the poem constitutes a sort of joining that takes the

⁹⁵ Writing about *Maude*, Leighton similarly argues, “Rossetti’s famous ‘mortuary imagery’ [Lona Mosk Packer] would seem to betray a profound reluctance on her part to imagine the afterlife she so rigorously preaches” (375).

reader up to the point of interpenetration. The speaker's desire for the other and the spreading of the ego within negation are clarified by Levinas's theory of "pluralism":

Contemplation is to be defined, perhaps, as a process by which being is revealed without ceasing to be one. The philosophy it commands is a suppression of pluralism. Multiplicity therefore implies an objectivity posited in the impossibility of total reflection, in the impossibility of conjoining the I and non-I in a whole. This impossibility is not negative—which would be to still posit it by reference to the idea of truth contemplated. It results from the surplus of the epiphany of the other, who dominates me from his height. (221)

The recognition of the other's alterity blocks full objective knowledge while it creates a subject position, or rather, a multiplicity of subject positions. "Echo," in its inherent repetition further embodies replication in its title, as *echo* can refer to a sound of unknown origin, of unknown subject location, pluralizing its being in the void. The voice of the speaker is this echo, cut off from any interlocutor, its message unreceived.

"From the Antique," "A Chilly Night," and "Echo," poems written within a few years of each other, deviate from the carefully organized rhythms of earlier poems like "Cobwebs," "Song," and "After Death," building through polyrhythmic verse prosodic unpredictability. This unpredictability is heightened by the continual border crossings that occur in the poems. Likewise, the escape envisioned in the earlier poems leads to an experience with the other in the later poems. The moment of abject sublimity the speakers experience in self-negation heightens with the experience of Otherness, one that reinforces a subject position built on the recognition of alterity. Such alterity is

maintained through the form of the poems through the disconnected speakers and interlocutors. Rossetti works from a Christian, kenotic discourse to create a new religious *ekstasis*. She envisions the ideal state of abjection as the dissolution of being and the incommensurability of self and other.

“Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!”:

Boundaries and Thresholds in Mary Coleridge’s Poetry

Mary Elizabeth Coleridge tucked her manuscript of “The Witch” into a letter to Lucy Violet Hodgkin on March 21, 1893⁹⁶: “[H]ome again in the company of this Witch. What do you think of her? Is she very bad? or not so very bad? The metre’s all wrong any way” (87, f. 2b).⁹⁷ The letter is filled with episodes that exemplify the sort of boundaries Coleridge manipulates even in her questions about the poem—whether the witch is morally reprehensible or dangerous in a deliciously alluring way that makes her badness palatable, or even desirable. For Coleridge, the witch’s badness originates in her transgressive plea: “Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!” The poem’s duologue form accentuates the central moment when the boundary transforms into a threshold—when the two speakers inhabit the house together. Coleridge revisits these transgressive moments repeatedly in her poetry: in “The Other Side of a Mirror,” the moment occurs when the speaker whispers, “I am she!” (30); in “Master and

⁹⁶ I would like to thank the librarians and library administrators of Eton College Library, including Mr. Michael Meredith, Ms. Rachel Bond, and Ms. Danielle Maisey, for assisting me in my research.

⁹⁷ Quoted by permission of the Provost and Fellows, Eton College.

Guest,” it is when the speaker invites inside the man who “stood in the shadow of the door” (4), a man who later tells her, “You have kissed a citizen of Hell, / And a soul was doomed when you were born” (19-20). In “On a Bas-relief of Pelops and Hippodameia,” the moment occurs when the waves “cut [the stone] more smoothly than the knife” (6): in “Wilderspin,” it occurs when the speaker cries, “I broke the web for ever, / I broke my heart as well. / Michael and the Saints deliver / My soul from the nethermost Hell!” (33-36). In each case, what seemed a barrier—between individuals and between objects—melts into a threshold for interpenetration. Building upon previously unexamined archival material, in particular the letter that envelopes “The Witch” in one of its earliest forms,⁹⁸ I would like to offer a new reading of the poem that re-envisions Coleridge’s

⁹⁸ Although in her edition of Coleridge’s poetry, Theresa Whistler gives the poem’s composition date as 1892, the manuscript in the letter in 1893 is the first version in existence, as far as I am aware. Only two other versions of the poem are extant; one, in a black notebook titled “Fancy’s Followings by Vespertilio” and the other in a red bound notebook titled “Verses by Vespertilio.” Neither notebook is dated, but both contain Robert Bridges’s editorial comments. Because it was not until 1894 that Hodgkin left out for Bridges to find the white notebook of poetry that Coleridge gave her, the copy of the poem in the letter probably predates any other drafts in later notebooks with Bridges’s comments. The draft of the poem in the letter contains phrases about which she and Bridges debated—“when they plead” (line 9), “so in she came” (line 10), “sank down and died” (line 10), and “since” (line 11). Although it did not make it through to the final draft, “down” (line 10) is present in all three drafts. I am using line numbers from the manuscript of the poem in the letter, in which she collapses together every two lines, except the refrain. The line breaks differ in each of the three earlier versions. The draft in the letter contains “since,” giving causality to the fire’s extinguishing. The fire dies because and after she carried the witch over the threshold.

As Virginia Blain notes, *Verses by Vespertilio* was the original title of *Fancy’s Following* (284). Consequently, the red notebook probably came before the black. In the red notebook, Bridges and Coleridge seem to have quarreled over the poem. On the back of the previous page, Bridges has made notes in pencil about the poem. Although she accepts many of the suggested changes, such as inserting “who” for “when they” at the beginning of line 9, she seems to have disagreed strongly with his later suggestions. They have been marked through with a long, scribbled line and the top of the right side of

poetic project through the lens of her personal experiences. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that this poem demonstrates Coleridge's experimentation with the dramatic monologue, though which she builds upon the traditions of poetic abjection.

In "The Witch," a woman knocks at the door and demands entrance and transport over the threshold (see Appendix B). The female traveler's body seems to have withstood painful tests and even at the moment of the poem's opening, she stands barefoot in the snow, teeth clenched, body recoiling from her icy clothing. She seems at once Geraldine and Jane Eyre, a woman alone fleeing from an unknown past and begging for entrance into a warm home with a crackling fire—the domestic ideal from which she has become somehow barred. As such, her weakened physical state and stalwart will to survive constitute her first claim to assistance.

Coleridge alludes to *Christabel*, dramatizing the mixture of voices she experiences in the process of writing. *Christabel*, of course, portrays the threat of the other bearing upon oneself, altering one's sense of identity and reshaping one's subjectivity. Through her refrain in "The Witch," she positions the poem of her great-great-uncle, Samuel

his comments has been erased—presumably by Coleridge. He wrote more comments in this place, writing from the right side of the page, but these were erased with such force that a digital scanner reflects the harsh lines of paper damage inflicted by the eraser. It is impossible to read the majority of these comments, although, given their swift disappearance, the thought of translating the remaining marks is very attractive indeed. In this draft, she includes "since" in line 11, but she has changed "She came—she came" in line 10 to "So in she came," prompting Bridges to reply: "In she came is slovenly, let the necessity not be that of commonplace." In the black notebook Bridges suggests that she add "since" to line 11, where Coleridge's version read, "I hurried across the floor." His suggestion implies that Coleridge often reconsidered whether to include the word, which means that she spent time working through the causal chain of events, ultimately deciding that she should clarify through "since" that the woman's entrance extinguished the fire.

Taylor Coleridge, to haunt her own. Henry Newbolt, the editor of the first widely accessible edition of her collected poetry, explains that she would not publish poetry under her own name because of “the fear of tarnishing the name which an ancestor had made illustrious in English poetry”:

She would close the discussion with a gay and characteristic inconsistency—“Never, as long as I live! When I am dead, you may do as you like.” Now that death has so soon taken her at her word, I cannot help thinking myself justified in acting on that permission, however lightly given; and I believe that no poems are less likely than these to jar upon lovers of “Christabel” and “The Ancient Mariner.” (v-vi)

However, within her poetry and her letters, Coleridge consistently alludes to her literary precursors, perhaps anticipating her post-mortem journey from her pseudonym, *Anodos*, the “Wanderer,” to the female namesake.

More recently, Angela Leighton, Katharine McGowran, and Alison Chapman have also explored Coleridge’s use of her family’s literary history. Leighton argues that Coleridge has re-written *Christabel* “in another voice (‘the voice that women have’)” (612). McGowran posits that Coleridge “is haunted by the witches and demons of Samuel Taylor’s texts” (186):

Coleridge seems trapped herself within this network of poetry and influence. She is caught somewhere between destruction and desire, like a female version of the Bloomian poet “condemned to learn his profoundest yearnings through an awareness of other selves.” (196)

Chapman contends, “Mary Coleridge’s adoption of a wayward pseudonym allows her to traverse literary history and inhabit Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poems, so that she reverses the norms of influence and haunts her precursor” (“Flight” 151).⁹⁹ Chapman reads the poem as exemplifying the witch as “a quintessential wanderer, a figure for Anodos and therefore the signature of the poet herself.” For Chapman, “[c]rossing the threshold means entering into the precursor’s poem” (“Literary Influence” 125). I would like to reverse the symbolism here to argue that the witch represents the precursor’s poem entering Coleridge’s, a haunting Coleridge desires and directs.

Building upon these arguments, particularly Chapman’s work with Coleridge’s boundary crossings and McGowran’s work with her thresholds,¹⁰⁰ I want to suggest that evidence in the letter that presents “The Witch” reveals how her incorporation of *Christabel* typifies her poetic project. A woman who never married, she, by all accounts,

⁹⁹ See also her article in *Victorian Gothic*.

¹⁰⁰ Chapman and McGowran have analyzed Coleridge’s use of boundaries and thresholds in several different ways. In “Mary Elizabeth Coleridge, Literary Influence and Technologies of the Uncanny,” Chapman suggests, “If this poem is indeed a love poem, as Leighton argues, in the crossing is another kind of deviation: the secret script of incestuous female desire. It is also a passing of the precursor’s block to poetic authority that traverses history as well as space” (Chapman, “Literary Influence” 125). In the more recent article, “Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and the Flight to the Lyric,” Chapman identifies Coleridge’s “willed possession, together with the traversing of boundaries and an uncanny contextlessness” as “perhaps the condition of Victorian women’s lyricism taken to an extreme, the ‘responsive strings’ open entirely to the influence of an other,” but also “the ghosting of an illicit desire and a tentative space for female aestheticism” (158). For McGowran, “Coleridge somehow always remains outside, or under the rule of someone else. [...] He is the host and she is the guest, her identity is confused by the sense of being a visitor in someone else’s poem” (190). Consequently, McGowran argues, “The threshold is the place where guest meets host in Mary Coleridge’s imagination, a place of reciprocal desire, yet also of loss” (196). I would like to focus on how Coleridge maintains agency by interweaving the voices without blending them, opening the threshold while maintaining the boundary.

threw herself constantly into a wide variety of literary worlds, writing on scraps of paper that find themselves in various family archives, leaving a trail of poems scrawled on the back of other people's stationery.¹⁰¹ Although her life featured a series of social events, with figures such as Tennyson, Morris, and Browning coming to visit and a dedicated coterie constantly engaging in reading groups and social visits, her greatest fear seems to be the loss of her independence, personal and poetic. However, rather than experiencing this fear as an "anxiety of influence"¹⁰² or an "anxiety of authorship,"¹⁰³ instead, she dissects it, palpating for its causes and reconstructing it in an aesthetic of interpenetration. Coleridge experiments with poetry in order to portray these precarious moments when two subjectivities converge in mutual self-consciousness, an aesthetic and personal act she initiates and desires.¹⁰⁴

"I worship you, & I want to nurse you.":

Boundaries, Thresholds, and Bodily Exchange

In her letter to Hodgkin, marked "very private indeed," Coleridge describes two encounters with Helen, Margaret Duckworth's younger sister, that might have inspired the poem. Coleridge first met the Duckworth sisters in 1886 through Ella Coltman, their cousin. Whistler describes Helen as "the beauty, about whom everyone felt protective"

¹⁰¹ See, for example, the letters of Samuel Courtauld to Christabel Mary Melville, 52434, f. 179, British Library.

¹⁰² See Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*.

¹⁰³ See Gilbert and Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

¹⁰⁴ Because she maintains a desiring subject position, her approach to abjection differs significantly from Levinas's.

(45). All of Coleridge's letters and the relationships they describe deserve much more detailed study, but for the purposes of this paper, I would like to focus only on this letter to suggest that Coleridge describes these encounters with Duckworth in so much detail because they resonated with her poetic project. As we shall see, every episode in this letter seems to move centripetally to "The Witch," tucked gently in the very middle. By claiming, "the story begins with Helen," Coleridge leads Hodgkin to read each event as advancing a larger narrative. She immediately reveals a pattern to the letter's seemingly haphazard construction through the promise of an internal logic that she reveals, finally, at the end. In the first encounter, Duckworth, visiting the Coleridge home, shares an intriguing moment of intimacy with Coleridge:

Darling,

There is so much to tell, that I don't know where to begin. However, now that I come to think of it the story begins with Helen. She came on Saturday night and I was feeling so tired that I said that we wouldn't brush our hair together that evening. "Couldn't you come down for 5 minutes & not stay?" she asked, with that irresistibly eager, hungry look in her dear eyes that would bring one back out of one's grave. So of course I said Yes, & went upstairs to collect my brush. As I was coming down again, I was surprised to see a light in the schoolroom. There stood H. in her blue dressing gown. "You mustn't come down. I'd forgotten how far down it is. I only wanted this" & she kissed & kissed & kissed. So sweet of her it was! & of course, she had arrived without any nightgown. H. asked the question ironically—I said "How can you be so suspicious?"—H suddenly

hid her face in her hands— & we found the shaft of a venture had gone home. Next morning we went to the Abbey. Alas, I found out afterward, that she had been too tired to enjoy it quite as much as I did!”

(87, f. 1a-c).¹⁰⁵

Duckworth’s childlike fascination for Coleridge persuades Coleridge to acquiesce—to run up the stairs to find her brush in order to engage in a traditional female bonding ritual. Evidently, she is surprised to find Duckworth in the schoolroom, a significant place for the kissing to occur. Duckworth could have chosen the room out of admiration for Coleridge’s literary abilities. The room also represents the social world the women inhabited, with their reading group and their literary-oriented conversations. For Coleridge, it was an intimate setting, one Whistler describes as “the scene of her most real adventures all her life” (23). Coleridge and her sister, Florence, “shared a little attic bedroom under the eaves above the schoolroom, for the roomy house was usually full of guests” (30). Now standing “in her blue dressing gown,” Duckworth admits that the request for mutual hair brushing was a ruse; she really “only wanted this.” If her kisses are out of the ordinary, Coleridge’s reaction violates one’s expectations: “So sweet of her it was! & of course, she had arrived without any nightgown.” Rather, Duckworth’s advances and her penchant for running around another woman’s home without a nightgown—presumably in a thin dressing gown—seem almost expected to Coleridge.

¹⁰⁵ Eton College Library has marked the letter as number 87. There are three parts to the letter. Each part is a piece of paper folded in half lengthwise. Coleridge wrote on both sides of each page and inserted the manuscript of “The Witch” in the second part. For the purposes of this paper, I have labeled the parts f1, f2, and f3 and denoted the pages through letters. “A” corresponds to the front of the part, “B” to the back of that page, “C” to the front of the second page, and “D” to the back of the second page.

At this point in the quotation, the relationship between events grows more tenuous. It is unclear what question Duckworth asks “ironically” or why it seemed suspicious to Coleridge. Apparently, Coleridge’s accusation upsets Duckworth, causing her to “suddenly [hide] her face in her hands.” Finally, Coleridge describes the dissolution of the moment between the two in the schoolroom in extremely ambiguous language: “& we found the shaft of a venture had gone home.”

In “The Witch,” the woman outside claims that she “has wandered over the fruitful earth” (5)—her travels have been only within areas of plentitude and health—without having “[come] here before” (6). She flatters the interlocutor, who stands in the warm room just on the other side of the door and contemplates the request, that she considers this place “fruitful.” The ambiguity begins here¹⁰⁶: how is the home “fruitful”? To whom is the home “fruitful”? At this moment, the speaker marks herself as a sort of consumer, come to devour the “fruits” of the home. We might hear in the background “Goblin Market”:

Did you miss me?
 Come and kiss me.
 Never mind my bruises,
 Hug me, kiss me, suck my juices
 Squeezed from goblin fruits for you,
 Goblin pulp and goblin dew.
 Eat me, drink me, love me;

¹⁰⁶ For Kristeva, the abject depends upon such open boundaries: “We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity” (9).

Laura, make much of me [...]. (465-74)

In the case of the “The Witch,” however, the woman inside is asked to give her fruits, to offer herself up.¹⁰⁷ The fruits are not from “goblin pulp and goblin dew”—they originate in her own life, even her own body. We might read the woman outside, then, as crying: “I want to eat you, drink you, love you; make much of you.” She is both the otherworldly goblin and Laura, who needs the juices—the magical essence of another life—to survive.

As late as 1983, the entry on Coleridge in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* describes her as a shy woman whose “daily life was centered around family and friends.” In contrast to the existing descriptions of “her merry disposition, her liking for people of all sorts, her whimsical tastes, [and] her spirituality,” the writer suggests, “her own poems testify to the mask she wore before even her most intimate friends.” The letter to Hodgkin—one of many—reveals a very different Coleridge, a woman surrounded by passionate relationships, whose decision to live at home and dedicate herself to “family and friends” was by no means the quiet piety of the stereotypical Victorian spinster. However, it is not entirely clear just what kind of relationships she did have with her friends. What kind of love did she share with Helen? What sorts of kisses were those in the schoolroom? By placing the draft of the poem in this letter, Coleridge signals a relationship between the woman outside begging for entrance and Helen, who pleads for her own desires. McGowran likewise notes the “eroticism” in “The Witch,” describing

¹⁰⁷ Katharine McGowran similarly connects the grapes in “Wilderspin” to the “fairy economy” in *Goblin Market* (194-96).

“the threshold as a threshold of experience, of awakening of sexuality” (188).¹⁰⁸ While the schoolroom kisses might seem overtly erotic, it is difficult to discern how Coleridge and Duckworth categorized them.

William Cory, who later changed his name to William Johnson, led Coleridge, Coltman, and Hodgkin in the study of Greek literature (Chitty 80-81). Cory had been dismissed from Eton after a scandal involving a student:

His regard for his pupils had been emotional, and he did not express himself discreetly. Like Socrates, he adored the beauty of youth, which filled him with a protective yearning, at times sentimental. A letter to a boy is said to have been brought to the attention of the headmaster, who decided that the safest—or simplest—course was to let Johnson go.

(Whistler 35-36)

The group of Coleridge’s friends must have discussed Grecian modes of love, which they may have transferred into their relationships. In this letter, Coleridge will develop more than the erotic dimension of her relationship with Duckworth. She will weave these experiences into a more complicated narrative involving mutually elucidating moments.

In the second stanza of “The Witch,” the speaker amplifies her supplication. First, she cries out against the worsening weather, the “cutting wind” (8) whipping across her frozen dress. Her body has begun to suffer from exposure, which has turned her hands to “stone” and her voice to “a groan” (10). However, when she claims that “the worst of death is past” (11), she makes her physical state increasingly ambiguous. Does

¹⁰⁸ “The Restless Wanderer.”

she imply that death has passed? If so, is she alive or dead? Folded into this line is the idea that her past is “the worst of death.” As if to assure the interlocutor that she is not a dangerous woman, she clarifies that despite her independent wandering, she is “a little maiden still” (12)—one whose “little white feet are sore” (13). Her insistence on making herself seem innocuous only heightens the intensity of the threat her hidden body holds.

The final stanza, from the perspective of the person listening to the woman’s plea from the other side of the door, reveals that the woman inside has indeed acquiesced. In a quiet explanation, the speaker recounts that the woman’s voice was persuasively honest in its insistency—it “was the voice that women have, / Who plead for their heart’s desire” (16).¹⁰⁹ However, the psychological consequences reveal the multiple valences to the woman’s “desire”: “She came—she came—and the quivering flame / Sank and died in the fire” (17). As with Geraldine, the flame flickers with the mere power of the woman’s presence; however in “The Witch,” we glimpse only the consequence of this burst of energy—the dying flames. Geraldine’s embrace—“And in her arms the maid she took, / Ah wel-a-day!” (263-64)—leaves Christabel “resigned to bliss or bale” (288), her beauty somehow transferred to Geraldine. In “The Witch,” the speaker inside gathers the woman in her arms, pulling her body to her own and carrying her over the threshold, blurring the roles of Christabel and Geraldine by both allowing the woman inside and initiating the physical contact. The consequence of the threshold embrace for the second speaker in “The Witch” is the loss of the hearth’s fire, a loss of inspiration or spiritual

¹⁰⁹ Because of the echoes of *Christabel* in “The Witch,” I read the second speaker as female. Katharine McGowran notes that “[i]f this other ‘I’ is instead, male, then the poem takes on a different aspect” (188): “The ‘voice that women have / Who plead for their heart’s desire’ stresses not commonality but difference” (188).

life. McGowran reads the poem this way, focusing on the “awareness of limitation, as though the ‘heart’s desire’ of the woman poet can never be achieved without loss” (189).¹¹⁰ However, the dying fire could also suggest a radical shift in the idea of home. The domestic norm has been transformed so that the sort of ideal domestic safety the first speaker craved has been replaced by something else—a union of bodies and lives that re-creates domestic life, even domestic bliss. Unlike Christabel, the second speaker can reveal the story of their intimacy. Likewise, Coleridge desires to reveal to Hodgkin the complicated story of her intimacy with Duckworth.

On the second page of her letter to Hodgkin, Coleridge details another encounter that explains her relationship to Duckworth more clearly:

Also she annoyed me by taking care of me the wrong side up. F.¹¹¹ who is much attached to those agonizing graces herself & has a fellow feeling, says it’s abominable of me not to like it—& I know it is—& yet O ♡., I can’t help it! The worst of it is, it’s a new thing; she never took care of me before, & I do wish she wouldn’t. And yet it’s lovely of her. “There’s something of the child and something of the mother in my love for you,” she said afterwards. “I worship you, & I want to nurse you.” Somehow I couldn’t tell her what I always feel, that her love for me is the love of the bird for the bough in “Misconceptions.” (87, f.1.4-2.1)

¹¹⁰ “The Restless Wanderer”

¹¹¹ “F.” probably stands for Florence, although Coleridge used a system of secret names for her friends. She often called Coltman “Fidus Achates” (Whistler 49), so, alternatively, it is possible that “F.” refers to Coltman.

How does one person care for another “the wrong side up”? Is this a sexual allusion, or does it describe showing affection in the opposite way it would be best received?

Coleridge does not seem to balk at Duckworth’s affection, but instead, the ways she displays it. The heart she doodles in the next sentence proves similarly ambiguous. She could be apostrophizing her own heart, but given what we know of their friendship, it could be more likely that she is referring to Hodgkin, the letter’s recipient, as her heart. If so, it draws attention to the intricate networks of relationships Coleridge is negotiating and the balancing of power these relationships involve. In a letter to Hodgkin a few years later, Coleridge admits, “Egalité is not love’s motto and never was.”¹¹² Duckworth’s behavior is “a new thing,” but her love for Coleridge is not—leading Coleridge to think about “what [she] always feel[s].” Duckworth expresses her love for Coleridge by declaring her desire for an intimate exchange with her. Like a child, she wants to worship Coleridge as an inconceivable, omnipotent figure—filling the corners of her world with a presence that shapes her understanding of herself. Like a mother, she wants to experience a physical exchange with Coleridge, their bodies tied together through childbirth and nursing. Adrienne Rich identifies the mother-child relationship as the first women share in the lesbian continuum of relationships, “the infant suckling at her mother’s breast, to the grown woman experiencing orgasmic sensations while suckling her own child, perhaps recalling her mother’s milk smell in her own” (650-51).¹¹³

¹¹² Whistler, *Collected Poems*, 48.

¹¹³ Rich defines the “lesbian continuum” as “includ[ing] a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—or woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman” (648).

Coleridge uses the image—at once non-sexual and highly erotic—to develop a continuum of intimacy within her relationship with Duckworth, a continuum which she then presents to Hodgkin.

As we have seen, the image of the nursing mother proves fundamentally important to Rich and to Kristeva. For Rossetti, it is just this intimate bond that is missing; her speakers cannot communicate orally with matriarchal figures, much less bond with them physically. Intimate contact is sacrificed, although highly desired, for spiritual sublimity. For Coleridge, as we will continue to see, nursing portrays a moment of interconnection that comes at a price—the sacrifice of one’s physical wholeness, of one’s flesh. As if to further develop her interest in interpenetration, she continues to weave allusions into her letter.

Browning published “Misconceptions,” alluded to above, in *Men and Women*. The poem features a spray that becomes the unlikely place for the bird’s home:

I.

This is a spray the Bird clung to,
 Making it blossom with pleasure,
 Ere the high tree-top she sprung to,
 Fit for her nest and her treasure.
 Oh, what a hope beyond measure
 Was the poor spray's, which the flying feet hung to, —
 So to be singled out, built in, and sung to!

II.

This is a heart the Queen leant on,

Thrilled in a minute erratic,

Ere the true bosom she bent on,

Meet for love's regal dalmatic.

Oh, what a fancy ecstatic

Was the poor heart's, ere the wanderer went on —

Love to be saved for it, proffered to, spent on!

In her letter, Coleridge replaces “spray” or “treetop” with “bough,” adding even more ambiguity to her relationship with Duckworth, who was soon to be married. If she means “bough” as substitute for “spray,” she suggests by this allusion that Duckworth lavishes her attention on Coleridge as a surrogate for her future husband, making Coleridge “blossom with pleasure” and experience “a fancy ecstatic.” Consequently, Coleridge places Duckworth in the position of the bird and of the Queen, “the wanderer.” It is significant that Coleridge signs this letter “Thy Anodos,” or “Thy Wanderer.” She might be communicating to Hodgkin that she too shares the role of Queen-wanderer, who “spends” her love in a “minute erratic” (9). Perhaps the letter itself, marked “very secret indeed,” is just such an act.

On the other hand, if she means “bough” to correspond to the “treetop” in “Misconceptions,” she communicates a very different message. In this case, Helen hopes for the most satisfying relationship—with Coleridge—but in the meantime, she gives her song to the spray, her fiancé. Likewise, in the second stanza, the Queen—Helen—gives her love to the “poor heart” (13)—her fiancé—until “the true bosom she bent on” is “Meet for love's regal dalmatic” (10-11). In this reading, Helen holds out hope for a

future relationship with Coleridge while giving her love temporarily to her fiancé. Coleridge enhances the ambiguity of her relationship with Helen, returning to these moments when boundaries become thresholds and when agency and domination blur.

Certainly many Victorian women had relationships that defied strict heterosexual schemas. Coleridge's "Quintette" of female friends, including Helen and Margaret Duckworth, Ella Coltman, and Lucy Violet Hodgkin,¹¹⁴ seemed to feel strongly that marriage dangerously threatened their freedom as women. In Coleridge's "Marriage," for instance, the speaker bemoans impending separation:

No more alone sleeping, no more alone waking,
 Thy dreams divided, thy prayers in twain;
 Thy merry sisters to-night forsaking,
 Never shall we see thee, maiden, again.

Never shall we see thee, thine eyes glancing,
 Flashing with laughter and wild in glee,
 Under the mistletoe kissing and dancing,
 Wantonly free.

There shall come a matron walking sedately,
 Low-voiced, gentle, wise in reply.
 Tell me, O tell me, can I love her greatly?

¹¹⁴ Whistler, *Collected Poems*, p. 39.

All for her sake must the maiden die!

Duckworth's encounter with Coleridge in the schoolroom gives new valences to the poem. The maiden's freedom to kiss and dance under the mistletoe perhaps refers to a sort of female intimacy that others will consider inappropriate after marriage. Leighton likewise argues that "[v]ery often in Coleridge the thrill of sexual desire, the 'kissing and dancing,' is associated with the company of women rather than of men" (*Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology* 611).¹¹⁵ Chapman perspicaciously notes that Coleridge's relationships with other women seem erotic and that they seem to have directed her aesthetic projects:

While I have found no direct primary evidence, it does seem that Coleridge's close and intense female friendships were erotic attachments. [...] I want to draw on the biographical revelations of Newbolt's life and the uneasy insinuations of Whistler's account of Coleridge's friendships not to explain away her riddling and allusive poems as lesbian love lyrics, but rather to suggest that their very uncanniness and dislocation is a product of her subculture. In other words, illicit sexual desire is not an interpretative key to unlocking what Whistler terms the "cryptic and haunting" poetry, but the condition of their production. (154, 155)¹¹⁶

Whether these relationships were seen as illicit or simply overlooked depends upon how most Victorians understood female sexuality. Sharon Marcus recently argued that "in Victorian England, female marriage, gender mobility, and women's erotic fantasies about

¹¹⁵ *Victorian Women Poets*.

¹¹⁶ "Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and the Flight to the Lyric."

women were at the heart of normative institutions and discourses, even for those who made a religion of the family, marriage, and sexual difference” (13).¹¹⁷ I have been hesitant to define my project as “queering” Coleridge because, like Marcus, I see the evidence suggesting that Victorian lesbian practices (i.e. woman-identified relationships and romantic bonds) were actually normative. Coleridge created a multi-faceted system of relationships with her female companions and maneuvered adeptly within a lesbian continuum. Her lesbian network fit neatly into her otherwise traditional Victorian life and from it, she shaped her aesthetic project, in which she juxtaposed these relationships with her relationships with men. Accordingly, in “The Witch,” the figure pleading for entry initiates a complicated lesbian relationship with the woman inside while also embodying the character’s literary ancestor, Geraldine, and the poem’s allusive visitor, *Christabel*.

Although Coleridge wants this letter to remain private, she does not seem ashamed of the experiences; she seems embarrassed only at the prospect of hurting Duckworth’s feelings. Consequently, I am hesitant simply to equate Duckworth to the

¹¹⁷ Marcus explains that her book responds to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, “which drew on Rich’s notion of a lesbian continuum to speculate briefly that women might not have experienced the panic around boundaries between homo- and heterosexuality that men did (2-3)” (10). Marcus’s project “takes to heart Sedgwick’s powerful precept that to understand any particular aspect of gender and sexuality we must draw equally on feminist and queer theories and histories” (11). She goes on to explain the theoretical shift Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* initiated: “many [abandoned] the female world of the lesbian continuum for the project of undoing gender and sexuality categories altogether” (11). Rather than reading relationships between women in terms of “women’s resistance to heterosexuality,” Marcus “ask[s] what social formations swim into focus once we abandon the preconception of strict divisions between men and women, homosexuality and heterosexuality, same-sex bonds and those of family and marriage” (12, 13).

witch, demanding emotional and sexual transport over the threshold. While it intimates intricate social codes for relationships between Victorian women, the situation is much more complicated—the letter reveals the inspiration for Coleridge’s approach to the poem. A world of complexity exists beneath Whistler’s comment about the group of friends: “[T]here was no social oddness or defiance about them. They were not ‘emancipated,’ or even specially ‘advanced’” (39).¹¹⁸ Although they might not have been openly defiant, they certainly surreptitiously redefined their lives according to their own beliefs and desires. As Whistler describes their relationship, “the romantic intimacy they enjoyed with each other was the fullest expression of this love” (43).¹¹⁹ According to Susan Chitty’s biography of Newbolt, Margaret Duckworth and Ella Coltman cultivated a long-time romantic relationship:

When Margaret was informed of her parents’ plans for her future, she politely but firmly declined them. She had a reason for this. She was in love with someone else, her cousin Ella Coltman. [...] [Newbolt] was aware that his future depended on her. Margaret would only accept him if Ella was intimately included in their married life. [...] The exact moment at which Newbolt became Ella’s lover is not known. It is certain that she began to spend nights at 14 Victoria Road about this time, and that Margaret knew of the arrangement. (Matters were simplified by the fact that she and Newbolt had separate bedrooms.) Neither woman appeared

¹¹⁸ Chapman describes in more detail how Whistler “both raises and suppresses the spectre of lesbianism” (154).

¹¹⁹ See Chapman’s “Mary Elizabeth Coleridge and the Flight to Lyric” for more information on the details of Coleridge’s groups of female friends.

jealous of the other, perhaps because their lover was careful to divide his favours equally. Among Newbolt's papers there is an account sheet covered with neat columns of figures. They represent the number of times he slept with each of his women each month [...]. (79, 82, 91)

One wonders how this new arrangement altered Margaret's relationship with Ella, and whether each woman had a tally sheet of her own. Coleridge's relationship with the other members of the Quintette, with their elaborate language system (i.e. "shaft of a venture"), their use of coding through literary allusion, and their multi-faceted partnerships with each other and with men in their lives, certainly warrants more critical attention.

Coleridge worked to maintain ambiguity in "The Witch" by avoiding quotation marks and by leaving "witch" out of the body of the poem so that she never specifies which character is so identified. Consequently, she forces the reader to judge which character deserves the outsider status of "witch"—a term historically used to describe women who dare to speak out, to pursue knowledge, and to express hostility—and therefore she positions the reader to question the gendered schema such a judgment requires. She reconfigures *Christabel* by giving the Christabel character more agency and by making indefinite whether the Geraldine character is "very bad" or "not so very bad." At the same time, she dramatizes the position of the poem *Christabel* as a seemingly innocuous entity, like Geraldine and the woman outside the door, that yet threatens to consume her "fruits." For Coleridge, it is this moment—when the door swings open and the boundary becomes a threshold—that reveals a truth about life that captivates her. Interpenetration is life at its highest intensity, the precarious balance of the self and other, the bad and the good.

The next encounter Coleridge describes in the letter to Hodgkin takes place in a moment alone with Margaret's infant: "Friday, I sat alone in the little drawingroom at 14 for some time, until Margaret woke, holding the baby in my arms, & wondering, wondering, wondering what it was that I held, — a conqueror or a shepherd" (87, f. 2b). Immediately afterward, she refers to "The Witch": "Is she very bad? or not so very bad?" (87, f. 2b). In many ways, these questions are the same in both cases. Who is the victor and who is the victim? What does it mean to be "good" in a relationship with other people? Complicating this experience are implicit images of mother and child. Coleridge sets the previous account of Helen Duckworth's declaration of desire to be both mother and child to her against this account, signaling that Coleridge conceptually links Helen's assertion to the emotions she has while holding Margaret Duckworth's baby. The mother-child relationship seems simultaneously suggestive and precarious to Coleridge.¹²⁰ On one hand, the child depends upon the mother, who physically contains the power of life for the child. On the other hand, the child requires the mother's full attention, directing the use of her days and perhaps threatening her health and well-being. In *Christabel*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge uses this image to describe Geraldine's power over Christabel:

O sorrow and shame! Can this be she,
The lady who knelt at the old oak tree?
And lo! The worker of these harms,

¹²⁰ See also Christine Battersby's description of Greek rituals relating to *anodos*, "or spiritual 'going up,'" "whereby the daughter (spring) is birthed by the mother (the period of sowing) and then takes the mother back into herself (ripening, harvest)" (266, 267).

That holds the maiden in her arms,
 Seems to slumber still and mild,
 As a mother with her child. (296-301)

In the same way, the woman who pleads for entrance in “The Witch” vacillates between a needful and harmless woman and a vampiric consumer.

In this letter, Coleridge frequently alludes to contemporary writers, particularly Robert Browning, suggesting a profound connection among her poetry, her own readings of Browning, and the interpretative community of her reading group (with M. Duckworth, Coltman, and later Henry Newbolt). After describing the schoolroom encounter with Helen, she first mentions the Brownings: “And then we watched the river, & talked about the Brownings you & I read” (87f. 1c). After their walk together to the abbey, Coleridge and Duckworth attended Ibsen’s *The Master Builder* “& changed opinions in the middle of it, she taking mine & I hers, which caused a want of unity at the end” (87f 1c). Duckworth soon returned, surprising Coleridge: “I thought she wanted [...] some terrestrial trifle [...], but not at all. She put both of her hands on my shoulders & fired her eyes straight into mine: ‘You don’t still think Hilde (the Ibsenite heroine) was wrong?’” (87f 1d). Coleridge’s description of Helen mirrors Browning’s “Love Among the Ruins.” In fact, just after describing the second encounter with Helen, Coleridge tells Hodgkin that Helen has been rewriting Browning: “If you can, tell me a little of what you feel about her ‘Love Among the Ruins.’ Is it not the ‘agony of peace’ beautiful, & the part about ‘perfect vision’ & ‘perfect embrace?’” (87f. 2a). Helen Duckworth’s embrace, then, echoes “Love Among the Ruins” and her re-writing of it. In Browning’s poem, the

speaker imagines the moment when he will meet “a girl with eager eyes and yellow hair” awaiting him:

When I do come, she will speak not, she will stand,
 Either hand
 On my shoulder, give her eyes the first embrace
 Of my face,
 Ere we rush, ere we extinguish sight and speech
 Each on each.

[...]

Oh heart! oh blood that freezes, blood that burns!
 Earth's returns
 For whole centuries of folly, noise and sin!
 Shut them in,
 With their triumphs and their glories and the rest!
 Love is best. (67-72, 79-84)

Duckworth and Coleridge re-create this scene in their own way, looking back on the history of a war of sorts, each having taken a different side on the Ibsen play.

Furthermore, Duckworth has re-written this scene in her poem, which she performed for Coleridge. Coleridge hopes she will perform it for Hodgkin, perhaps transferring the “‘perfect vision’ & ‘perfect embrace.’”

Poetry was so vital to this group that they constantly read and re-envisioned it, adopting literary phrases as a coded language for their intimacies. Their constant literary references and energetic re-writings suggest that Coleridge's group of friends did not

merely extol the virtues of their literary predecessors. Instead, they employed intertextual methods to refigure their relationships to each other and to their literary history. Like the complicated relationship of mother and child, with inherent demands on both sides, their active relationship dramatizes the shifts and strain of literary power that occur particularly when competing generations of writers come into physical and intellectual contact. As it does in the quivering balance achieved between conqueror and shepherd in Browning's "Saul"—a poem Coleridge might have had in mind while holding Margaret's child—literary song has the power to transform the relationship of type to antitype, predecessor to progeny, and self to other.

“The life of what is dead terrifies. The death of what is living terrifies.”:

Boundaries, Thresholds, and Spiritual Crossings

At the end of the letter, Coleridge describes an experience at the home of William Hamo Thornycroft, sculptor and son of Thomas Thornycroft. She reports to Hodgkin the details of the visit, particularly the merging of life and death that she finds so captivating in Thornycrofts's work:

There was a marble monument, the Angels Death & Immortality seated at the feet & at the head of some unknown mortal or other; beautiful, great winged “birds of God.” He said those 2 tremendous words in such a matter-of-fact tone that it gave me a little shock of surprise. What wonderful people are these, to whom they are daily bread & Bread of Life at one & the same time! Their wings, apparently, were just “lines” to him,

lines that “carried up the lines of the drapery.” He had had a model lying in the same position, to do the robes from the other day, (there they still were, horrible things! With gloved hands folded) & one of the workmen thought he was dead & fled in terror when he saw him sat up. Whereat everybody laughed, & I did something besides. The life of what is dead terrifies. The death of what is living terrifies. How it makes one’s head whirl! But I can’t convey to you any idea of what that ½ hour was to me. (87f. 3a- 3c)

There are many versions of death and life at play in this excerpt. First, the angels Death & Immortality represent “what is dead” and “what is living,” from a religious standpoint. These statues are very much non-living, but they were made to guard a tomb to represent the soul’s life. Next, someone who has commissioned these statues must believe in the version of life they represent—the life of the soul in Heaven—but the artist himself thinks of them only as stone with a sort of aesthetic movement, but not imbued with life. Finally, Coleridge adumbrates the models ambiguously: are they static, lifelike drafts of the angels or people paid to model? Kristeva links such an experience to abjection:

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. . . . The abject confronts us . . . with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*. (*Powers of Horror* 4, 12)

Coleridge’s ambiguity heightens the horror of the moment when the worker sees the model sitting and realizes that he is not dead but only death-like, an episode epitomizing

the horror and deep truth Coleridge finds in threshold experiences. We might recall in Rossetti's "After Death" the spirit of a woman looking down at her own dead body. For Rossetti, such contemplation leads to a newfound openness and spiritual peace. Coleridge does not want to escape the visceral humanity of such experiences.

The mixing of life and death "terrifies"—and art is best suited to capture this fusion. Despite the sculptor's vision—Thornycroft's perspective of the wings as "lines"—the art piece has a life of its own and pulls toward action. Consequently, it inhabits the ambiguous, transitory territory between action and stasis, where the stone contains the imaginary potential of flight and spiritual power. According to Whistler, "The Garden of Ancient Palms," Coleridge's favorite illustration from a book from her childhood—*The Story Without an End*—features wings similar to the angels'. "[T]he trees of an oasis rise purple against a glowing, mystic sky," Whistler explains, "and on the roof in the foreground a dove with half-folded wings is just alighting or, it may be, preparing to be gone. [...] The scene might stand as a frontispiece to Mary's poems; it has the same secrecy, the same sense of deep silence in which mysterious good and evil move" (33). The same scene that might inspire quiet awe can easily produce terror. This slippage seems to interest Coleridge most. In *Gathered Leaves*, a collection of her prose, Coleridge describes "the sharp sensations of fear that broke the dull dream of my childhood" (31), a fear that Whistler explains through a horrific story. When Coleridge was very young, one of Millais's protégés began to paint a portrait of Mary and Florence when he "seized up a knife in a demented fit, and was about to attack either the children or the canvas, when luckily Millais came in" (31).

Although Whistler notes that Coleridge never mentioned the event, one wonders whether standing in an artist's studio—especially when discussing the opacity of the boundaries of life and death in art and in human experience—might have resonated with that shocking moment when the artist employed to capture the spirits of the young girls rushed to dig them out of the children or the canvas. The “terror” in the Thornycroft passage likewise results from defied expectations—the threshold moments shifting her concept of how the world works. What one thinks is dead might yet live, what appears to live might be insensate, and what seems innocuous might be deadly. On the other hand, avoiding the threshold moments leads to the sort of spiritual ossification that occurs in Browning's “The Statue and the Bust”: “You of the virtue (we issue join) / How strive you? *De te, fabula*” (249-50). Art uniquely portrays the sort of interpenetration that reveals our inherent interconnectedness and the hazardous balancing act we often disguise through strict binaries of inanimate matter or life, good or bad, and self or other.

The “story” in the letter, then, “begins with Helen” and ends with Thornycroft. Just before her descriptions of Watt's and then Thornycroft's studio, Coleridge writes: “[H]ome again in the company of this Witch. What do you think of her? Is she very bad? or not so very bad? The metre's all wrong any way. That brings the record down to yesterday, & I must tell you about yesterday—only I can't. I've been junking it all along” (87f. 2b-c). She could mean that she has separated it from the rest of the letter, but her phrasing also suggests that she has cut it into pieces that emerge through other moments in the letter. In other words, she has distributed the core of this more recent event in all of the other episodes, including those with Helen and with Margaret's baby.

Whistler describes Coleridge's work as a "personal form of what Keats called 'negative capability,'" through which she "break[s] down the barriers that divide one personality from another" (46, 47). Likewise Christine Battersby has argued, "Far from having an (apparently) firm and autonomous ego that reassures itself of its own identity by the rigorous exclusion of otherness (and then longs nostalgically for that other), Coleridge is wildly variable in her attitudes to the 'I' because she has never made a sharp division between 'I' and other" (269). Coleridge's letter to Hodgkin reveals how she envisions the point of contact between self and other as the essence of human experience, possibly horrific, but always exhilarating. Consequently, she employs allusive techniques to trace the process of interpenetration. Coleridge carries *Christabel* into her poem, although it threatens her creativity and poetic individuality, in order to bring her forefather's voice into her own—to inhabit together the same literary space.

In the case of "The Witch," the incorporative moment ends in alterity. In "The Witch," after all, the pronouns "I" and "she" are maintained through the end of the poem. The echoes of *Christabel*, then, function as a force embodied in the witch, the other allowed in, but forced to remain other. Recognizing alterity leads to a combination of alienation and joissance that creates for the self a new experience of interconnected existence, one Levinas calls "the idea of infinity" (52). This is the central moment of the poem, as the first and second speakers engage in an oppositional relationship that changes the original identities of each. Likewise, Coleridge builds an aesthetic project that reaches out to past poetic power but keeps it at a distance, allowing her to maintain her poetic identity. Rather than writing over her poetic precursors, she reconfigures this encounter as a process of interpenetration that allows her to bring these earlier poems to

bear on her own, a relationship with power to shape poetic composition and generic development.

Coleridge's model of interpenetration, building upon Rossetti's experimental work, will lead us to the final form of subjectivity that evolves through experimentation with the genre, intersubjectivity. The next chapter will focus on two forms of intersubjective poetry, intertextuality in the poems and polyvocality in the speakers. While the poetry of abject subjectivity allows speakers to traverse boundaries, the poetry of intersubjectivity gathers multiple discourses inside of one identity. The first focuses outward and forever expands; the second focuses inward through a speaker who uses all available modes of expressing the self to create many selves.

Chapter Five:

Literary Intersubjectivity and Polyvocality

To accept this form of inclusion is a precondition of disrupting the totalizing demand to make any voice absolute, even that of the formerly excluded other, or to silence others, even the silencers. This can only mean that the self as subject can and will allow all its voices to speak, including the voice of the other within. Owning the other within diminishes the threat of the other without so that the stranger outside is no longer identical with the stranger within us—not our shadow, not a shadow over us, but a separate other whose own shadow is distinguishable in the light. (Jessica Benjamin, Shadow of the Other 108)

As Yopie Prins describes in “Voice Inverse,” Robert Browning once faltered when reciting his poetry into a phonograph, breaking free of his own text to listen to the sound of his voice being recorded (46-47). This invention provided a new sense experience of objectivity. With the other people present, Browning broke into a chorus of “Hip hip hurray!” celebrating the magnificence of the “wonderful invention.”¹²¹ Prins

¹²¹The Poetry Archive has recently made Browning’s recording available to the public at www.poetryarchive.com.

uses Browning's recorded performance to argue for a new critical focus for readers of Victorian poetry:

One path I envision for the future of Victorian poetry is a return to reading Victorian meters, or what I would call "historical prosody." [...] [I]t would mean coming to terms with Victorian poetry on its own terms, taking into account its highly self-conscious mediations and wide range of generic conventions rather than imposing our own ideas (or idealizations) of poetry as a genre. (52, 54)

Through reading meter and focusing on the formations of voice, one can locate moments of "self-conscious mediations" in order to hear how later Victorian writers responded to their sense of literary history. Browning seems most distracted by the act of recording, the "mechanical reproduction of voice," according to Prins (49). Late Victorian poets using the monologue experimented with the form to portray these moments of self-consciousness in the relationship of self and other. Particularly, they blurred any divide between speaker and interlocutor and between author and literary history. We have seen a glimpse of this movement in the later Magdalen monologues by Levy and Mew, especially through their development of multiple identities in the character. As we will see, the intersubjective projects exemplified by "Circe," "Woman's Future," and "Xantippe" differ through their concentrated development of the portrayal of internalized intersubjectivity—even the inclusion of misogynistic discourses—through the mechanics of poetic form. Late Victorian poets drew voices together to create polyvocality that reveals an internalized, intersubjective form of relationship.

We have seen two different models of subjectivity posited through Victorian monologues: contrasubjectivity and abject subjectivity. The first involved defining the self against the other, and the second involved defining the self as other. In contrast to abject subjectivity's centripetal motion of the self that disperses, in intersubjectivity the self absorbs other voices. This inclusive act requires accepting difference. This acceptance is not the same as recognition of the other, such as what we see in Levinas's work. As Steven Hendley explains Levinas's theories,

The "face of the other" that he evokes as the ground of our sense of moral obligation is always essentially the face of my interlocutor, the one who addresses me in speech. [...]. To converse with another person is to find oneself called into question, called precisely to question what one would say in the light of what the other has said, to say only that which takes into account what the other has said and, in this way, genuinely respond to the other. (2, 3)

By contrast, Jessica Benjamin's construction of intersubjectivity allows for an ethical relationship with the Other without the recognition of the Other's alterity or sameness:

To postulate a self who can assume both "goodness" and "badness," both recognition and negation of the other, is the only ground for a critique of the subject's inability to recognize the other. . . . Politically, the possibility of mutual intersubjectivity is predicated on the very difference that also leads to continual misfiring of recognition, the very plurality that strains subjectivity. Psychologically, the struggle to try to know the other while still recognizing the other's radical alterity and unknowability has to

be formulated not only as one between different identities, but as disagreement and contradiction within identities. . . . This requires a notion of self that need not aim at a seamless unity of consciousness by exclusion, by mistaking a part for the whole. A self that allows different voices, asymmetry, and contradiction, that holds ambivalence. (100, 101)

I would like to build upon Benjamin's work—which builds upon the work of Kristeva, Derrida, Lacan, Levinas, and Bakhtin—to describe a third poetic conversation about gender and subjectivity. This conversation posits through the monologue multiplicity of identity, the self that “allows different voices, asymmetry, and contradiction.” Generic experimentation with the monologue allowed late Victorian poets to place the poetic Other into their poetry and to portray new theories of poetic subjectivity through these reverberating voices.

The resulting poetry blended dramatized subjectivities. As we explored in the first chapter, we could describe the monologue by using the form of the double helix—which in this case, becomes a triple helix—where the reader enters into the poets' and the speakers' minds through his or her own. Intersubjective poetry dramatizes this process by extending the logic of the structure. For example, in “Circe,” the reader enters the poem through the mind of Circe, created in the mind of Webster. The reader understands the speaker through layers of criteria—i.e. the reader's expectations of the character, the genre, and the author—and from his or her own subjective vantage point. Reading each word, the reader enters into a sort of subjective harmony with the speaker, embodying the speaker's voice in his or her mind. Because of the poem's intertextuality, the reader then enters Caliban's mind—and Browning's—through Circe's mind—and Webster's. We

can even enter the mind of Caliban from *The Tempest* and, thus, the mind of Shakespeare. The resulting experience is that of reading Caliban through Shakespeare through Caliban through Browning through Circe through Webster. Such intersubjective and intertextual poetry brings literary subjectivities into spatial connection, thereby bringing authors into conversation. As we shall see, we could read this poetic interconnectedness through Bloom's *agôn*, a space for poetic competition in which a poet writes against a "father" poet. Some poets, like Levy and Kendall, work to portray this moment of self-recognition—of self-consciousness—primarily in their speakers. In this case, rather than clearly electrifying allusive connections in their poems, they embody multiple voices in their speakers. This polyvocal poetry is equally intersubjective; it internalizes this process. Polyvocal poetry portrays the competing intersubjective voices. Of course, we might read these voices as a single speaker's performance of multiple identities and thus not intersubjective, but intrasubjective. We might point to a poem like "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" as an example of a poem that contains contrary blended identities in one speaker: "Gr-r-r" (1). In such poems, the voices rise in succession to depict the speaker's psychological struggle, but we can usually identify a central voice that carries the strongest subjective force. In the polyvocal poetry I will examine in this chapter, no such central voice exists; instead, the voices compete for dominance but reach no common key. Furthermore, some of these voices clearly represent popular discourses that undermine the speaker's other expressions. In this way, the voices represent subjectivities impinging upon one another in the mind of the speaker.

Benjamin describes intersubjectivity as the result of a process that we might link to the conversations we have explored in the monologue. First, she explains the “complementarities” that shape our psyche:

Subject and object, active and passive, observer and participant, knower and known—these reversible complementarities have structured the psychoanalytic relationship. The intersubjective perspective is concerned with how we create the third position that is able to break up the reversible complementarities and hold in tension the polarities that underly them. Essential to that theoretical aim is the uncovering of the gender coding of these complementarities, which as so successfully inscribed them in our desire, in our psyches. (xiv)

Benjamin explains that the representation of the Other is fundamental to the process of negotiation that shapes the relationship of these “complementarities.” Of course, this complicated process is occurring in one mind. We might recall Shaw’s “ghosts” here in order to describe intersubjectivity as the ghosting of the other in the self. According to Benjamin, the self craves “escape into merger with like-self beings, creating an identity that demands the destructive denial of the different” (96).¹²² We might detect a kinship between “the destructive denial of the different” and the process of contrasubjectivity

¹²² Benjamin explains, “I have suggested that the early developmental route out of projective-introjective assimilation turns out to be through recognition’s opposing term, negation, which has to be revalued” (96). She notes that she is building upon “Winnicott’s notion of destruction—the mental refusal to recognize the other, the negation of the external—” by “contend[ing] that recognition practically, psychically depends upon symbolic processing of destruction” (96).

explored in the third chapter.¹²³ For Benjamin, the desire that leads to “destructive denial” is a step in a greater process¹²⁴ that can end in reconciliation:

Breakdown, full rupture, is only catastrophic when the possibility of reestablishing the tension between negation and recognition is foreclosed, when the survival of the other for the self, of self for other, is definitely over. By the same token, recognition does not require a full reconciliation, least of all an “extorted” one, as Adorno termed it, but rather something that is both “tensed and unstable—never quite *aufgehoben* or reconciled” (Bernstein, 1992). (96)

The breakdown, or “splitting,” is part of this process in which the individual separates from the Other; “it can either be transformed in relation to the outside other or reduce the other to a locus of the self’s disowned parts” (97). For Benjamin, intersubjectivity does

¹²³ According to Benjamin,

Merely by living in this world, we are exposed to others and subjected to unconscious, unwilling identification with others (on television, if not begging on the streets). Whether we will or no, the world exposes us to the *different* others who, not only in their mere existence as separate beings reflect our lack of control, but who also threaten to evoke in us what we have repudiated in order to protect the self: weakness, vulnerability, decay, or perhaps sexual otherness, transgression, instability—the excluded abject in either Kristeva’s and Butler’s sense. It is not truly in our power not to identify; what we cannot bear to own, we can only repudiate. (95)

¹²⁴ This process is part of her proposed answer to a series of questions she asks earlier in the text:

The question—Can a subject relate to the other without assimilating the other to the self through identification?—corresponds to the political question, Can a community admit the Other without her/him having to already be or become the same? What psychoanalysis considers the problem of overcoming omnipotence is thus always linked to the ethical problem of respect and the political . . . problem of nonviolence. (94)

not necessarily mean a loss of agency; rather, “Only such a self can *own*—assume responsibility for containing—destructiveness in self and other rather than projecting it into the not-I or turning it against the self” (99). As we saw with abject subjectivity, the loss of a central identity does not result in the loss of agency or of identity. Instead, identity can take another, multiple form in “a self that sustains difference and contradiction” (104):

To include without assimilating or reducing requires us to think beyond the binary alternatives of self-enclosed identity and fragmented dispersal to a notion of multiplicity. . . . Difference, hate, failure of love can be surmounted not because the self is unified, but because it can tolerate being divided. (104, 105)

As I will argue, individual subjectivities that “can tolerate being divided” and ethical relationships based on this “notion of multiplicity” are modeled by the generic experimentation that results in intersubjective poetry and polyvocal speakers.

Although we might trace intersubjective elements in the work of many Victorian poets—like Swinburne, Kipling, Bradley, and Cooper—Webster, Kendall, and Levy seem most interested in using the monologue to shape polyvocal projects. Circe defines herself against the unknown Other, the lover to come (Odysseus), who must be great because she is beautiful. Both Browning and Webster set up a situation (“So he”) in which the speakers define themselves by conceiving of the Other. Subjectivity requires that the Other define the self, which is relegated to a refraction of a power situated elsewhere. Yet at the same time, through this subjective and highly self-reflexive move—the declaration of “So he”—the speaker defines the self as the set of

characteristics that reveals an outside power. Thus, the speaker gives shape to that power through describing the self. I do not wish to equate Browning to Caliban and Webster to Circe, although these speakers certainly share some traits with their creators. Instead, I am arguing that Webster builds upon Browning's epistemological project, in which Caliban understands himself as a reflection of the Other, by modeling Circe on Caliban. That Webster brings Browning, through allusion, into her poetry perhaps says something about the ways she negotiates the very same dynamic. At issue here is the weight of literary history and the temptation for a poet to see herself as a refraction of a greater body of poetic power. By facing the forces at play, however, by acknowledging the dynamic, the poet gains a sort of power that begins to shape the representation of the other. In their poetry, Kendall and Levy also incorporate other voices into the speaker's subjectivity, revealing how female poets negotiated internalized sexist arguments about women writers. We might also see such internalized sexism in Circe's character such as in the way she describes her own body according to traditional models of women's beauty. However, Circe's monologue does not move back and forth between disparate voices. For Kendall and Levy, poetry embodies an *agôn* in which these discourses compete, resulting in the polyphony of a multiplied subject position.

Bonnie J. Robinson argues that incorporation marks the poetry of female *fin de siècle* authors. They incorporate the traditions before them, an aesthetic that offers a counterpoint to Modernism's aesthetic of division (10). I wonder what happens when, building upon this approach, we identify such experimentation as an extension of earlier Victorian conversations. I would like to suggest that later Victorian generic experimentation builds upon earlier models of subjective and objective theories of poetry,

adding to them a self-conscious reenactment of incorporation in the modifications of generic conventions. We could return here to Robert Browning's poetic ideal of approximating "absolute vision" (17) by combining the "objective poet," "one whose endeavor has been to reproduce things external" (11) and the "subjective poet," one "impelled to embody the thing he perceives" (13). Aurora Leigh's description of the importance of poetic "double vision" (V.184), necessary in this "full-veined, heaving, double-breasted Age" (V.216), claims incorporating poetic vision for the female poet. Later Victorian women poets built self-reflexivity into their poetry in order to position the poems to reveal the process of incorporation and the ways that they envision their own literary self-positioning. The use of poetic "double vision" seems vital to Victorian poets throughout the period, but especially for later Victorian poets, who add another layer—self-reflexivity—to the aesthetics of incorporation. They give voice to this aesthetic project through polyvocal and intersubjective poetic form.

"So he":

Echoes of Robert Browning's "Caliban upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island"

in Augusta Webster's "Circe"

Perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of studying a non-canonical female poet is determining a methodology for reading of her work. Patricia Rigg, Angela Leighton, Christine Sutphin, and Susan Brown have all begun to describe Webster's

poetry, especially how it fits within and challenges our current ideas of poetic genre.¹²⁵

Rigg warns that “recent scholars of the dramatic monologue have continued the tradition of defining the genre exclusively through reference to male poets, primarily Browning” (“August Webster: The Social,” 75).¹²⁶ Rigg’s desire to distance the two poets through genre perhaps responds to the critical heritage that considers Webster style “derivative”

¹²⁵ See Rigg’s “Augusta Webster and the Lyric Muse: The *Athenaeum* and Webster’s Poetics” [*Victorian Poetry* 42 no. 2 (2004): 135-64], Rigg’s “Augusta Webster: The Social Politics of Monodrama” [*Victorian Review* 26 no. 2 (2001): 75-107], Leighton’s *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* [Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992, pp. 164-201], Sutphin’s “The Representation of Women’s Heterosexual Desire in Augusta Webster’s ‘Circe’ and ‘Media in Athens’” [*Women’s Writing* 5 no. 3 (1998): 373-92] and Sutphin’s “Human Tigresses, Fractious Angels, and Nursery Saints: Augusta Webster’s *A Castaway* and Victorian Discourses on Prostitution and Women’s Sexuality” [*Victorian Poetry* 38 no. 4 (2000): 511-31], and Brown’s “Determined Heroines: George Eliot, Augusta Webster, and Closet Drama by Victorian Women” [*Victorian Poetry* 33 no. 1 (1995): 89-109].

¹²⁶ As we have seen, she argues that Webster’s dramatic poems constitute monodrama instead of dramatic monologues because “dramatic poetry by women tends to be less specific in defining the speaker, thereby retaining an important attribute of lyric poetry and delineating a rather transparent dramatic ‘mask’” (75). Others like Angela Leighton, however, place Webster’s dramatic poems within the category of the dramatic monologue (177). She maintains that Webster’s poetic strength lies not in her lyric poetry, but in her dramatic monologue form that “overtly expresses what the lyric disguises: that the heart itself is another (or several others), and that language already mediates it” (177-78). However, she describes the differences between Browning’s and Webster’s approach to the form. The complex process of defining a genre like the dramatic monologue proves inherently political, according to Scheinberg:

My hypothesis is that each time dramatic monologues by men have been theorized as the ‘other’ kind of poetic utterance, the ‘Others’ of our literary tradition (in this case, women), have been written out of the theory. Likewise, critics interested in looking at the ‘difference’ of women’s poetry have maintained a difference in women’s poetic genres, and so often ignored or obscured how women writers’ use of the dramatic monologue transforms the genre as it has been theorized through male writers’ work. (“Recasting ‘Sympathy and Judgment’” 176)

Scheinberg explains, “My point in citing these passages is not to suggest that we must never make comparison to male writers in our work, but simply that when we do make comparison, we should resist discourses that depict certain authors, usually canonized male poets, as ‘owning’ certain genres” (186).

(Forman 173).¹²⁷ Scheinberg cautions against a type of criticism that already considers poetry by male authors as foundational and work by female authors as “other” (“Recasting ‘Sympathy and Judgment’” 176). Because of the very real gender dynamics that Victorian women experienced, often including gender discrimination and violence, we can see in their poetry the ways that they worked to establish their right to speak and to negotiate their place in society. Indeed, as Scheinberg suggests, “we can speculate that women writers may have had special insights and literary strategies with which to address the problems of speaking ‘universally’” (188). Their strategies include baring the gendered conflict inherent in the act of writing, a conflict that surfaces through what Isobel Armstrong calls the “double poem,” “two concurrent poems in the same words” (12):

The double poem is a deeply skeptical form. It draws attention to the epistemology which governs the construction of the self and its relationships and to the cultural conditions in which those relationships are

¹²⁷ Harry Buxton Forman’s chapter about Augusta Webster in *Our Living Poets: An Essay in Criticism* in 1871 helps explain modern critics’ reticence to compare Browning and Webster. The chapter begins with an excerpt from Browning’s “One Word More” and he calls Webster a “disciple-poet” (171). Throughout this chapter, Forman half-heartedly praises Webster’s poetry, which he considers quite minor, and he believes that while it exhibits “a compact proof of how firmly the analytic method is taking root” and contains “a good knowledge of modern life and thought [and] a good classical erudition,” it has “much sterling thought [but] no strikingly new ideas” (171). Webster seems trapped in Browning’s legacy and poetic legacies, in general, in Forman’s estimation: “these minor poems derive from Tennyson and Mrs. Browning, and in a lesser degree from Browning and Miss Rossetti; and a derivative style wherein so many prototypes are traceable will never give any piquancy of tone to poetry of any order” (173).

made. It is an expressive model and an epistemological model simultaneously. (13)

Like Aurora Leigh's "double vision," the "double poem" allows the poet to see objectively and subjectively and to draw attention both to his or her epistemological understanding with the world and to the expression of this vision. Contextualizing these female non-canonical poets with their contemporary male poets does not cripple their independence. Instead, it reveals the ways in which they created for themselves powerful poetic positions that reveal "the epistemology which governs the construction of the self," personal and poetic. Intersubjective poetry provided such a position.

Webster built into "Circe" a system of allusions to Browning's "Caliban," while drawing the reader to notice Circe's agency. Both poets placed the poems just before the openings of canonical works, "Caliban" preceding Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and "Circe" preceding Homer's *The Odyssey*. Furthermore, both monologues occur immediately before a storm that the speakers perceive as life changing. At the beginning of "Caliban," the sun shines brightly and Caliban looks out across the ocean, while contemplating Setebos, who "dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon" (25). Circe also watches the ocean, but the sun is setting and the storm is growing, events that do not occur until the end of "Caliban." The darkness, gendered female, dominates the light almost sexually in Circe's world: "Darkness has raised her arms to draw him down / Before the time, not waiting as of wont / Till he has come to her behind the sea" (2-4). The storm seems caused by this premature sexual experience, which occurs "[b]efore the [correct] time." In "Caliban," the storm comes suddenly, and Caliban worries that it is a consequence of his talking openly about Setebos: "What, what? A curtain o'er the world

at once!” (284). For Caliban, darkness threatens his sight and his ability to protect himself. For Circe, darkness symbolizes her power to satisfy her sexual desires and to subvert natural order.¹²⁸ Furthermore, the sudden darkness visually represents the end of Caliban’s monologue and the world outside of his understanding. Circe, by contrast, appears knowingly and intimately connected to the natural world, perhaps even part of the female, chaotic “darkness” that draws in the male “light.”

Through the speakers’ descriptions of their environment, they begin to build their conceptions of themselves. Caliban speculates that Setebos, lonely and unable to make an equal partner or experience the joys of flight, “looks down here, and out of very spite / Makes this a bauble-world to ape yon real” (146-47). Of course, for the reader, Caliban has the creative power of Setebos to make a textual “bauble-world” ape and replace the real, if only for the duration of the poem. Circe is equally concerned with her ability to read her world correctly. She endeavors to determine whether each shipwrecked man is her ideal partner and, frustrated, cries, “Will he not seek me? Is it all a dream / Will there be only these bestial things / ... These things who had believed that they were men?” (92-93; 97) Though her power seems proportionately lessened by her desire for a man to dominate her, the reader is always aware that she is both creating and deferring the figure she longs to rule her. After all, her description fills the poem’s frame, while the lover never enters it. Thus, she rules herself—and the reader—as she controls her narrative’s past, present, and future. Webster assures this control by ending the monologue before the assumed arrival of Odysseus. Caliban controls his narrative, too, but though he forms

¹²⁸ Leighton reads this passage as a “wish-fulfilling sexual encounter in which female ‘Darkness’ draws down the male sun into her bed of storm” (194).

Setebos in his mind, he fears a real consequence because he sees Setebos embodied in the world around him. Webster allows Circe ask similar questions as Caliban's, building upon Browning's textual structure. The questions they ask shape their poetic characterization. For the speakers, these questions define them in the absence of the answers they crave. However, only Circe finds power in the search for answers. The more she claims to desire this coming lover, the more she seems to relish the seeking. Webster, then, gives her speaker more power to create her world self-consciously, to redefine—if not re-create—the “real.”¹²⁹

Caliban and Circe both define the powerful Other—Setebos and the ideal lover—in terms of themselves. They see themselves as types of the Other's antitypes. In this way, both Webster and Browning used the dramatic monologue form to invert the power structure. In other words, both Caliban and Circe vex and dislodge type from antitype to form the powerful Other in their own images and form themselves in the process. As Caliban considers himself a type of Setebos and Circe claims she is a type of her lover, the dramatic monologue form shifts so that the absent figures of Setebos and the lover

¹²⁹ A tension exists here between the power to control one's narrative and the unavoidable power of the other. However, we could understand the first as a response to the second. Solipsism would cut off any possible relationship between self and other, isolating the self in the mind. Although perhaps the monologue itself can only demonstrate what is in the mind, and thus lends itself to such a reading of solipsism, this does not seem to be Webster's and Browning's project. The very construction of the speakers' subjectivity (“So he”) depends upon reaching outward to the other. Benjamin's explanation could help us differentiate the two approaches:

In order to go beyond a conception of a self-enclosed self, to recuperate difference and respect for otherness along with agency, we have to account for the impact of the other on the self. This impact provides a negation that is at once indeterminate and irreducible to the subject's own mental world, thus not the subject's own constructed, internal Other, even though related and interdependent with it. (94)

become the types, the impressions waiting to be filled. Caliban and Circe fill those spaces with their own psyches. Caliban sees the world in terms of reflection, considering himself a refraction of Setebos's psyche ("so He"). Caliban imagines Setebos's arbitrary injustice as rooted in several different causes: because he was "ill at ease" (31), because "he could not, Himself, make a second self / To be his mate" (57), or because he "envieth that, so helped, such things do more / Than He who made them" (113). Of course, Caliban also experiences these emotions, his logic rooted in self-reflexive reasoning.¹³⁰

Circe has grown bored with "the sickly sweet monotony" of her life (32) and with the beauty of the island. She has fashioned a mate in the form of the lover she awaits. However, this mate does not materialize, remaining her mind's creation. Her creative control proves limited—at least in her own mind—by her desire not to have absolute power, but instead to fit within natural and traditional social structures. She claims not to be a god, stating that her nymphs, "who have the souls of flowers and birds / Singing and blossoming immortally" (67-68) are gods more than she. She argues that she does not create the inhabitants of her island; she helps them transform into their "true" selves, "false and ravenous and sensual brutes" (198): "Change? there was no change; / Only disguise gone from them unawares" (188-89). However, self-definition proves elusive to Circe. She surmises that her lover must come because she is intelligent, powerful, and beautiful:

Nay, but he *will* come. Why am I so fair,

And marvelously minded, and with sight

¹³⁰ Along these lines, Browning clarifies his project in his epigraph: "'Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself.'"

Which flashes suddenly on hidden things,

As the gods see, who do not need to look? (98-101)

Circe's circular logic (he exists because I exist and I exist for him) reveals that, for her, the existence of the Other defines one's existence; the self represents the embodiment of constructions related to that Other. Circe describes herself in terms of classical romance with pale hair; blue eyes; a "sad sweet longing smile" (120); round, pale, flushed cheeks; and "chiselled limbs" (125). She woos her image in her lover's name because to love her image is to love him. Thus, he must come because she is beautiful and her beauty means that he loves her: "But that my beauty means his loving it?" (130). The tension in these poems derives from their simultaneous self-effacing and self-figuring in the shadow of the Other. However, the poem is proof of a possible response to this tension, the intersubjective incorporation of the Other. In other words, Circe and Caliban can gain some control of the other by controlling the narrative and defining the other. The female poet can do the same thing; while she might feel controlled by the male literary history that precedes her, she can incorporate these texts and re-write the history. Webster builds upon Browning's structure to prove the efficacy of this response.

The poems' formal elements express the speakers' differing sense of agency and reveal how Webster's prosody builds upon Browning's. Circe surmises that a being other than her lover cannot have power over her. She depends on fate, while Caliban believes in a complex spiritual realm of figures competing for a power for which he can conceive no fully trustworthy system. Caliban's voice is hesitant in response to his fear of Setebos overhearing him, and the poem's punctuation accents this fear. Perhaps because of the poem's punctuation that allows Caliban to talk in the third person, some critics consider

Caliban a “half-savage man-monster” who “speaks in his own semi-animal version of English” (Hawlin 81, 169). However, other critics like E. K. Brown¹³¹ and John Woolford, after studying the language and punctuation, have discovered that its intricacies reveal Caliban’s psychology and the shifts in his emotions. The layered structure of the poem adds to Caliban’s ever-building and ever-deconstructing perspective. According to Woolford, Browning added apostrophes to denote an absent pronoun, capital letters to mark references to Setebos and the Quiet, apostrophes before a verb to show that “Caliban is referring to himself,” and “brackets round the opening and closing paragraphs of the poem” (96-97). Woolford believes that this construction reveals important elements of Browning’s approach to the monologue:

If my description of this sequence is accurate, a number of interesting implications, about RB’s compositional procedures and their reciprocation within the thematic material of his poem, naturally follow. At one level, this procedure implies a double movement of identification and withdrawal within the compositional sequence. Or, one could find, in the supersession of textuality upon oral utterance, a deconstruction of the convention that dramatic monologue must be read as an excerpt from real speech really uttered in the world. (98)

Browning breaks the regular iambic pentameter, substituting trochees and dactyls for iambs when Caliban exhibits confidence, such as when he “thinketh” and wonders if Setebos creates to “make what Himself would fain, in a manner be—” (62). He uses

¹³¹ See DeVane’s description in *A Browning Handbook*, p. 300.

enjambment to cause the reader to focus on the images and to add to Caliban's narrative a sense of confused forward progression, such as in lines 12-15:

He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
 And recross till they weave a spider-web
 (Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
 And talks to his own self, howe'er he please [...].

However, the poem's structure primarily emphasizes Caliban's feeling of impotence within his spiritual schema, revealing the psychological web through which he tries to glimpse a reality outside of himself.

"Circe," by comparison, is the fluid monologue of a confident speaker who does not fear that a more powerful force will overhear her. Curiously, however, the last line of the poem shifts from the singular pronoun "I" to the plural, "our" (210). One could conjecture that she is thus speaking to the "silly beasts, / crowding around [her]" (178) that "love [her] still" (179). However, near the end of the poem, she refers to the animals without speaking to them directly: "Did I choose them what they are?" (184). Earlier in the poem, she speaks once to her nymphs and once to the gods, but she does not assume that they can hear or respond. Instead, these references help her to refocus her ideas about herself and to gather the material and spiritual world to gaze at her as well. Thus, it seems more likely that the plural pronoun in the last line refers to her divided personality, one that both enjoys mastering and longs to be dominated. Like "Caliban," "Circe" uses blank verse and iambic pentameter. Webster changes the rhythm when Circe longs for action, believes that her lover will come, declares her beauty, and talks of her "cup of Truth" (172). As Browning does in "Caliban," Webster accents Circe's confident

moments by beginning certain lines with a trochee or dactyl. Almost half of the poem's lines are enjambed, pulling the reader into the narrative fluidly and naturally. Thus, because of her divided personality, Webster persuades the reader of Circe's dynamism through the poem's form and structure.

At the end of the poems, both speakers await hope of discovering some pattern to their lives: Caliban wants only to escape retribution ("Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!" [292]), while Circe prepares for her newest round of guests. Whether their anticipation is laced with hope or dread, both await the same event: the physical entrance of the Other. By bringing "Caliban," *The Tempest*, and *The Odyssey* into the margins of her work, Webster builds upon Browning's project to create a speaker who wrestles with defining herself in the shadow of a powerful figure, while she defers the moment of their contact. In the last line, Circe begins to "make ready for our *guests* to-night" (210; emphasis mine), a statement that emphasizes her control over the length of the visit. Temporally, this line immediately precedes the storm of *The Odyssey* and parallels Browning's placement of "Caliban" just before the storm of *The Tempest*. Webster thus positions "Circe" to suggest that these literary "guests" may be welcome, but they will be subject to her "cup of Truth," in this case, her literary reformulation process that reveals the "Truth": They have already been grafted into her poetic tale, and they form part of her literary intersubjectivity.

“When once we’re enthroned, you shall never dethrone us—

The poets, the sages, the seers of the land!”:

The Agôn in the Poetry of May Kendall and Amy Levy

May Kendall and Amy Levy both celebrated the unique perspectives of poets deemed minor, those excluded from major Victorian literary conversations or from the literary canons. For example, in Kendall’s “Shakespeare,” the speaker expresses relief at the distance others see between canonical poetry and her poetry:

Because you are beyond us and above,

Therefore we need no longer fret

Our nature's shadowy limit to remove [...]. (1-3)

As we have seen, Levy, in her literary criticism, praised James Thomson for his ability to tell a very subjective, internal, individual truth “with intense eyes fixed on one side of the solid polygon of truth, and realizing that one side with a fervour and intensity to which the philosopher with his birdseye view rarely attains” (1358). Engaging in the larger shift toward subjective art, Kendall and Levy employed poetic methods that differed from Webster’s in “Circe.” While Webster focused on incorporation through allusion and self-creation in the shadow of the Other, Kendall and Levy dramatized the internalization of discourses to portray polyvocal intersubjectivity in the speaker.

In Kendall’s “Woman’s Future” and Levy’s “Xantippe: A Fragment,” the speakers are women who bravely envision a role for themselves beyond that which

society prescribes.¹³² Despite the consequences, these women take risks and advocate change despite the society's narratives of women's capabilities and proper position in society. However, rather than building in their poems pointed arguments for women's advancement, Kendall and Levy revealed the process of negotiation that takes place in order to create room for such a discourse.¹³³ For Kendall and Levy, gender reform necessitated re-imagining the physical spaces women inhabited and revealing gender discourses. In "Woman's Future," Kendall's speaker declares women "the poets, the sages, the seers of the land!" (36), but *fin de siècle* women claiming such active roles in the culture had to navigate the discourses that limited them ideologically. Joan Douglas Peters argues that polyphony in *Mrs. Dalloway* "builds into the surface representation of unity between characters an underlying representational opposition between them" (132). Like Peters, I believe that polyphony produces a layered tone that a speaker can manipulate into irony or even parody (130). However, I contend that the speakers in "Woman's Future" and "Xantippe" do not unify the perspective by steering the audience's sympathy so directly. Instead, the oppositional voices pervade the speaker's

¹³² Other poems by Kendall and Levy that feature this approach include Kendall's "A Pious Opinion," "In a Toy Shop," and "Otherworldliness" and Levy's "The Old House."

¹³³ Recent studies on Levy include Ana Parejo Vadillo's *Women Poets and Urban Aestheticism* (2005) and Linda Hunt Beckman's article, "Amy Levy: Urban Poetry, Poetic Innovation, and the Fin-de-Siècle Woman Poet," in Joseph Bristow's anthology, *The Fin-de-Siècle Poem: English Literary Culture and the 1890s* (2005), and her book, *Amy Levy: Her Life and Letters* (2000). Additionally, Susan David Bernstein recently published with Broadview Press two of Levy's novels. Kendall's work has not seen the same level of critical attention, but Bonnie Robinson, Marion Thain, and Virginia Blain have all directly responded to Kendall in their criticism and some critics consider her fundamental to a revised canon of Victorian poetry. Diana Maltz's article on Kendall, "Sympathy, Humor, and the Abject Poor in the Work of May Kendall," published in *ELT* in 2007, constitutes one of the only critical studies of Kendall to date.

voice, revealing the inscription of the opposing discourses on her psychology. In this way, the poem pits opposing discourses against one another not to unify, but to display the complex process of discourse negotiation that proves necessary to those who want to argue for social change. Polyphony in these poems has two radical effects: it challenges the centrality of the speaker's coherent subjectivity, and it creates within poetry an agonistic space of rhetorical positioning, revealing the poet's and speaker's movements between discourses.

By reading this space of negotiation in terms of an *agôn*, I realize that I am placing Kendall and Levy—within recent critical history—into a Bloomian paradigm, with Oedipal overtones that tend to subvert female poets. A “strong poet,” according to Bloom, “wrestle[s] [his] strong precursors, even to the death” in order “to clear imaginative space” (*Anxiety* 5). Bloom also uses the image of the *agôn* to describe the space of “misprision” (*Agon* 28), a defensive stance performed to “usurp” (29) through the displacement of previous paradigms (45). However, I have derived my definition of the *agôn* from Debora Hawhee's recent work on ancient Greek rhetoric.¹³⁴ Hawhee contends that the *agôn* was the space of contests that promoted social community and allowed for the performance of *aretē*, a sort of civic virtue, rather than emphasizing triumph in competition. For Hawhee, agonism provides a vehicle for *aretē* and for describing rhetorical positioning (35).

Kendall and Levy brought the *agôn* into their poetry, rather than merely choosing a recognized position within it. They reveal the structure of the discourses at battle in the space by portraying the ways that a liberated female voice fits within a polyvocal social fabric. Furthermore, the speakers of these poems absorb opposing voices into their own, accentuating the process of social inscription and revealing the tensions within the *agôn*. Thus, my reading of agonistic positioning aligns more closely with Bakhtin's work on hybridity, polyphony, and dialogism. As we have seen, for Bakhtin, "To express oneself means to make oneself an object for another and for oneself ('the actualization of consciousness')" (110). Donald Wesling explains the importance of oppositional tension in Bakhtin's writings:

For Bakhtin, we can never know ourselves or see ourselves as finished beings, so we require the otherness of other people to define us in the world (as we reciprocally define other people by seeing them from the outside). Alterity is the defining condition governing the perception of persons, but also defining the perception of whole societies. (31)

The *agôn*, from this perspective, can function as the inscription of the outer on the inner, blending objectivity and subjectivity. This very specific form of incorporation unhinges the individual's subject position, redefining it according to the Other.

Kendall's "Woman's Future" engages in subtle rhetorical shifts that include acknowledging the popular science that regarded women as having a lesser intellectual capacity and charging women to "rouse to a lifework—do something worth doing! / Invent a new planet, a flying machine" (27-28). The poem begins with the speaker delineating the misogynistic argument that women's intellects are "bound by a limit

decisive” (3). The speaker responds to these arguments by calling them “falsehood[s]” and “base innuendos” (5). However, she immediately uses the same type of discourse to suggest that women will evolve: “We trust Evolution to make us amends!” (8). In this contradictory discursive move, the speaker vacillates between condemning the misogynistic discourse that assumes women’s biological limitation and using the same sort of argument to claim that women can evolve, but they just have not done so yet. In the next section of the poem, the speaker focuses on a certain type of woman who wastes her days away on “a rug or a screen” (26). She calls these women to *evolve* psychologically into the abilities that she assumes they already possess. In this way, she takes part in both discourses, using the rhetoric of women’s evolution, while advocating social revolution for women, who seem already able to accomplish it. The section ends with a forceful rebuttal to the misogynistic claim at the beginning of the poem that women’s intellect can never rise “[t]o the level of Homer’s” (4): “[T]he knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces, / The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes” (31-32). However, the argument does not move easily from an essentialist-oriented misogynistic rhetoric to a rebuttal that restructures social forces to free women for psychological development. Instead, the speaker leans these discourses against one another, moving between them.

The Envoy complicates the agonistic discourses further. In lines 5-8, the speaker first reveals the “falsehood” of the rhetoric of women’s biological limitations, then uses that discourse to claim that women will evolve. Finally, she rejects these previous arguments to claim women’s biological equality. The Envoy emphasizes the structure of such interwoven discourses. In the first line, the speaker adds to the charges against

scientific misogynistic discourse that of “jealous exclusion” (33). However, she immediately, again, claims that women’s evolution is nigh. Her prophecy of women’s active involvement in society, however, requires a disruption of a misogynistic, biologically deterministic narrative. These women already are powerful, and they are waiting to take their rightful place in the culture:

Oh, wait for the time when our brains shall expand!

When once we’re enthroned, you shall never dethrone us—

The poets, the sages, the seers of the land! (34-36)

Kendall’s title, “Woman’s Future,” sets up the expectation for prophecy, but Kendall does not merely forecast women’s place in the society. Claiming roles for them of fundamental importance, she structures the poem around the sorts of negotiation necessary to the acceptance of woman’s equality and leadership. Within the discourse of women’s biological limitation, Kendall buries charges against it of falsehood and jealous motivations—“base innuendo” (5) and “jealous exclusion” (33). Woman’s future reflects a time of intense cultural change, a time for the discourse negotiation that initiates social action.

Kendall’s use of poetic form in the poem frames the negotiated discourses aurally and strengthens her argument for women’s intellectual capacity in its intricate design. Through her prosody she proves women’s intelligence. The poem’s rhythm alternates between a hypercatalectic line with one iamb and three anapests, and an acatalectic line with one iamb and three anapests. She uses deviations from this form to draw the reader’s attention to specific lines. The deviations include the addition of an unaccented

syllable. Three of these, lines 4, 20, and 31, change the initial iamb to an anapest. The poem's arguments hinge on these three lines:

Our intellects, bound by a limit decisive,
 To the level of Homer's may never arise.

.....

Can patchwork atone for the mind's inanition?
 Can the soul, oh my sisters, be fed on a *plaque*?

.....

But the knowledge of Newton will beam from your faces,
 The soul of a Spencer will shine in your eyes. (3-4, 19-20, 30-31)

Line 4 encapsulates the misogynistic view of women's intellectual—and thus poetic—limitations. In line 20, the rhythmic deviation pulls the reader's attention to the word *soul* as the speaker argues that women's household activities do not feed their souls. Line 31 claims most strongly women's innate capacity for inspiration, intelligence, and social leadership, the altered meter emphasizing the word *knowledge*. Thus, she draws the reader's attention to her argument through her poetic construction. In line 25, the alteration of the second accented syllable changes the first anapest to an amphibrach, a rocking syllable that propels the reader through the line in the same way that "Fashion's vagaries" sweep women away from their intellectual abilities:

Is this your vocation? My goals is another,
 And empty and vain is the end you pursue.
 In antimacassars the world you may smother;
 But intellect marches o'er them and o'er you.

On Fashion's vagaries your energies strewing,

Devoting your days to a rug or a screen,

Oh, rouse to a lifework—do something worth doing!

Invent a new planet, a flying-machine. (21-28)

In line 36, the last line of the poem, the added unaccented syllable changes the ultimate anapest to a pyrrhic and an iamb, slowing the verse and emphasizing the last word, *land*, or the national province of the “poets, the sages, the seers”: the newly liberated Woman:

When once we're enthroned, you shall never dethrone us—

The poets, the sages, the seers of the land! (35-36)

She performs the roles of poet, sage, and seer, while proving women's intellectual capacity through her careful attention to rhythm. Through this design, she emphasizes the tensions between discourses, even as they become polyvocal entities inscribed within the woman's subjectivity.

In Levy's “Xantippe: A Fragment,” the speaker, Xantippe, tells the maidens with her in the weaving room the story of her marriage to Socrates, beginning with a description of her independent spirit as a child, moving through her courtship and rocky marital relationship, and ending with her life as a widow. The monologue seems quite coherent, so to title it “A Fragment” accents the lacunae the text contains. Levy frequently uses ellipses to mark these gaps, which draw attention to Xantippe's psychology, especially her frequent suppression of subversive thoughts. We do not know Xantippe's future, so perhaps in that way the poem is fragmentary, but primarily, the fragmentation occurs in the rhetorical shifts of Xantippe's narrative. Like “A Woman's

Future,” “Xantippe” works as an *agôn*, the space for diverse discourses to impinge on one another, especially the competing arguments about women’s biology and their place in society. Xantippe embodies this *agôn* physically in her ultimate desire to keep from Socrates her intellectual abilities and give him only the “household vessel” (237) he desires. She claims to have “spun away / The soul from out [her] body, the high thoughts / From out [her] spirit” (245-47), yet she uses the opportunity to warn the maidens around her about the dangers of marriage, revealing to them her enduring spirit. The poem ends with her desperate command: “The casement, quick; why tarry?—give me air— / O fling it wide, I say, and give me light!” (278-79) Xantippe vacillates between the ethos of Socrates’s traditional wife and the intellectual genius of Aspasia, weaving them together in her re-creation of her identity.

The agonistic relationship of these discourses about women structures both the poem and Xantippe’s psychology. Twice she claims that she has “sinned” (273) by her desire to violate the boundaries of what the gods have deemed “women’s thoughts” (43). These two occurrences mark the dramatic action of the poem. First, Xantippe rebels from the apparent narrow-mindedness of the weaving women who mock her for her “high thoughts” and “golden dreams” (37). Next, she responds in openly rebellion to Socrates’s declaration of women’s innate intellectual weakness, maintaining this rebellion in veiled form for the rest of Socrates’s life through her performance of the soulless woman he desires. Opening the poem into its rhetorical substructure, the ellipses visually and aurally reveal Xantippe’s psychological tensions, especially her powerful sense of identity and her need to suppress it. The ellipses begin just before the courtship section of the poem, when Xantippe parenthetically counters her conviction that she

sinned when her “woman-mind had gone astray” (43) with the quiet suggestion, “(And yet, ’tis strange, the gods who fashion us / Have given us such promptings)...” (45-46). Against the maidens’ harsh direction, “bidding [her] return / To maiden labour” (35-36), Xantippe declares her difference from them. Her soul has “yearned for knowledge, for a tongue / That should proclaim the stately mysteries / Of this fair world, and of the holy gods” (37-40).

The meter of the poem, a very regular iambic pentameter, remains even, hopeful, and organized until the climax, when she flings the wineskin to the ground. She has just exclaimed to Socrates, Aspasia, Alcibiades, and Plato that if the gods made women too finely, they did so cruelly, forcing “their half-completed work / To bleed and quiver here upon the earth” (184) and “beat its soul against the marble walls / Of men’s cold hearts, and then at last to sin” (185-87). Woman’s “sin,” or her deviation from a “woman-mind” (43), results from the gods’ inadequate nurturing of her finely tuned senses and their act of cruelly placing women in a world that suffocates them. Her life is evidence of this cruelty. Although Xantippe first reacts with repulsion to Socrates’s body, she enters into a sort of courtship with Socrates because she sees it as means by which to grow intellectually. However, he destroys her hopes when he values Aspasia for her ability to parrot what Xantippe terms “glib philosophy” (228) while he maintains his contention that knowledge “intoxicate[s]” (170) women, and leads to their rebellion:

She grows intoxicate with knowledge; throws

The laws of custom, order, ’neath her feet,

Feasting at life’s great banquet with wide throat. (170-73)

Xantippe agrees that knowledge does necessitate rebellion for women, not because it overwhelms their innate intellectual weakness, but because it allows them to realize their strength. However, Xantippe is caught between the desire for freedom (“give me light!” [279]) and the desire to teach the great Socrates a lesson. She starves her own soul to deprive him of her true magnificence, which proves a very self-destructive act. However, after his death she finally feeds it, demanding “light.” Even in this act, however, she wavers between her declaration of rebellious victory and the haunting warnings against deviant behavior that deem it a “sin.” She claims, even in these last lines, that she has “sinned” against the gods (273). She seems finally able to reject these constructs, shifting, with the rising dawn, to revere her own boundless soul that requires communion with air and light.

Because these poems both work as dramatic monologues, defining the nature of the speaker’s voice proves complicated, as we have seen. In “Woman’s Future,” the speaker, in a traditional parlor—the setting—directs her call to a group of women who symbolize to her all women. Elements of the setting serve as examples of the limiting physical spaces of women’s existence, especially because of their meager and time-consuming tactile objects of production. The scale of the poem, a Woman to all women speaking in women’s spaces and prophesying about the future, resembles parts of “Saul” or “A Death in the Desert.” After all, in titling the poem “*Woman’s Future*” (my emphasis), not “Women’s Future,” she accentuates the interconnectedness of all women and she emphasizes gender as a factor that will determine the quality of that future. In “Xantippe,” the speaker’s flashback constitutes the bulk of the poem. Like “Fra Lippo Lippi,” she struggles to explain herself and her suffocating existence through her life

story told beneath the clench of impending death. She is the failed revolutionary, the powerless artist, and the martyr.¹³⁵ Her polyphonic voice reveals her absorption of misogynistic discourses that will always keep her morally at cross-purposes with her own call for freedom. A Christ-like figure, she admonishes the “maids” who “too soundly have . . . slept / [t]hat should have watched [her]” (8-9). So, although the precedence for Kendall’s and Levy’s experimentation with the form certainly exists, the speakers’ polyvocality is their true innovation. Though both poems end in a singular subject position, one that advocates women’s liberation, that position clearly mediates the polyvocal tensions of various discourses about women’s ontology and social freedoms.

These poets positioned strong, individualistic female speakers to look outward to the culture and back at themselves through its misogynistic lens. W. E. B. Du Bois’s notion of “double consciousness” applies here, an experience Du Bois describes as “this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness” (qtd. in Friedman 76). Although Levy’s and Kendall’s position as women writing in a patriarchal society perhaps heightened their sense of “twoness,” they also found freedom in allowing multiple discourses to meet in an agonistic fashion within their texts and within their speakers’ minds. Although the misogynistic discourse fundamentally threatens to devalue and negate a female speaker’s subjectivity, Levy and Kendall seem to have felt that it was necessary that the female speakers confront these

¹³⁵ Of course, Levy’s “tendency to severe depression” (Blain 333) and, ultimately, her tragic early death by suicide suggest biographical inspiration for Xantippe’s character.

other voices, which originated in the culture and which were inscribed inside of themselves. Webster similarly employed allusive techniques to confront literary voices and through the process, to claim poetic independence. This sort of dialogic subjectivity spun the poems centrifugally outward into the larger culture, providing a model for an *agôn* with pragmatic importance for advocating change, one that argued for the ethical necessity of polyphony in a diverse polis. As Benjamin explains,

Inclusion thus calls for difference, not synthesis. Politically, it cannot mean anything but the principle of sustaining continual contest and contradiction among differences. . . . As each different voice ascends to the position of subject of speech, however contested, it has the chance to attain the status of an outside other, rather than a repudiated abject that threatens to contaminate or reabsorb the self. (108)

The move to intersubjective monologues is this kind of call for inclusion. Late Victorian poets—particularly female poets—employed the monologue to portray for a new society on the verge of radical gender reform a new form of ethics and a new form of subjectivity that accepted “continual contest” and welcomed the introduction of newly-recognized citizens.

Conclusion: Literary Networks and Poetic Inheritance

In 1886, Katharine Bradley wrote about the warm friendship she and Edith had with Robert Browning. One evening, in particular, ended in Browning's expression of admiration and the sort of passing of the poetic flame from one generation to the next:

[H]e took us into the hall and said, "I believe poetry is the most glorious thing in the world; you are beginning where I long ago ended. God bless you! Then he suddenly & impulsively kissed Edith, & then me, with the same like dictum—adding low as if apologetically—"You will be none the worse for my good wishes." Then he came with us to the gate, asked us if knew our way home, & left us the divine perfected Spirit—giving God thanks for him. Of his humility, of his exquisite dearness—oh he deserves sonnets from the Portuguese! I cannot speak. I have never loved him till to-day: now I love him dearly. (British Library, 46866, f. 230)

She titled the letter, "The Gospel According to St. Matthew," perhaps in order to link their experience with Browning to a type of calling, Jesus passing his spirit to Peter, an event that occurs in the book of Matthew: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (16.18-19a). Browning likewise passes down a "divine perfected Spirit," giving them literary keys to the kingdom: "you are beginning where I long ago ended." Furthermore, he walks them to the gate, a prepositional phrase Bradley underlines in the letter. Earlier in Matthew, Jesus

has cautioned his listeners: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (7.13-14). Bradley does not clearly explain whether Browning’s gate is the wide gate one or the narrow one, but rather—through the connection—she describes “Father Poet,” a pet name they have for Browning, as a sort of Christ figure showing the way and transferring his spirit, as Jesus does in Matthew: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world” (28.19-20).

On the other hand, Browning has already betrayed them by outing them, a fact that gives the kiss other religious valences. Cooper tentatively had sent Browning their work two years earlier, which sparked a relationship between the writers. She described their writing together as “Shelleian” (ff. 10-11). Seven months later, Bradley wrote to Browning,

Spinoza, with his find grasp of unity, says: “If two natures individuals of exactly the same nature are joined together, they make up a single individual doubly stronger than each alone,” i.e. Edith and I make veritable Michael. And we humbly fear you are destroying this philosophic truth: it is said The Athenaeum was taught by you to use the feminine pronoun. Again some are named André Raffalovich, whose earnest young praise & frank criticism gave me genuine pleasure, now writes in ruffled distress he “thought he was writing to a boy—a young

man... he has learnt on the best authority it is not so.” I am writing to him to assure him the best authority is my work. But I write to you to beg you to set the critics on a wrong track. We each know that you mean good (ours[]);& are persuaded you thought by “our secret” we meant the dual authorship. The revelation of that would indeed be utter ruin to us; but the report of lady- authorship will dwarf and enfeeble our work at every turn. Like the poet Gray (M. Arnold) we shall never “speak out.” And we have many things to say the world will not tolerate from a woman’s lips. We must be free as dramatists to work out in the open air of nature,—exposed to her vicissitudes, witnessing her terrors: we cannot be stifled in drawing-room conventionalities. . . . Besides, you are robbing us of real criticism—such as man gives man. The gods learn little from the stupid words addressed to them at shrines: they disguise, meet mortals unsuspecting in the marketplace, & enjoy wholesome intercourse. (British Library, 46866, f. 11)

A few days later, she wrote again, explaining her phrase “drawing-room conventionalities”:

I do not care to speak to you again of our relations to our work: on one point however your mis-apprehension is so serious that I cannot keep silent. I did not speak of combating “social conventions.” It is not our desire to treat irreverently customs or beliefs that have been, or are, sacred to men. We hold ourselves bound in life & literature to reveal—as far as

maybe—the beauty of the high feminine standard of the right to be.

(British Library, 46866, f. 11)

In just two years, then, they had overcome this rocky start in order to kindle a growing friendship. By the time Bradley can declare that she loves him, she has created an image of him that blends God (the “Father Poet” and “the old gentleman” [another pet name]), Jesus (the one who leaves “the divine perfected Spirit”), and Judas (who “suddenly & impulsively kisse[s]” them). By positioning herself against Browning in this way—as the fulfillment of poetic promise—she and Cooper step into the role of Jesus, the one betrayed, and Peter, the “rock” and receptacle of the spirit. Reverberating in her description is Browning’s “Saul.” As Michael Field, Bradley and Cooper take David’s role, able to see prophetically into the future, casting new light into dark places. Even when writing about their time with Browning, Bradley layers her writing intertextually, rewriting the Bible and Browning. For Bradley and Cooper, writing seems to have required the delicate interfolding of textual voices. Many later poets, particularly female poets, respond similarly to their literary history.

The literary history of the genre of the dramatic monologue records the movement of time from Browning’s early versions of the form to his passing of his poetic spirit to Bradley and Cooper, whom he by this time referred to as “Field.” The conversations that formed through the genre and the poetic networks they represent chart the genre’s history. Its evolution through earlier forms—Hemans’s and Landon’s, if we follow Armstrong’s argument, Browning’s and Tennyson’s, if we follow the traditional critical account—to the polyvocal form used by Kendall and Levy reveal its flexibility to create important works of poetry and to portray the human condition, even as that condition

changes, particularly because of the movements for gender equality at the end of the period. Victorian poets offer models of subjectivity through the monologue in conversations, each of which differently defines subjectivity and objectivity, with important implications for ethical relationships. Such endeavors permeate the Victorian period, with its scientific breakthroughs, reform movements, and civil rights advancements. It is difficult to imagine the Victorians without the monologue.

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Appendices

Appendix A: "Mary"

Sweet Mary the first time she ever was there
Came into the Ball room among the Fair
The young Men & Maidens around her throng
And these are the words upon every tongue
An Angel is here from the heavenly Climes
Or again does return the Golden times
Her eyes outshine every brilliant ray
She opens her lips tis the Month of May
Mary moves in soft beauty & conscious delight
To augment with sweet smiles all the joys of the Night
Nor once blushes to own to the rest of the Fair
That sweet Love & Beauty are worthy our care
In the Morning the Villagers rose with delight
And repeated with pleasure the joys of the night
And Mary arose among Friends to be free
But no Friend from henceforward thou Mary shalt see
Some said she was proud some call'd her a whore
And some when she passed by shut to the door
A damp cold came o'er her her blushes all fled

Her lillies & roses are blighted & shed
O why was I born with a different Face
Why was I not born like this Envious Race
Why did Heaven adorn me with bountiful hand
And then set me down in an envious Land
To be weak as a Lamb & smooth as a Dove
And not to raise Envy is calld Christian Love
But if you raise Envy your Merits to blame
For planting such spite in the weak & the tame
I will humble my Beauty I will not dress fine
I will keep from the Ball & my Eyes shall not shine
And if any Girls Lover forsakes her for me
I'll refuse him my hand & from Envy be free
She went out in Morning attird plain & neat
Proud Marys gone Mad said the Child in the Street
She went out in Morning in plain neat attire
And came home in Evening bespatterd with mire
She trembled & wept sitting on the Bed side
She forgot it was Night & she trembled & cried
She forgot it was Night she forgot it was Morn

Her soft Memory imprinted with Faces of Scorn
With Faces of Scorn & with Eyes of disdain
Like foul Fiends inhabiting Marys mild Brain
She remembers no Face like the Human Divine
All Faces have Envy sweet Mary but thine
And thine is a Face of sweet Love in Despair
And thine is a Face of mild sorrow & care
And thine is a Face of wild terror & fear
That shall never be quiet till laid on its bier

Appendix B: "The Witch"

I have walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall nor strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,
But I never came here before.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
I dare not stand in the blast.
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
And the worst of death is past.
I am but a little maiden still,
My little white feet are sore.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
Who plead for their heart's desire.
She came—she came—and the quivering flame
Sank and died in the fire.
It never was lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,

To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ This is the published version of the poem from the Newbolt collection.

Vita

Kasey Bass Baker was born in Abilene, TX. She received her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Texas A&M University and her Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Alaska. At the University of Tennessee, she developed her research interests in Victorian literature and taught for both the English Department and the Women's Studies Program. In 2008, she received her Ph.D. in English from the University of Tennessee.