



## The Printed Voice

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## The Printed Voice

*Yann Tholoniati*

Broadly speaking, the dramatic monologue can be defined as a poem in which there is one (historical or fictional) speaker addressing an imaginary audience, and what makes it “dramatic” is that it is uttered in a critical moment for the speaker, not simply that the speaker cannot be equated with the poet, wearing a mask, as it were. The phrase “dramatic monologue” was coined by the poet George W. Thornbury in 1857, speaking about Robert Browning’s art (Culler 366), and it has since served to characterize Browning’s major poetical achievement as well as poems displaying similar generic features.

Around 2,300 years before, in Ancient Greece, actors wore masks on stage. One might argue that at a particular moment in ancient Greek drama, there appeared the first form of what could be called a dramatic monologue. Indeed, there was often a moment when the *persona* of the author came to introduce or to conclude the play and addressed the audience. This theatrical device, particularly used by Aristophanes, and other Greek and Roman playwrights after him, is called a *parabasis*, and describes the author coming to the front of the proscenium to engage in a dialogue with his audience. Another structural aspect of the dramatic monologue is *prosopopeia*, a figure of speech describing the personification of some non-human being or concept, or absent person, as capable of speech. This trope was favored by Quintilian who helped shape modern classical rhetoric, and by famous authors such as Ovid who in *Heroides* made use of it to make mythological heroes speak. As such, the dramatic monologue appears as a combination of parabasis and prosopopeia in variable proportions.

In the Renaissance, some of John Donne’s best-known poems such as “The Flea” and “The Sun Rising” can be said to be dramatic monologues. In “The Sun Rising,” an anonymous speaker addresses the sun in a vivid tone:

Busy old fool, unruly Sun,  
 Why dost thou thus,  
 Through windows, and through curtains, call on us?

(ll.1–3)

The rise of the conversational poem in the eighteenth century gave birth to poems that were very close to dramatic monologues, but the presence of a (mostly silent) listener is not frankly asserted. William Blake, Robert Burns, or William Wordsworth paved the way for the genre before the term existed. Blake's "The Little Black Boy" (*Songs of Innocence*, 1789) gives voice to a black child who describes his social position to an English boy. Robert Burns's "Holy Willie's Prayer" (published posthumously in 1799) is a prayer addressed to God by a cantankerous reverend as he makes his confession. In doing so, he entreats the Almighty to dispose of his local enemies, a revenge Willy insists upon although it springs from petty matters. "To a Mouse, On Turning Her up with the Plough, November 1785" is addressed to frightened rodent:

Wee°, sleekit°, cow'rin, tim'rous *beastie*, °small, sleek  
 O, what a panic's in thy breastie°! °breast  
 Thou need na start awa° sae° hasty, °away, so  
 Wi' bickering° brattle°! °hasty, scurry  
 I wad° be laith° to rin° an' chase thee, °would, loath, run  
 Wi' murd'ring *pattle*°! °a plough-scraper

(ll.1–6)

"The Last of the Flock," by William Wordsworth (*Lyrical Ballads*, 1798), consists of the speech of a shepherd who has been forced, through poverty, to sell his lambs.

The heyday of the dramatic monologue is the nineteenth century. Critics generally believe that, as a reaction towards the lyrical stance of the Romantic poets, early Victorian poets tended to set a distance between their speakers and themselves by having obviously imaginary characters (remote in place and time) speak. Browning and Tennyson were very specific about distinguishing the speaker's *persona* or mask from the author's identity. The title of the poem very often provides clues as to the identity of the speaker, or the circumstances. It establishes the speaker's universe at the same time as it creates a temporal and cultural distance between speaker and reader, as in titles by Robert Browning: "Rudel to the Lady of Tripoli," "A Grammarian's Funeral, Shortly after the Revival of Learning in Europe." The gender of the poet and the speaker may differ: a man writes as a woman or a woman as a man, as in Browning's "Count Gismond," spoken by the count's wife. Browning is also famous for the abruptness of the beginnings of some of his poems. As one of his contemporaries wrote,

Mr Browning rushes upon you with a sort of intellectual douche, half stuns you with the abruptness of the shock, repeats the application in a multitude of swift various jets

from unexpected points of the compass, and leaves you at last giddy and wondering where you are, but with a vague sense that, were you but properly prepared beforehand, you would discern a real unity and power.

(Davis 463)

This critic alludes to “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister,” which begins thus:

Gr-r-r — there go, my heart’s abhorrence!  
Water your damned flower-pots, do!  
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
God’s blood, would not mine kill you!

(ll.1–4)

The dramatic monologue is so strongly linked to the name of Robert Browning that an overview of his achievement is necessary to perceive the rules he delineated, as well as the flexibility of the genre. Browning was influenced by Walter Savage Landor. In *Imaginary Conversations of Literary Men and Statesmen* (four volumes published between 1823 and 1829), Landor wrote a number of dialogues ranging from classical times to his own day, covering a wide field of topics and tones, with action and incident. Robert Browning, after having written a closet drama (*Paracelsus*, 1835), then *Pippa Passes* (1841)—a work that evades generic definition, being half-lyrical, half-dramatic—and seven plays between 1836 and 1846—many of which were never actually performed—, resolutely devoted himself to the hybrid genre that he first called “dramatic lyrics,” a phrase he used for his 1842 collection of poems (Tholoniati “De la voix au théâtre” and “*Tongue’s Imperial Fiat*”). The term probably comes from Percy Shelley and his definition of *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) as a “lyrical drama.” Browning expanded his range of experimental forms in the following collection entitled *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, published in 1845. His endeavor was to individualize each character (man or woman, young or old, painter or priest, Spaniard or German, etc.) by means of his or her voice. In these poems, Browning first organizes a constellation of preliminary elements (title, subtitle, epigraph, etc.) which are designed to allow the reader to perceive the speaker’s voice from the start. As in “Fra Lippo Lippi” (published in *Men and Women* in 1855), the title provides the name of the speaker, the poet’s mask. The table of contents of *Men and Women* looks very much like a list of *dramatis personae* at times. Indeed, Browning chose *Dramatis Personae* as the title for an 1864 volume which was very much in the same vein as *Men and Women*. Sometimes the subtitle and/or the beginning of the poem provide other elements, such as the time and place of speech, as is the case in “Fra Lippo Lippi”:

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!  
You need not clap your torches to my face.  
Zooks, what’s to blame? you think you see a monk!  
What, ‘tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,

And here you catch me at an alley's end  
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?

(ll.1–6)

As we can see with this instance, Browning puts these peripheral indications to good use so as to play with the reader's expectations.

Moreover, he very deftly organizes a system of echoes in his titles: "The Italian in England," "The Englishman in Italy," "The Lost Leader," "The Lost Mistress," "Home-Thoughts, from Abroad," "Home-Thoughts, from the Sea," "Meeting at Night," "Parting at Morning," "Love in a Life," "Life in a Love," in *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*, and "Before," "After," "In Three Days," "In a Year," "One Way of Love," "Another Way of Love," and, more subtly, "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Andrea del Sarto" in *Men and Women*. Browning also conceived poems composed of several complementary parts. "Cavalier Tunes" (*Dramatic Lyrics*) includes "I. Marching Along," "II. Give a Rouse," and "III. Boot and Saddle"; "I. The Flower's Name" and "II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis" make "Garden Fancies" (*Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*), whereas "James Lee's Wife" (*Dramatis Personae*) contains nine sections, each of which has its own title. Browning adds another layer of complexity to his dramatic monologues by putting them into a network of echoing allusions. In each particular volume (and one may also add, beyond each individual volume), temporal, geographical, subject-related elements contribute to strengthening the dialogical links between the poems. Antiquity is the background of such poems as "An Epistle Containing the Strange Epistle of Karshish, the Arab Physician," "Cleon," and "A Death on the Desert." The temperaments and aesthetic projects of Italian Renaissance painters are compared and contrasted in "Pictor Ignotus," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Andrea del Sarto." Deathbed utterances can be heard in "A Woman's Last Word," "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" and "Confessions"; musicians speak in "Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha," "A Toccata of Galuppi's," and "Abt Vogler."

Consequently, the juxtaposition of dramatic monologues turns them into a dialogue, and the constellation of echoing poems creates a polyphonic effect. *The Ring and the Book*, published in 1868–69, is in this respect a stylistic tour de force, Browning's *magnum opus*. Consisting of about 21,000 lines and divided into twelve books, this "novel in verse" is also one of the first detective stories in English literature. Moreover, the reader is expected to play the part of the detective. The plot is the following one: in seventeenth-century Rome, a young woman, Pompilia, has been stabbed to death by her jealous husband Guido, who stands trial for his murder. Each book is a dramatic monologue. The first and last books are spoken by the figure of the poet who addresses his readership about the characters and the development of the plot, with a desire to immortalize his characters vocally because, according to one of his statements, "The printed voice . . . lives now and then" (164). Books II, III, and IV are spoken by characters who embody rumors in Rome: "Half-Rome" supports Guido, while "Other Half-Rome" sides with Pompilia; "Tertium Quid" weighs the balance and refuses to take sides. Each of them has a "good" reason to have a biased

judgment, something the reader discovers gradually and very often indirectly. Books V, VI, and VII are spoken by the protagonists. In Book V Guido finds justification for his murder by exposing his young wife's alleged affair with a priest, Caponsacchi, who answers his accusations in the following book. Pompilia, who is breathing her last, supports Caponsacchi's speech in Book VII. Books VIII and IX consist of the two lawyers' speeches for the trial. As no clear-cut decision emerges, the Pope, in Book X, after much hesitation, finally finds Guido guilty and sentences him to death. Book XI is Guido's last speech in jail, a few hours before the time of his execution. Full of malice and innuendoes, Guido's character tries to present himself as more sinned against than sinning. The reader has to make his or her own mind about him, as he or she is invited to do so in the last book, spoken by the poet. The architecture of *The Ring and the Book*, based on pairs and triads (rumors, protagonists, lawyers), a dense metaphorical network of echoes and allusions, with its alternation of pros and cons in relation to the protagonists and the relative importance of certain facts, is reminiscent of the structure of a polyphony.

As we have seen with the example of *The Ring and the Book*, the active participation of the reader is of course crucial in the apprehension of the subtleties of a dramatic monologue. "Andrea del Sarto," in *Men and Women*, is a case in point. As John Maynard has shown, the reader starts by siding with the henpecked eponymous painter, but as the latter tries to detain his wife from going out to meet her cousin (and more probably, her lover), he uses arguments which allow the reader to discern why his company is not as enjoyable as he might believe. The combination of this phenomenon with the echoing structure of the poems has a powerful consequence. Most of the dramatic monologues rely on the reader's perception of dramatic irony, the fact that he or she perceives more of what is at stake in the monologist's speech than he himself seems to understand. Indeed, Jean-Jacques Mayoux described dramatic irony in Browning's dramatic monologue as similar to the *lapsus linguae* on a large scale (Mayoux 200), although in general speakers wish to achieve some conscious purpose (to justify themselves or to argument a case, for instance).<sup>1</sup>

After *The Ring and the Book*, Browning went to experiment new ways of linking dramatic monologues so as to create what W.E. Harrold (1973) called "the overpoem" (Harrold 4). *Ferishtah's Fancies* (1884) consists of a series of twelve poems framed by a prologue and an epilogue, each poem falling into two parts: an allegorical fable followed by a moral lesson. *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in their Day* (1887) contains seven dramatic monologues in which the figure of the poet imagines a conversation with artists of various fields.

Alfred Tennyson, succeeding William Wordsworth as poet laureate in 1850, wrote poems very similar to dramatic monologues ("Ænone," "The Lotos-Eaters," "Saint Simeon Stylites," "Ulysses," "Maud," for instance), but in most of these poems, the dramatic element does not urge the speaker into revealing himself or herself as is the case in Browning's poems. "Saint Simeon Stylites" for example is more of a monologue, a rumination of the speaker addressing God. That the poem has ironic overtones, and strikes one as echoing the situation of Burns's Holy Willie, does not



make it particularly “dramatic.” Indeed, Tennyson chose to call a poem of a similar form, “Maud,” a monodrama, and he defines the genre as a poem in which “different phases of passion in one person take the place of different characters.”<sup>2</sup> Tennyson’s best instances of dramatic monologues are perhaps “Northern Farmer (Old Style)” and “Northern Farmer (New Style),” written in Lincolnshire dialect:

Dosn’t thou ’ear my ’ere’s legs, as they canters awaäy?                    °horse  
 Proputty°, proputty, proputty—that’s what I ’ears ’em saäy.                    °property  
 Proputty, proputty, proputty—Sam, thou’s an ass for thy pains;  
 Theer’s moor sense i’ one o’ ’is legs, nor in all thy brains.  
 (“Northern Farmer [New Style],” ll.1–4)

As we can see, a monologue may have different guises: it can be a soliloquy (an actor speaking alone on stage), a parabasis (an actor addressing the audience), a prosopopeia (the speech of an imaginary person or entity), a monodrama (where the driving force of the speech comes from emotions rather than from action), and finally, a dramatic monologue, in which one can distinguish another subgenre, the monopolylogue (a play with more than one character in which one actor plays every role), which literally designates a one-man show. Browning’s “Fra Lippo Lippi” is a typical example: the speaker is a Renaissance painter and a monk, and in his speech he imitates, or rather impersonates in turn the voices of some of his relatives, fellow-monks, and even the voice of his auditor.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, other poets experimented forms inspired by the dramatic monologue. Robert Browning’s wife, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, wrote a moving and politically committed dramatic monologue: “The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim’s Point,” published in *Poems* (1850):

I have run through the night, my skin is as dark,  
 I bend my knee down on this mark . . .  
 I look on the sky and the sea.

O pilgrim-souls, I speak to you!

(ll.5–8)

Robert Buchanan, in *London Poems* (1866), and at the end of the century, John Davidson, allowed the marginalized voices of abandoned women, vagrants, and workers to be heard. Emily Pfeiffer, Constance Naden, May Kendall, and Augusta Webster also exploited the dramatic monologue as a powerful tool for social critique, especially from a woman’s point of view. Some writers poked fun at what they considered to be Browning’s stylistic whims (Tholoniati “Au miroir déformant du style”). C.S. Calverley, in “The Cock and the Bull” (1872), parodies the beginning of *The Ring and the Book*. J.K. Stephen, in “The Last Ride Together (From Her Point of View)” (1891), plays upon Browning’s habit of paired poems, and provides an imaginary counterpart to Browning’s “The Last Ride Together” (*Men and Women*, 1855).

Thomas Hardy and Rudyard Kipling sometimes followed Browning's influence and wrote fine dramatic monologues. Thomas Hardy took many notes concerning Browning's rhyme schemes in his notebooks, and put them to good use in "The Ruined Maid," for instance. Some of Kipling's *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892) merge the dramatic monologue with music-hall ballads and marching songs; but the collection also contains more traditional monologues. "The Window at Windsor," for instance, consists in a colloquial speech addressed to a silent listener by a soldier whose patriotic concerns are undercut by his proletarian choice of vocabulary. "The 'Mary Gloster'" (1894) is a death-bed speech, reminiscent of Browning's "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" and "Confessions":

I've paid for your sickest fancies; I've humoured your crackedest whim—  
 Dick, it's your daddy, dying; you've got to listen to him!  
 Good for a fortnight, am I? The doctor told you? He lied.  
 I shall go under by morning, and—Put that nurse outside.

(ll.1–4).

Although most modernist poets tended to oppose what they considered to be the formal conventionality of Victorian poets, they appropriated their modes to suit their new purposes. Ezra Pound (1895–1972), as Ford Madox Ford noticed, owed a great deal to Browning. This is a debt Pound himself acknowledged, albeit indirectly, in the title of his 1909 *Personae* (a title he took up in 1926 for *Personae: The Collected Poems of Ezra Pound*), and directly in his essays about literature. Ezra Pound insists on the use of a persona, by which he means, writing of his early volume *Personae*, a "complete mask of the self"—he described himself as "casting off, as it were, complete masks of the self in each poem." In this sense, a persona is neither the "I" which equates to or is congruent with, without necessarily being identical to, the poet in Romantic, and other expressive, schools of poetics nor the autonomous fictional (in Northrop Frye's sense of the term) "I" of the Browningsque dramatic monologue. Rather, the persona articulates a series of shifts and displacements between the two; it may even be described as deconstructing the distinction, which goes back through Aristotle to Plato, between speaking in one's own voice (*in propria persona*) and assuming the voice of another. While Pound's concern with "masks" (and his experiments with "personae") can be traced to Wilde, and his choice of specific masks often takes him back to the Middle Ages or to Ancient Greece or China, it was central to his development of a modern poetic idiom and links his poetic practice, almost from the beginning, with modernist poetics of impersonality and with a wider modern questioning of received models of the self and of individual identity.

At the same time, T.S. Eliot turned back to Wordsworth's project (expounded in the 1800 preface of the *Lyrical Ballads*, which advocated reconciliation between poetry and everyday language): "the law that poetry must not stray too far from the ordinary everyday language which we use and hear. Whether poetry is accentual or syllabic, rhymed or rhymeless, formal or free, it cannot afford to lose its contact with the



changing language of common intercourse" (Eliot 29). On his way back to literary history, he could not but meet Robert Browning's art of the printed voice. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915) bears an ironic title, since the middle-aged speaker of the poem is too shy to achieve a significant gesture that might change his dull, bourgeois life:

Let us go then, you and I,  
 When the evening is spread out against the sky  
 Like a patient etherized upon a table;  
 Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,  
 The muttering retreats  
 Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels  
 And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells.

(ll.1–7)

In *The Waste Land* (1922), Eliot radicalizes the potentialities of Browning's dramatic monologue by going a step further. Like Browning and Pound, he saturates his work with literary and artistic allusions combined with the use of several languages both ancient and modern. The beginning of the twentieth century was also a moment when science's forays into the human psyche unveiled the hidden dimensions of the mind that have a bearing on the conscious level. Eliot's poetics sometimes appear as a process of collage and sudden juxtaposition of ideas and feelings giving birth to a stream of consciousness (as in James Joyce's novel, *Ulysses*, at the same period). The poem therefore appears as a mosaic of written quotations and soundbites, a vortex of cultural elements surfacing now and then in the polyphony of human history. Robert Frost wrote dramatic monologues in colloquial speech, housed in conventional meters. His favorite topics are the life of the New Englanders, their everyday activities, their experience of solitude and hardships.

In the second half of the twentieth century, Edwin Morgan chose to introduce unfamiliar perspectives on human experience, by having, not men and women, but the Loch Ness monster ("The Loch Ness Monster," 1968), a computer ("The Computer's First Christmas Card," 1968), or a dolphin ("The Dolphin's Song," 1970) speak. His most daring experiment is "Message Clear," a deconstruction of a single line drawn from the gospel of St. John ("I am the resurrection and the life"), reorganized over fifty-five lines including typographical gaps and a variety of missing letters. The various words and texts which emerge from the truncated line problematize questions of interpretation and communication, as there is no intention of creating the illusion of a "real" speaker. Richard Howard's "Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565" (1995) is a tribute to Browning's "My Last Duchess" (*Dramatic Lyrics*, 1842) and a sequel to it at the same time. Like Browning, to whom he refers in the dedication page of *Untitled Subjects* (1969), Howard's interest in the dramatic monologue is to explore the historical dimension of texts as well as the textual dimension of history. But "Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565"

illustrates other features of the dramatic monologue. First, it makes use of archaisms, mannerisms, or words belonging to a specific jargon so as to identify the speaker:

I see that the Duke,  
by his own lights or perhaps, more properly  
said, by his own *tenebrosity*°,            °obscurity  
could offer some excuse  
for such cunctation° . . .                    °tardiness

(ll.52–56)

Secondly, one notices the metalinguistic quality of the poem: the speaker comments upon the words selected by other persons or by himself. As a corollary, italics and capitalized words are used so as to lay the stress on important words or phrases in the poem—although of course they might mean more than the speaker himself expects. Finally, the poem displays a sophisticated typographical layout, so as to create effects of rhythm and suspense. Indeed, in its development over the twentieth century, the dramatic monologue increasingly insists on its condition as text.

More recently, Carol Ann Duffy's masterful use of the dramatic monologue enabled her, as one critic put it, "to popularise complex ideas about language and its political role and meaning" (Byron 130). Her poems deal with speakers who are abusers or abused individuals unaware of their own shortcomings. In "Standing Female Nude," a prostitute who sits for a painter provides oblique comments on the part played by women in art:

Six hours like this for a few *francs*.  
Belly nipple arse in the window light,  
he drains the colour from me. Further to the right,  
Madame. And do try to be still.  
I shall be represented analytically and hung  
in great museums. The bourgeoisie will coo  
at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.

(ll.1–7)

A woman, as a sitter, a "muse" or a pictorial topic, tends to be considered only as a body, and finally as an object. Many modern dramatic monologues display a reflection on the dialectic of the self and the other, or more generally, on the self and otherness in a given society: between man and woman, old and young, past and present or future, morality and desire (or body and soul). Such poems explore the way our identity (the self or a collective identity) is constructed, according to the pressure of various socio-cultural contexts. As a consequence, a trend in recent dramatic monologues has been to have highly polemical or unreliable speakers. Problems in assessing the speaker's "moral" or social position contribute to the debunking of the idea of the autonomous subject. Developments of the monologue outside the field of poetry can be perceived in the work of contemporary songwriters, such as Bruce Springsteen and

Steve Earle. Springsteen, in the title song *Nebraska* (1982), assumes the voice of a serial killer minutes before his execution on the electric chair. From *Cruelty* (1973) onwards, the American poet Ai (Florence Anthony, 1947–2010) chooses well-known figures of stars (Marilyn Monroe, James Dean), politicians (Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton) or criminals as speakers for her poems. In “False Witness” (1999), a mother addresses her daughter, and the reader gradually understands that the speaker actually encourages her husband to abuse their child sexually. By exploring such topics, dramatic monologues can convey a very unnerving as well as unwilling sense of complicity. She once declared: “I feel that the dramatic monologue was the form in which I was born to write and I love it as passionately, or perhaps more passionately, than I have ever loved a man.”<sup>3</sup> Other variations on the dramatic monologue conventions include the exploration of a specific female voice, the questioning of the cult of personality, various aspects of social critique, sequences of dramatic monologues (for example, Duncan Bush’s “Are There Still Wolves in Pennsylvania,” 1994). As in Richard Howard’s “Nikolaus Mardruz to his Master Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol, 1565,” late twentieth-century dramatic monologues tend to foreground the processes of representation.

Outside the English-speaking world, the dramatic monologue underwent similar developments. In the 1930s, the Spanish poet Luis Cernuda sought refuge in Great Britain, where he discovered the work of Robert Browning. In Greece, Constantine Cavafy, also influenced by Robert Browning, wrote historical and pseudo-historical dramatic monologues, some tinged with irony. The Argentinean poet Jorge Luis Borges, in a poem entitled “Browning resuelve ser poeta” (“Browning makes up his mind to be a poet,” published in *La rosa profunda*, 1975), makes Browning speak for himself in a dramatic monologue. As a speaker, Browning describes some of the masks that he intends to put on, and he announces his poetic project: “En el dialecto de hoy / diré a mi vez las cosas eternas” (“In today’s dialect I too shall utter eternal things”). In Italy, Eduardo Sanguineti (1930–2010) adapted the genre, and together with the figure of Pound, he influenced the poet Antonio Colinas (1946– ), translator of both Pound and Sanguineti into Spanish, who wrote “Giacomo Casanova acepta el cargo de bibliotecario que le ofrece, en Bohemia, el conde de Waldstein” (“Giacomo Casanova accepts the charge of librarian offered to him by the count of Waldstein, in Bohemia,” *Sepulcro en Tarquinia*, 1976).

If the dramatic monologue has recently been influenced by the invasive presence of various media (the computer, television), it has also managed to influence the media in return. Indeed, the innovative poetics of multiple voices embodying as many viewpoints was put to effective use in the field of cinema. The Japanese writer and translator of Browning in Japanese, Akutagawa Ryûnosuke (1892–1927), wrote his novel *Rashômon* using the stylistic device of multiple perspectives he had found in *The Ring and the Book*. The novel served as a screenplay to Akira Kurosawa’s film, *Rashômon*, which won the Golden Palm at the Cannes Festival in 1950. In contemporary society, the dramatic monologue has undergone a popular resurgence in the form of ventriloquism and stand-up comedy, where the comedian engages in a dialogue with a puppet,

an imaginary addressee, or the audience. Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads* (1988) and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (1996) share Browning's blending of poetic and theatrical monologues and dramatic irony. As one can see, the dramatic monologue opens up vistas that are surprisingly large: mixing memory and desire, irony and the grotesque, art and politics, and giving voices that attest the on-going flow of the human mind.

## NOTES

- 1 Cornelia Pearsall argues that speakers always want to achieve a purpose.
- 2 According to Culler, the monodrama derives from works by Rousseau in France and Goethe in Germany. Introduced into England by Coleridge and Southey, the genre evolved from conversational poems to monodrama with Alfred Tennyson.
- 3 Quoted at [www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a\\_f/ai/about.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/a_f/ai/about.htm).

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