

Danielle Kennedy
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“Alas! It Is I, I, I”: The Mirror and the Divided Self in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue

[H]ow comes it this man of such large powers, such truth, such force of passion and intellect, such originality, should have been entirely overlooked for the greater part of his life, and even at its close so scantily recognized? ... To us, who never saw his face nor touched his living hand, his image stands out large and clear, unutterably tragic: the image of a great mind and a great soul thwarted in their development by circumstance; of a nature struggling with itself and Fate; of an existence doomed to bear a twofold burden.¹

So writes Amy Levy in her 1883 *Cambridge Review* essay entitled “James Thomson: A Minor Poet,” and in doing so she encapsulates the central problem facing female poets of the Victorian era—how best to claim the authority of a poet when told by society that women should be subordinate. This task became particularly problematic for female poets in the nineteenth century because, as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, creativity was perceived as a fundamentally masculine quality. To support their argument, they cite an 1886 letter from G.M. Hopkins to his friend R.W. Dixon, in which he claims that the “most essential quality” of the artist is “masterly execution, which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women. ... on better consideration it strikes me that the mastery I speak of is not so much in the mind as a puberty in the life of that quality. The male quality is the creative gift.”²

Rather than attempt to achieve authorial autonomy through the lyric, many female poets turned to the relatively new form of the dramatic monologue. Popularized by Robert Browning and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, the dramatic monologue first entered the public consciousness in 1842, when both Tennyson’s *Poems* and Browning’s *Dramatic Lyrics* were published.³ *Poems* featured some of Tennyson’s best-known monologues, including “Ulysses” and “Saint Simeon Stylites,” and was well-received by the public. *Dramatic Lyrics* was less well received than

Poems, but also featured some of Browning's most famous works, such as "My Last Duchess" and "Porphyria's Lover."⁴

Since the release of these works, much effort has been spent in defining the dramatic monologue, but little consensus has been reached. Early critics tended to focus on the dramatic monologue's so-called essential features—colloquial language, the presence of a listener, psychological self-revelation on the part of the speaker, and clear identification of the speaker in a spatial and temporal context. However, few monologues fit all of these criteria,⁵ and looser definitions, such as Donald Hair's theory that the dramatic monologue is a "combination of the drama and the lyric"⁶ are also problematic because they leave little room to differentiate between the dramatic monologue and the lyric. Confusion between the two arises because both forms are typically written in the first person, but the differences between dramatic monologues and lyrics have to do with the distance between the speaker, the audience, and the poet. In the dramatic monologue, the speaker is clearly named or titled in a way that distinguishes him from the poet, and readers are able to easily perceive this distinction.^{7,8} Thus the most important factor in distinguishing the *I* of the dramatic monologue from the *I* of the lyric poem is the distance between poet and speaker on one hand and between reader and speaker on the other.

This distance proved appealing to some female poets, who made the switch from lyric to dramatic monologue. The switch was advantageous for two main reasons: one, the novelty of the form meant that the work produced by female poets would not be compared to poems written by previous generations of male poets, and two, the form's dependence on constructed personae gave female poets enough distance from their personae to express themselves without worrying about direct public censure. As I discovered in the course of writing this thesis, the so-called distancing effect in many cases seemed more like subterfuge. Despite the relative freedom the

form afforded them, female poets repeatedly dramatized feminist issues, woman-specific concerns, and their own autobiographies, a fact that has been relatively ignored by scholars of both dramatic monologues and Victorian women writers.

The “anxiety of authorship” Gilbert and Gubar refer to in *Madwoman in the Attic* alludes to an implicit link between speech and writing by arguing that an author’s anxieties would play out in her writing. The dramatic monologue, as a combination of speech and writing, provides the perfect format to examine the tensions between a female author’s frustrations and those of her speaker. And the Victorian dramatic monologue tradition has practically no female personae, making those constructed by female poets all the more radical. However, the expression and reconciliation of these tensions, as well as the creation of female personae, is not merely a question of “female power,” as Gilbert and Gubar allege, but more specifically a question of voice.

The persona constructed by the speaker, then, can in some ways be an outlet for the poet’s own frustrations. Though Langbaum and others have theorized that the definition of the dramatic monologue depends on the speaker being different from the poet, many nineteenth-century dramatic monologues written by female poets are often so obviously autobiographical or feminist that it would be difficult to argue that the poet has no connection with the speaker. If one grants that the voice of the poet can be heard in the voice of the speaker, it still remains difficult to determine the point at which the personal I (of a lyric poem) intersects with the dramatic I of the monologue. Judith Butler (in *Excitable Speech*) theorizes that subjectivity is created through language, and the subjectivity of a person depends on the language they are allowed to use:

The subject’s production takes place not only through the regulation of the subject’s speech, but through the regulation of the social domain of speakable

discourse. The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all. ... *To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject.*⁹

The dramatic monologue, then, creates a new domain in which female poets may broaden the definition of what is considered speakable.

The presence of a listener is just as crucial to the dramatic monologue as the voice of the speaker. While the presence of an auditor is nearly guaranteed in dramatic monologues written by men, the speakers of female-written dramatic monologues are often speaking to themselves, in isolated settings. The seclusion of the speakers and the frequent futility of their words can be read as analogous to the difficulty female poets had in securing an audience, particularly when one considers the hostility of the Victorian reading public to feminism.¹⁰ The absence of an obvious auditor in the female dramatic monologue raises questions of whom the listener is supposed to be, and to what extent that listener is intruding on the privacy of the speaker. According to Robert Langbaum, the listener serves as a stand-in for the reading audience and allows the reader to feel he has had the same experience the listener has had. Omitting an obvious listener leaves the reader unsure of the validity of his experience, giving it the taint of voyeurism. This technique, I argue, is yet another way for the female poet to deflect attention from herself, which allows her to move farther and farther away from the realms of acceptable speech. Forcing the reader to evaluate the validity of his own experience forces him to think more carefully about what the speaker has told him, which increases the speaker's chances of attracting sympathy from her audience.

The three poets this thesis will examine—Augusta Webster, Amy Levy, and Charlotte Mew—all wrote heavily (but not exclusively) in dramatic monologue format, and their subject matter is

almost exclusively feminist or autobiographical. Each chapter will explore the connections between the poet and the persona she constructs in each monologue. As the Victorian era progresses into Modernism, the coherence of the personae and the subjectivity of the speaker/poet will undergo a progressive change that is linked to both the lives of the poets and the literary conventions of their time. Augusta Webster will use her dramatic monologues—"By the Looking-Glass," "Faded," and "A Castaway"—to champion the causes of downtrodden everywomen, which is consistent with Webster's involvement in women's rights movements in London. Amy Levy's monologues ("Xantippe" and "A Minor Poet") focus on the role of the depressed intellectual woman and artist in society, which parallels her personal life nearly exactly. The Charlotte Mew monologues "The Farmer's Bride" and "The Forest Road" are the most modern of the three. They express her suppressed homoerotic longings while calling into question the coherence of the subject.

CHAPTER ONE: *Augusta Webster*

Outside of scanty biographical details, little is known of Augusta Webster's life. She was born in Dorset in 1837 and her early years were spent on board a ship, where her father was Vice-Admiral. The family moved to Cambridge in 1851 after her father was appointed chief constable, and there Augusta received a classical education, making her extremely well educated for a woman of her time.¹¹ She went on to attend the Cambridge School of Art, and later the South Kensington School, where, according to Ray Strachey, she “nearly dashed the prospects of women art students for ever by being expelled for whistling.”¹²

Starting in 1860 with *Blanche Lisle and Other Poems*, Webster began to publish poetry under the pseudonym Cecil Home. She published two more works, *Lillian Gray* and *Lesley's Guardians*, in 1864. Her education enabled her to publish well-received translations of *Prometheus Bound* in 1866 and *Medea* in 1868, both of which were published under her own name. Christine Sutphin notes that Webster's personal satisfaction with her education is difficult to ascertain, though it seems apparent that her education was much better than that of many of the women in her poems. Sutphin also cites Elizabeth Lee's assertion that Webster learned Greek in order to help a younger brother, which places her learning “within traditional boundaries of feminine service to others.”¹³ However, Webster's intellectual and literary interests were likely what compelled her.

In 1863 she married Thomas Webster, a law lecturer at Trinity College, with whom she had only one child. At some point during the 1860s, Webster and her family moved to London, where she continued to pursue writing and become increasingly involved in politics. She wrote for *The Examiner* during the 1870s, and was the regular poetry reviewer for the *Athenaeum* for

several years during the 1880s and '90s.¹⁴ Webster continued to write creatively, publishing two collections of dramatic monologues, *Dramatic Studies* (1866) and *Portraits* (1870).

Webster's political views are easy enough to ascertain. In her writing and activism, she showed fervent support for women's education, employment opportunities, and suffrage. In 1879, she published a collection of her political essays, ironically titled *A Housewife's Opinions*, under her own name, indicating that she felt no shame in expressing her opinions publicly. Webster also served on the London School Board, where she exercised considerable influence, particularly in the promotion of women's education.¹⁵

As a writer, Webster was much acclaimed during her lifetime. H. Buxton Forman, though he disliked her poetry, acknowledged that he had "more than once seen claimed for her the first place among the women-poets of England."¹⁶ Edmund Stedman, in his survey of Victorian poets, claimed her verse was "nearly equal ... to that of the best of her sister artists." He added:

She has a dramatic faculty unusual with women, a versatile range, and much penetration of thought; is objective in her dramatic scenes and longer idylls, which are thinner than Browning's, but less rugged and obscure; shows great culture, and is remarkably free from the tricks and dangerous mannerisms of recent verse.¹⁷

When Webster died in 1894, her reputation remained solid. Theodore Watts-Dunton wrote in her obituary that Webster belonged to "the noble band represented by George Eliot ... and Miss Cobbe, who, in virtue of lofty purpose, purity of soul, and deep sympathy with suffering humanity, are just now far ahead of the men."¹⁸ Webster's sonnet sequence *Mother and Daughter*, unfinished at the time of her death, was published posthumously in 1895 with a glowing introduction written by William Michael Rossetti.

However, critics tended to shy away from praising her most overtly politicized writing. As Angela Leighton notes, Webster's poetry was frequently praised for its so-called masculine

strength, by which critics seem to mean her tendency to avoid writing about matters of the heart in favor of socio-political content. When one compares Webster's work to that of a poet like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the differences are clear. Both have written poems about aging—Browning's "How do I love thee?" and Webster's "Faded." But while Browning's lyric focuses on her heart's personal response to love over the period of a relationship, Webster's monologue details the sufferings brought on by aging and remaining unmarried.

But the praise was not without tinges of anxiety; Mackenzie Bell, writing for Miles's *The Poets and the Poetry of the Century*, mentions the "virility" that distinguishes Webster from her female contemporaries. But Bell, a typical Victorian, cannot let this word go unmodified:

Virile, however, as is the strength of the writer, her sex is constantly declaring itself by a discernment of the most secret workings of the heart of Woman such as is far beyond the reach of masculine eyes, and a passionate, almost it might be said, a biased sympathy with the cause of Woman in her relation to Man.¹⁹

These "biased" sympathies, it should be noted, are not anthologized in Miles' work; instead, she is represented by "a selection of disappointingly innocuous lyrics."²⁰ So Webster's "virility," by which critics seem to mean her strength and clarity of expression, paradoxically means that her most "virile" ideas are ignored. This idea—to speak but not to be heard—recurs in Webster's dramatic monologues, as readers are presented with portraits of women whose voices are marginalized and unfamiliar perhaps even to themselves.

"By the Looking-Glass" / "Faded"

Two of Webster's dramatic monologues, "Faded" and "By the Looking-Glass," can be read as companion pieces. In both monologues, the speaker gazes at herself in a mirror and describes the ways in which she finds herself lacking compared to Victorian feminine ideals. In both pieces, Webster uses the trope of the mirror to show how the act of looking has been distorted to the

extent that a woman cannot trust the validity of her own gaze. “By the Looking-Glass” begins with the speaker, who has just returned from a party, talking to herself in a mirror. Attempting to fit in with the others at the party has been difficult, as the monologue’s opening lines attest: “Light and laughter without, but what within? / Are these like me?” (5-6). She describes the party scene as “lips that smile and the voices that prate / To a ballroom tune for the fashion’s sake,” and the forced half rhyme of these lines parallels the forced social conventions of the party. In “Faded,” an old woman addresses her younger face, which she fears will now “flout” her for the fadedness of the face she has now (15). The speaker in “Faded” notes her “drearier” old self (7), and the speaker in “Looking-Glass” says that she sees “all through [her] gloom” (8), indicating the extent to which the conceptions these women have of themselves are shaped by their impressions of their physical beauty.

Both poems then describe the ways in which their perceived lack of beauty alienates them from themselves and others. The speaker in “Looking-Glass” tries to see herself as a stranger would, but “alas! it is I, I, I, / Ungainly, common” (25-26). Ironically, strangers seem to perceive her attractiveness much more readily than she does; the speaker describes overhearing someone at a party tell his companion that the speaker “‘is not so plain. / See, the mouth is shapely, the nose not ill’” (27-28). The speaker in “Faded” also describes her physical beauty ironically—she calls old women like herself “lifeless husks” (77), suggesting that old women are all surface and hollow inside, when the opposite is clearly true.

Both poems admit that marriage is the only path to fulfillment for a woman. The speaker in “By the Looking-Glass” defiantly declares that she does not “weep at the wedding chimes” (80), though she knows her age “will be lone in its home” (79). The speaker in “Faded” frankly states that unmarried women “lose the very instinct of their lives” (40), becoming “song-birds

left voiceless, diswinged flies of the air” (41). The implication is that a woman’s only purpose in life is to be married. The speaker in “Faded” acknowledges that women depend on marriage and motherhood to give them an identity: “girls so wait, / Careless and calm, not judging what they shall be; / Only they know life has not reached them yet” (113-115). In her essay “Husband-Hunting and Match-Making,” Webster elaborates on the necessity of marriage in giving young women an identity:

... marriage is not merely the happiest and fittest condition to which they can look forward, but the only happy and fit condition—the only escape from dependence on charity or on their own incompetences, from loss of social position, and from all the hardships and hazards of an unskilled gentlewoman’s precarious existence.²¹

This implication is corroborated by the speaker in “Looking-Glass,” who notes that “the right of a woman is being fair,” but “her heart must starve if she miss that dower, / For how should she purchase the look and the smile?” (13-15). These lines illustrate the central paradox in the lives of both speakers: without male attention, she cannot find happiness, but the happiness she lacks is necessary in attracting a man.

Despite the conversation overheard by the speaker in “Looking-Glass” about her more pleasant attributes, she dismisses their observations, noting that she has a “partly a painter’s skill” (31) and that she has “fed ... / On beauty” (33-34). Both of these statements imply that she sees beauty as an ideal, and fails to recognize that many factors contribute to a person’s attractiveness. However, the speakers (both in “Looking-Glass” and more obviously in “Faded”) repeatedly identify beauty with youth (“a light young heart”) and joy (“the joy of the flying hour”), two attributes that are broad enough to allow variation. The speaker in “Looking-Glass” also seems to acknowledge that beauty has a class-based component. She describes her reflection as “A clumsy creature smelling of earth, / What fancy could lend her the angel’s wings? / She

looks like a boorish peasant's fit mate. / Why! What a mock at the pride of birth, / Fashioned by nature for menial things" (43-47). The speaker's mention of angel's wings evokes the archetype of the angel in the house, which contrasts with her self-image of "a clumsy creature smelling of earth ... fashioned by nature for menial things" (43, 47). The speaker's description of herself in second person also demonstrates the extent to which she has become alienated from her own reflection.

Both speakers note that their dearth of marriage prospects has alienated them from their families. The speaker in "Looking-Glass" describes falling in love with a man who later proposed to her more attractive sister. She claims she was not in love with him, and that she retains her "scatheless maidenly pride," but her words clearly indicate otherwise:

But it might have been—for did he not speak
 With that slow sweet cadence that seemed made deep
 By a meaning—Hush! He has chosen his bride ...
 And I have no cause to weep,
 I have not bowed me so low (131-136).

Though her would-be suitor chose the speaker's sister, he seems to recognize that he has hurt the speaker: "I see him watch me at times, and his cheek / Crimsons a little, a little pales, / If his eye meets mine for a moment long" (156-158). She seems to think a change in her relationship with her sister is also inevitable: "I think she loved me till now— ... But his lightest fancy is more, far more, / To her than all the love that I live" (193-196). The speaker in "Faded" describes a dream in which she her body died but her soul remained alive. She says she had "grown viewlessness" (82). What is significant about the dream is that, after her death, the speaker is not remembered by her family. Though her dream-self clings to them, begging for acknowledgement, they do not see her.

The final lines of “By the Looking-Glass” feature the speaker directly referring to her “self.” She prays that her “wild thoughts” (213) will “stray / Weakly, selfishly” (214) away from her, allowing her to sleep. Here, the speaker acknowledges that her despair comes from her perception of herself, but is unable to see the difference between her inner and outer selves. Unlike the speaker in “By the Looking-Glass,” the speaker in “Faded” is able to come to terms with her face by the monologue’s end by noting the similarities between her physical decay and the decay of the painting of her younger self. She says “Both shall have had our fate ... decay, neglect, / Loneliness, and then die and never a one / In the busy world the poorer for our loss” (163-165). This ending, while still fairly bleak, depicts beauty as a commodity rather than an artistic ideal, which mitigates the speaker’s despair. The ending of the poem addresses an unheard and unseen auditor, who draws the speaker’s attention to the lateness of the day. She realizes she can hear her sister singing in the drawing room, indicating that she is able to take pleasure in her sister’s singing even if she can no longer take part in her world.

“A Castaway”

Probably Webster’s most famous dramatic monologue, “A Castaway” brings Victorian culture’s obsession with sex and capitalism to its apex, detailing the life and opinions of a prostitute. Webster depends on the distance inherent in the form of the dramatic monologue to express her points; as a respectable woman, she could not have said these things otherwise.

“A Castaway” begins with the fallen woman speaker reading her old diary and being shocked that she was ever such a “good girl.” The speaker makes it clear that this way of life would not have made her happy: she calls herself a “colourless young rose” (8) and notes that she had “no wishes and no cares, almost no hopes” (21). She then looks at herself in the mirror,

and, unlike the speakers in “By the Looking-Glass” and “Faded,” is able to separate society’s conceptions of her from the reality of what she sees:

... a woman sure,
 No fiend, no slimy thing out of the pools,
 A woman with a ripe and smiling lip
 That has no venom in its touch I think,
 With a white brow on which there is no brand;
 A woman none dare call not beautiful,
 Not womanly in every woman’s grace (27-33).

Though she acknowledges her beauty, the speaker notes that without it, she probably would not have been led into prostitution. She mocks the class distinctions that pervade the sex industry, arguing that her “modesty” keeps her from being “drunk in the streets ... / At infamous corners with my likenesses / Of the humbler kind” (48-50), but she owns her “kindredship with any drab / who sells herself ... although she crouch / In fetid garrets and I have a home / All velvet and marqueterie and pastilles ... our traffic’s one” (68-76). In the next section, she rails against housewives who hate prostitutes, calling them “Dianas under lock and key” (129) and saying they have never faced temptation. Despite her outrage at their scorn, the speaker brazenly declares that she has “looked coolly on [her] what and why” and accepted herself (136-137).

The speaker goes on to express an idle desire to return to her pre-fallen days, but knows that she would not truly be happy now that she has experienced life on her own:

I might again live the grave blameless life
 Among such simple pleasures, simple cares:
 But could they be my pleasures, be my cares?
 The blameless life, but never the content—
 Never. How could I henceforth be content
 With any life but one that sets the brain
 In a hot merry fever with its stir? (226-232)

The speaker radically implies that prostitution has provided her with a level of mental stimulation that is preferable to that of a housewife. Her use of the word “grave” is telling, and

implies the downside of becoming the angel in the house. In addition to this, prostitution, she argues, is more profitable than typical women's work: "But where's the work? More sempstresses than shirts; / And defter hands at white work than are mine / Drop starved at last" (266-268). The speaker implies that the reason for the dearth of gainful employment for women is "woman's superfluity" (299): what's more, she blames God for putting "too many women in the world" (296). According to her, the problem is also "the silly rules this silly world / Makes about women!" (377-378). The speaker wonders why there should be a "pretense of teaching them / What no one ever cares that they should know" (379-380).

Though the speaker has accepted her lot, she still rails against the societal forces that condemn fallen women, pointing out that no one will offer any help to these women once they have fallen. She likens fallenness to quicksand: once one falls in, it is nearly impossible to help them without falling in yourself. She details her brother's grudging efforts to help her—he gave her "five pounds, / Much to him then" (542-543). Now, she notes, he has "married a sort of heiress, ... / A dapper little madam dimple cheeked / And dimple brained" (610-612). The speaker knows that even though she used to be close to her brother, the fact that he married this kind of woman means that he will never speak to her again. By mentioning that the brother married an heiress, Webster also implies that he has engaged in another more socially acceptable form of prostitution.

At the end of the monologue, the speaker hears a bell announcing the arrival of a visitor, which the speaker welcomes due to her isolation. She realizes it is a woman she hates, but she is forced to speak to her anyway, reasoning that "half a loaf / Is better than no bread" (628-629). This statement drives home the central point of the poem: if a woman chooses an unconventional lifestyle, she can expect to be lonely.

All three of these monologues involve the female speaker gazing at herself in a mirror, an act that is typically associated with feminine beauty rituals and vanity. Webster also uses the trope of the mirror to show how the male gaze has taken over: women now see themselves as they think men see them. Webster inverts this trope in her dramatic monologues by situating her speakers in front of a mirror as they experience or narrate their revelations about the place of women in society. As they enter the realm of impossible speech, the female speakers face themselves, thereby affirming their own voices, as well as the possibility of speech for female audiences. Of the three poets this thesis will examine, Webster appears to have the least immediate connection to the speakers in her dramatic monologues. She was by most accounts a happy wife and mother, though her views of marriage were pointedly realistic: she argued that a happy marriage required not love, but “a certain healthy indifference.”²² However, Webster’s seeming satisfaction with her life meant that her speakers tend to represent the universal concerns of all women (or certain groups of women, as in “A Castaway”). The fact that her speakers tend to be Everywomen, rather than unique characters, comes from her advocacy for women’s education and welfare. Webster, more than Amy Levy or Charlotte Mew, uses the dramatic monologue primarily as a means of social critique, but the unstable presence of auditors in Webster’s monologues point toward the continuing difficulties female poets have in establishing the possibility of the subject.

CHAPTER TWO: *Amy Levy*

Amy Levy was born on November 10, 1861. From 1879 to 1881, she attended Newnham College, Cambridge, one of the few Cambridge schools that allowed women, and was its first Jewish student (*Victorian Women Poets* 589).²³ Her publishing career began early. At the age of 13, she published a poem in *The Pelican*, a feminist journal, and continued to publish throughout the 1880s—three volumes of poetry, three novels, some translations, a number of essays, and many short stories. In September 1889, she committed suicide at the age of 27.

Many of Levy's texts provide a nearly transparent look at the evolution of her consciousness and subjectivity. Linda Beckman has noted that her subjectivity takes shape "in negotiation with her discordant experiences as a member of various groups, all of them marginal."²⁴ In addition to being a woman writer, Levy also suffered from depression, was Jewish, had homosexual tendencies, and was afflicted with progressive hearing loss.

Angela Leighton writes that the notoriety of Levy's novel *Reuben Sachs*, as well as her involvement in various socialist organizations, allowed her to be introduced to a wide circle of writers, including Mathilde Blind, Oscar Wilde, and William Michael Rossetti.²⁵ However, an 1891 entry in Michael Field's diary suggests that Levy's hearing loss may have affected her ability to socialize with others, reporting that she was "a delightful, silent smoking companion ... She was deaf & often quiet."²⁶ Those she met also had a tendency to fixate on the "Jewishness" of her appearance. The Irish poet Katharine Tynan, upon meeting Levy at a club for women writers, described her as "... that tragic personality ... sitting opposite me, her charming little Eastern face dreamy in a cloud of tobacco smoke."²⁷ The writer Harry Quilter, in an essay about Amy Levy, calls her "a small dark girl, of *unmistakably Jewish type*."²⁸ Both her deafness and

the tendency of those around her to romanticize what they saw as her “Jewish” qualities could have contributed to Levy’s sense of isolation and depression.

In the winter of 1885, she traveled to Italy with a friend, Clementina Black, who was a socialist and suffragist. While Levy was in Florence, she stayed with the novelist Vernon Lee, who was known for engaging in passionate friendships with women. It is difficult to know how Levy responded to this atmosphere of charged female friendship and artistic activity, but it may have allowed her to feel more open about her purported homosexuality. However, Levy’s poem “To Vernon Lee” concludes pessimistically (“Hope unto you, and unto me Despair”), indicating the outcome of Levy’s stay was negative.

“Xantippe”

In a passage from Amy Levy’s most well-known novel, *Reuben Sachs*, one character writes in her prayer book: “Cursed art Thou, O Lord my God, Who has had the cruelty to make me a woman ... I have gone on saying that prayer all my life—the only one.”²⁹ This sentiment is repeated in “Xantippe,” Levy’s monologue written from the perspective of the wife of Sophocles: “ ... I grew / Fiercer, and cursed from out my inmost heart / The Fates which marked me an Athenian maid” (231-233). Historically, Xantippe was known as a scold; her name has been used allusively in literature to describe ill-tempered women or wives.³⁰ In the poem, Levy re-envisioned her as an intellectual woman frustrated with her unfulfilling marriage, and by doing so critiques the misogyny and homoeroticism of the male academy.

The poem begins in the morning; Xantippe is apparently near death: “What, have I waked again? I never thought / To see the rosy dawn, or ev’n this grey, / Dull, solemn stillness, ere the dawn has come” (1-3). Her observation begins a meditation on nature; she says she has been

dreaming of “weary” and “stormy” days, but also of “gladsome” and “sunny” days, yet “all their sunshine seem’d so sad, / As though the current of the dark To-Be / Had flow’d, prophetic, through the happy hours” (13-18). Xantippe’s altered perception of these happier days, as well as her remembrance of “weary days [she] thought not to recall” (13) implies depression, from which Levy herself suffered.

She then addresses her ostensible audience, her maids, who have overslept and forgotten to wake her. Though Xantippe addresses them at least three times throughout the monologue, they never respond, nor do they seem to take to heart what she tells them. This is made clear at the end of the poem, when she tells them, “I would not that ye wept; / ... with the young, such grief / Soon grows to gratulation, as, ‘her love / Was withered by misfortune; mine shall grow / All nurtured by the loving’” (266-270). Angela Leighton notes that the implications of her statement—that the cycle of marital dissatisfaction will repeat—is one of the prevailing themes of Levy’s work; that is, “her vision of a world which is unredeemed by faith, love, or social change.”³¹

Xantippe recalls that, in her earlier years, her views of nature were not affected by her gloom; the glimpses she caught from her window of ships at sea reminded her of her own “vague desires, ... hopes and fears, / ... [and] eager longings” (30-31). But these ambitions only served to isolate her from other girls her age: “What cared I for the merry mockeries / Of other maidens sitting at the loom?” (33-34). But by the time she was 17, she was considered to be unusually beautiful, which only made her more aware of the frivolity of her search for knowledge. Xantippe says she had not yet learned her lesson of “dumb patience” (50); she “stood / At Life’s great threshold with a beating heart, / And soul resolved to conquer and attain” (50-52). Levy’s use of the phrase “dumb patience” here implies that once Xantippe realized her beauty, she had

to wait for a man to take notice of her; the soul that wished to “conquer and attain” would inevitably be conquered and attained by someone else.

When Xantippe meets Socrates, her description of him focuses on his intelligence and charisma, rather than his physical attractiveness. She notes with a hint of envy that “many gathered round to hear his words,” despite his unattractiveness (57). Xantippe observes that

The richest gem lies hidden furthest down,
And is the dearer for the weary search;
We grasp the shining shells which strew the shore,
Yet swift we fling them from us; but the gem
We keep for aye and cherish (61-65).

Though she ostensibly refers to Socrates’ intelligence, she also implies that beauty (what is prized in women) is sought after, but not deeply appreciated. What is absent from her description of her first encounters with Socrates is any evidence of sexual or romantic passion. Her lack of attraction to him is confirmed when she weeps after learning her father has arranged their marriage, but she optimistically hopes that Socrates will aid her in the pursuit of knowledge: “I, ... Led by his words ... Should lift the shrouding veil from things which be” (88-90). Clearly, Xantippe’s motivation for marriage has everything to do with her desire for knowledge and nothing to do with any perceived love for Socrates. Despite the ancient setting, Xantippe’s decision was still relevant for Victorian audiences. In particular, her decision evokes the heroine of Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, Dorothea Brooke, and her decision to marry the aging Mr. Casaubon in the hopes that he will teach her “masculine” knowledge.

However, marrying Socrates did not initiate Xantippe into the world of (masculine) ideas. She notes that her “high philosopher” (116) husband did not deign “to stoop to touch so slight a thing / As the fine fabric of a woman’s brain” (118-119). Levy’s use of the phrase “fine fabric” is significant: it alludes to the idea that masculine notions of female intelligence are socially

constructed and potentially inaccurate. Continuing her reflection on the disappointment she felt in the early days of her marriage, she describes herself as “wholly incredulous that Nature meant / So little, who had promised me so much” (131-132). Instead of taking part in Socrates’ intellectual discussions with his friends, as her intellectual nature desires, Xantippe is forced to serve them. Levy infuses the scene with a great deal of homoeroticism: one of Socrates’ pupils, “Alkibiades the beautiful” (161) sat at Socrates’ feet with his arm draped around his knee. As she brings fresh wine-skins to them, she overhears Socrates:

“This fair Aspasia, which our Perikles
Hath brought from realms afar, and set on high
In our Athenian city, hath a mind,
I doubt not, of a strength beyond her race;
And makes employ of it, beyond the way
Of women nobly gifted: woman’s frail—
Her body rarely stands the test of soul;
She grows intoxicate with knowledge; throws
The laws of custom, order, ‘neath her feet,
Feasting at life’s great banquet with wide throat” (163-172).

Socrates’ words echo common Victorian views of female sexuality and education—if women become “overly” or improperly educated, they may make themselves prone to hysteria or licentiousness. Unlike men, who it is assumed can consume knowledge responsibly just as they imbibe alcohol, women become “intoxicate” from it. Though there is no explicit record in Amy Levy’s letters of her dissatisfaction with her education, biographers have noted that the first female students at Cambridge and Oxford, of which Levy was one, often dealt with hostile male students, to the extent that they had to be taught separately (Beckman 38).

In Levy’s unpublished verse play “Reading,” she satirizes male professors and students.

At one point, a female student, Cornelia, says to a male student, Bob:

Ah sir, I detest
The shallow sentiment of men like you,
Who kill us, use us with as much remorse

As they would kill a stag; or ride a horse,
 But like to keep us sound, and free from vice,
 Fattened with meekness, for the sacrifice (Beckman 40).

The condescension Cornelia observes is also present in Socrates and his friends. When Xantippe reacts angrily to Socrates' speech, his friends look at her contemptuously and Socrates condescendingly tells them that "here's another phase / Of your black-browed Xantippe" (198-199). His response illustrates the misogyny inherent in the male academy.

Enraged, Xantippe flings the wine-skin to the marble floor, where it bursts. She tells readers that she "fled across the threshold, hair unbound," her "white garment stained to redness" (218-219). Though the details in these lines—her unbound hair and stained garment—connote a kind of liberation, it rings hollow, as she implies when she describes her "beating heart / Flooded with all the flowing tide of hopes / Which once had gushed out golden, now sent back / Swift to their sources, never more to rise . . ." (219-222). Xantippe's act of ruining the service her husband expected her to provide is her only means of revenge against the patristic world she has been forbidden from entering. The fact that her dress is stained and her hair unbound implies the damage she has done to herself as a result of her action, and the self-hatred on which her act was predicated.

Once she realized her husband would never see her as an intellectual equal, she embraced a "fierce acceptance" (236) of her fate, becoming a "household vessel" (237) and spinning thread all day long, in the same futile way that Odysseus' wife, Penelope, did while her husband was away. Once her husband is executed, she stops spinning and says that she was not informed when Socrates had died, since everyone assumed her only concern was that she'd be taken care of. The irony is that the connection she was expected to build with her husband through marriage was ultimately considered unimportant. The poem concludes with Xantippe begging her maids to

open her window so she can see the sun rise—she is literally searching for air and light (i.e., life) that cannot be found in her home.

“A Minor Poet”

“A Minor Poet” is perhaps Amy Levy’s most starkly autobiographical dramatic monologue. The speaker in the poem, who is unnamed, seems to be a writer who is dissatisfied with life and suicidal. The speaker describes locking herself in a room so that no one will interrupt her, then begins to explain why she feels suicide is necessary:

Then again,
 ‘The common good,’ and still, ‘the common, good,’
 And what a small thing was our joy or grief
 When weighed with that of thousands (15-18).

These lines illustrate the root of the speaker’s depression; she cannot live in a world that she feels has no place for her. Her sense of isolation and lack of belonging is reiterated further on the poem, when she describes herself as “a blot, a blur, a note / All out of tune in this world’s instrument” (50-51).

Levy’s own struggles with suicide have been detailed by her biographers. Angela Leighton notes that, a few years after Levy’s death, the following rumor appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

... two literary ladies ... one of whom is widely famous—were spending a holiday at the seaside together, and both were indulging in very gloomy views of life. After discussing the question they both decided to commit suicide, and the younger hurried home and but too effectually carried out her purpose. The other happily thought better of the matter, and refused to fulfill her terms of the contract.³²

Leighton explains that Levy had gone to the ocean with Olive Schreiner a month before her death, and they had formed a close friendship. Schreiner refuted the rumor, telling Havelock

Ellis in a letter that she was “always trying to cheer up Amy Levy.”³³ She added that Levy had just returned a book to her, with the inscription “It might have helped me once; it is too late now; philosophy cannot help me.”³⁴

The last stanza of the monologue is the most puzzling one. The speaker begins by describing a woman who “did not break [the speaker’s] heart, / Yet haply had her heart been otherwise / [The speaker’s] had not now been broken” (160-164). These lines, which suggest some kind of homoerotic desire if one assumes the speaker to be female, possibly align with Levy’s own rumored homosexuality. Though such things are difficult to determine, there exists a great deal of homosexual longing in her writing and almost no mention of passion for men. Levy also developed a very strong attachment to the writer Vernon Lee, who was known for forming intense, erotic friendships with other women. However, these few lines, which are the only of their kind in the monologue, are quickly tossed aside by the speaker: “... Yet, who knows?” (164). She adds that her life “was jarring discord from the first” (165), perhaps referring to Amy Levy’s otherness. In the concluding lines of the monologue, the speaker casts herself “from this bleak world, into the heart of night, / The dim, deep bosom of the universe” (168-169). The speaker’s final longing to be subsumed by the universe illustrates the extent of her depression. Her struggles throughout the poem to create a place for herself in the world have become a heavy burden she must fling down.

Both “Xantippe” and “A Minor Poet” show how the dramatic monologue can be used as a staging ground for the poet’s struggle to achieve voice. The speakers in both poem are intellectual women who struggle to be heard by their peers and families; Levy’s emphasis on the isolation and quiet rage of these speakers parallels the female poet’s struggle for audience, once again questioning the possibility of the female self.

CHAPTER 3: *Charlotte Mew*

Charlotte Mew was born in London in 1869, the third of seven children and one of the few to survive childhood. The family's second son, Frederick, died in infancy; in 1876, two more sons

died.³⁵ When Mew was 10, she began attending the Gower Street School for girls, which was run by the suffragist Lucy Harrison. Mew developed a passionate attachment to Harrison, to the extent that, when Harrison left the school, Mew was so grief-stricken she began to bang her head against the wall.³⁶ Frightened by his daughter's reaction, Mew's father persuaded Lucy Harrison to teach her privately. Whatever the emotional effect of these years was, it seems they were also intellectually formative. Lucy Harrison passed on to her pupils a love of Emily Brontë, the Brownings, Christina Rossetti, and Alice Meynell.³⁷ In Mew's later career, these early influences were apparent.

In 1888, the Mew family moved to Gordon Street, in Bloomsbury. Charlotte was 19. Around this time, Mew's oldest brother Henry was institutionalized following a mental breakdown. Only a few years later, the family's youngest daughter, Freda, began to show similar symptoms and was also sent to an asylum. These family burdens weighed heavily on Charlotte and her remaining sister, Anne, particularly in the face of the Victorian era's attitudes toward insanity. Angela Leighton notes that mental instability, along with other diseases, was thought to be an inherited deficiency; individuals had a responsibility not to pass them on. This belief would have encouraged Mew and her sister to refrain from seeking out marriage proposals, and probably added dimensions of secrecy and paranoia to their lives.³⁸

Following the death of her father and oldest brother, Charlotte and her sister Anne went on a long holiday to France after finding a nurse for their invalid mother. Charlotte was apparently quite taken with France and its "foreignness," returning several times throughout her life. Leighton notes the tendency of her stories and poems to be set in France and have French protagonists and theorizes that France (no doubt with its connotations of freedom and otherness) may have aligned more closely to her imagination than England.³⁹

Once Mew returned to London in the early 1890s, she began to identify herself with Aesthetic and Decadent circles. In 1894 she submitted a story, “Passed,” to the infamous *Yellow Book*, where it was accepted enthusiastically and published. However, Oscar Wilde’s 1895 arrest, allegedly with a yellow book in his hand, cast a shadow over the magazine’s reputation. Mew did not entirely withdraw her support for *The Yellow Book*, but she began to publish her works that appeared in it under a pseudonym, Charles Catty.⁴⁰ After this scandal, Mew never regained the momentum toward fame that seemed to accompany her previous success. She wrote less and became increasingly withdrawn, which affected her both personally and professionally.⁴¹

Given her childhood infatuation with Lucy Harrison, it would not have been unreasonable to suggest that Mew’s sexual and romantic passions were largely directed toward women. Perhaps tellingly, Charlotte and Anne’s pet parrot, Wek, was known for loudly proclaiming his objection to male visitors.⁴² However, the stories of Charlotte’s attraction to women that survive are dubious, due to hearsay and Mew’s own absolute silence on the subject. She fell in love with Ella D’Arcy, a fellow *Yellow Book* contributor, and in 1902 went to Paris to visit her. D’Arcy was heterosexual and could never have returned her interest, but Mew’s shyness and insecurity sabotaged whatever overtures she wished to make. At one point, Charlotte was supposed to meet Ella, but defaulted at the last minute without explanation: “E. d’A wished me to meet her but as it was wet I did not feel inclined—and waiting for a break started off by myself in the direction ... and prowled about the Quartier Latin.”⁴³ Fitzgerald also points out that Paris was fairly open in 1902—“lesbians met by mutual understanding at the *Chat Noir*, ... and in rue Georges-Ville the Marquise de Belboeuf, dressed in mechanic’s overalls, reigned mildly

over her circle as ‘Missy’—but Mew was unable to summon the courage even to go into a café by herself.⁴⁴

In 1913, Mew fell in love again, this time with May Sinclair, who apparently took Mew’s confession much less politely than D’Arcy. In a letter sent to Sinclair’s biographer, Dr. Theophilus Boll, the novelist G.B. Stern (“Peter”) recalls how Sinclair had told him that “a lesbian poetess, Charlotte M., had chased her upstairs into the bedroom—‘And I assure you, Peter, and I assure you, Rebecca, I had to leap the bed five times!’”⁴⁵ The hyperbolic absurdity of the story suggests that it was elaborated on for entertainment, and there is little doubt Mew was humiliated.

Mew did not publish a volume of her poetry until 1916, when *The Farmer’s Bride* was published by the Poetry Bookshop, a small imprint, bookstore, and literary gathering place in London. The title poem had appeared in *The Nation* in 1912, where it attracted considerable interest.⁴⁶ The volume only improved her reputation in England’s literary circles; Thomas and Florence Hardy invited her to their home in 1918, and Hardy later wrote that she was “far and away the best living woman poet, who will be read when others are forgotten.”⁴⁷

“The Farmer’s Bride”

In “The Farmer’s Bride,” Mew offers what at first appears to be a depiction of the unpleasant realities of marriage relations, but the end of the monologue expresses Mew’s latent homosexuality. The poem’s speaker is a rough country farmer who has acquired a bride “three Summers ago” (1). The poem’s opening lines make clear that he sees marriage as a practical matter; he acknowledges that his bride was perhaps too young to marry, “but more’s to do / At

harvest time than bide and woo” (2-3). What is implicit in the farmer’s statement is the idea that a woman’s consent to marriage is irrelevant.

The farmer’s feeling that his wife may have been too young to marry is confirmed when she tries to run away. From this point in the monologue until the last stanza, he uses animal imagery and similes when describing her, which shows not only his possession of her, but also his inability to understand her: she is like a “frightened fay” (8), she runs “like a hare” (15) ahead of their lanterns, she works around the house “like a mouse” (21). Just before the animal similes begin, the farmer says “her smile went out, and ‘twasn’t [it wasn’t] a woman” (7)—the fact that he calls her “it” and explicitly categorizes her as “not a woman” further displays his inability to understand her or her actions.

When the chase begins, Mew inserts the word “so” before the farmer begins to narrate what happened. This insertion is telling because it implies that the search for the farmer’s bride is inevitable; no possibility for freedom exists. Also telling is the farmer’s use of the word “we” in the next line (“So ... we chased her ...”), indicating that the whole community took part in returning the bride back to the farmer. He adds that “we caught her, fetched her ... / And turned the key upon her” (18-19); the continued use of the communal “we” further establishes both the impossibility of the wife’s escape and the community’s approval of the farmer’s attempts to manage and control his wife.

However, the poem is not strident, despite its pessimistic view of marriage. The farmer is portrayed much too sensitively to be convincingly evil, something that critics of the time seized upon. H.W. Nevinson, the literary critic at *The Nation*, where “The Farmer’s Bride” was first published, commented that the farmer was “much too sympathetic. A man can hardly imagine why the most sensitive of women should run out into the night to avoid him.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the

farmer does seem able to read his bride's body language, if not understand her actions—he says her eyes shout “Not near, not near!” when men approach (25). The final two stanzas of the poem radically revise readers' perceptions of him, as he turns from practical and gruff to romantic and meditative:

Shy as a leveret, swift as he,
 Straight and slight as a young larch tree,
 Sweet as the first wild violets, she,
 To her wild self. But what to me? (30-33).

In the second half of the second stanza, the monologue's consistent iambic tetrameter begins to break down, and the farmer's helplessness and frustration to seep through. He describes the change of seasons from fall to winter; readers infer that soon it will be nearly four years since the farmer and his bride married, and their relationship has yet to be consummated.

The final stanza of “The Farmer's Bride” describes the apex of the farmer's lust, but the poem ends before it can be satisfied. The tempo of the lines speed up here, as the farmer begins to lose control over himself: “Oh! my God! the down, / The soft young down of her, the brown, / The brown of her—her eyes, her hair, her hair!” (44-46). The farmer's overwhelming lust for his bride, which has been suppressed throughout the entire monologue, would probably have been familiar to Charlotte Mew, who was forced to suppress her feelings for other women, but her decision to channel her words through the voice of the farmer gives her an acceptable distance from them.

This monologue is unusual in that it does not appear to have an auditor. Though this is true of many dramatic monologues penned by women, their speakers are usually female and lack the communal support the farmer has. His bride, on the other hand, is voiceless, except when calling animals, so if the farmer has difficulty securing an audience, he is still better off than his bride, who has no way to express herself.

“The Forest Road”

Although Charlotte Mew died well into the Modernist period, her sensibilities are purely Victorian. “The Forest Road,” much more clearly than “The Farmer’s Bride,” illustrates the clash between Mew’s Modernist expression and her Victorian sense of repression. As in “The Farmer’s Bride,” the speaker expresses an intense, withheld lust for her sleeping lover, but unlike the generally strict iambic tetrameter of “The Farmer’s Bride,” the lines in “The Forest Road” stretch on, seemingly dictated by the speaker’s train of thought, rather than by meter.

The poem immediately establishes a contrast between the sleeping lover and the freedom represented by the forest road. Mew eroticizes both: in the poem’s opening lines, the road is described as “breathless” (3), as if it waited for the speaker like an expectant lover. We are told that the lover’s hands are “half-awake, / groping for [the speaker] in sleep” (11-12), an image that is also erotically charged. The fact that Mew chooses to eroticize both the road and the lover implies an equality in the speaker’s options, but the speaker wants to leave her lover, as she makes clear:

I wish that God would take them out of mine
And fold them like the wings of frightened birds
Shot cruelly down, but fluttering into quietness so soon,
Broken, forgotten things; there is no grief for them in the green Spring
When the new birds fly back to the old trees (13-17).

The violence of this metaphor suggests the strength of the speaker’s desire to leave her partner, perhaps in a way that rules out the possibility of the lover forgiving her. The last two lines of the quoted passage introduce an element of self-blame; the speaker seems to believe she will return to old, hurtful habits, just as “new birds fly back to the old trees” (17). Indeed, the speaker goes on to say that God should take care of her lover, since he “does not hurt the frailest, dearest things / As we do in the dark” (22-23). The speaker’s care not to hurt her lover is consistent with

Mew's attitudes toward love. Her biographer writes that Mew was "most scrupulous ... in her treatment of those who were attracted to her,"⁴⁹ and goes on to relate the story of a young woman with tuberculosis who fell in love with Mew and her poetry. The biographer notes that Mew befriended this girl, but "love, for her, was never an excuse for acquisition."⁵⁰

Despite the speaker's desire to leave her lover, she begins to feel some ambivalence, which the poet indicates by combining the nature imagery that pervades the poem with descriptions of her lover's physical attributes:

If you had lain
A long time dead on the rough, glistening ledge
Of some black cliff, forgotten by the tide,
The raving winds would tear, the dripping brine would rust away
Fold after fold of all the loveliness
That wraps you round, and makes you, lying here,
The passionate fragrance that the roses are (27-33).

The fact that, by the end of this passage, her lover has been subsumed by nature implies the speaker's desire to bring her lover with her into the freedom that the forest road represents. Unfortunately, by the end of the poem, the speaker firmly decides to leave, at which point her lover awakens. Until this point, the speaker has been talking while her lover sleeps, but when she awakes, the speaker loses some of her verbal dexterity: "... Sleep. If I could leave you there— / If, without waking you, I could get up and reach the door—! / We used to go together.— Shut, scared eyes" (57-59). The fact that the speaker can only express herself eloquently when her lover is asleep and cannot hear her indicates the speaker's emotional coldness, which is hinted at when she compares her lover's hands to shot birds.

At the end of the poem, the speaker struggles to console her now-upset lover, who has realized the speaker's plans. The speaker acknowledges her lover's broken heart and then says she will strike hers out, as well. The closing lines of the poem involve the speaker calling out to

her soul, which she hears “singing among the trees” (70). The knowledge that the speaker is now separated from both her heart and her soul is both problematic and difficult to believe—this fragmentation of self is consistent with Modernist writing, but her passionate speech is inconsistent with her claim that she is both heartless and soulless. The poem’s ending is, however, consistent with Mew’s views of her own homosexuality—like the speaker, Mew felt certain her longings for women could never be consummated.

Mew’s tendency to write dramatic monologues is directly related to her reluctance to fully embrace her homosexuality. Without the distance between poet and speaker allowed by the dramatic monologue, Mew would have been forced to express her desires more directly, which would have been socially unacceptable, as well as personally unthinkable. Mew’s involvement with *The Yellow Book* at the time of its association with Oscar Wilde’s arrest no doubt made her aware of the consequences of publicly expressing her sexuality. The fact that Wilde’s writing, most notably “The Portrait of Mr. W.H.” and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, figured so heavily in his conviction also would have steered her away from more personal forms of expression. Mew’s reliance on the dramatic monologue form enabled her to speak radically while maintaining formal distance.

CONCLUSION

It would be difficult to consider the female dramatic monologue in depth without determining what separates it from dramatic monologues written by men. Considering the dramatic monologues studied in this thesis, it could be argued that the female-penned dramatic monologue distinguishes itself from Browning and Tennyson through its use as a tool of social critique, whereas the more traditional dramatic monologues critique the nature of the self.

The, in many cases, obvious autobiographical connections between the poets and their speakers strongly suggests that writing the dramatic monologue is a way for female poets to claim some kind of selfhood. But this claim is complicated by the fact that these women speak not through their own voices, but through the voices of others. The voicing of these poets' desires through the personae of others, then, allows female poets to question how the self is constructed, as well as challenge the possibility that a self can be created at all.

The most important thing to consider, then, is the role of the audience in the female-penned dramatic monologue, as the poet's constructed speaker cannot be stable without a clear auditor. In the dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson, the speaker, no matter how pathetic or amoral, can count on the presence of a listener who will give his claims legitimacy. For example, the auditors in Browning's "My Last Duchess" and "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" are unnamed and are assumed to be people with whom the audience can identify. The same is not true of auditors in monologues written by Webster, Levy, or Mew. These auditors, if they are present at all, often do little to induce sympathy in readers; instead, they often highlight the speakers' lack of social relations and confidantes. For example, in Webster's "By the Looking-Glass," "Faded," and "A Castaway," the speakers address themselves, with auditors, if present in the poem, not appearing until the very end. In Levy's poems "Xantippe" and "A Minor

Poet,” the speakers are similarly isolated. By Mew’s “Farmer’s Bride” and “Forest Road,” the lack of a sympathetic auditor has caused a dissociation between poet and persona, suggesting the self constructed by the poet is fragmented.

What these poets dramatize are the necessary conditions of subjectivity: not only the ability to speak but also the ability to be heard. These conditions are often absent for women in real life, just as they are in dramatic monologues. Thus if the traditional purpose of the dramatic monologue is to call into question the nature of the self, the purpose of the female dramatic monologue is to question the possibility of the subject.

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- ³ Poets wrote isolated dramatic monologues prior to Browning and Tennyson, however.
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- ⁵ Howe 3.
- ⁶ Qtd. in Howe 4.
- ⁷ Howe 4-5.
- ⁸ See, for example, T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" or Browning's "Andrea del Sarto."
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- ²⁵ *Victorian Women Poets* 589.
- ²⁶ *Victorian Women Poets* 589.
- ²⁷ Beckman 2-3.
- ²⁸ Beckman 3, my emphasis.
- ²⁹ Levy, Amy. *Reuben Sachs: A Sketch*. London: Macmillan, 1889. *Google Books*. Google. Web. 28 Apr. 2010. 193.
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- ³² *Pall Mall Gazette* (1 April 1892) 2 qtd. in *Victorian Women Poets* 590

³³ *Victorian Women Poets* 590.

³⁴ Schreiner, Olive. *Letters*. Ed. S.C. Cronweigt-Schreiner. Fisher Unwin: London, 1924. 207.

³⁵ Fitzgerald, Penelope. *Charlotte Mew and Her Friends*. New York: Addison-Wesley, 1988. 16-7. Print.

³⁶ Fitzgerald 33-34.

³⁷ Leighton, Angela. *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992. 269. Print.

³⁸ Leighton 272.

³⁹ Leighton 274.

⁴⁰ Leighton 274.

⁴¹ Leighton 275.

⁴² Leighton 275.

⁴³ Fitzgerald 84.

⁴⁴ Fitzgerald 84.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Fitzgerald 133.

⁴⁶ Fitzgerald 150.

⁴⁷ Fitzgerald 174.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Fitzgerald 103.

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald 153.

⁵⁰ Fitzgerald 154.