



**Reconceptualising the Dramatic Monologue: the interlocutory
dynamics of Carol Ann Duffy's poetry**

**Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the Department of English, University of Lancaster in October 2002**

by Jennifer Garrett, B.A.(Hons) M.A.

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Abstract

Previous critics of the dramatic monologue have largely confined their interrogations to the ironic form in the work of male poets. Little attention has been paid to sympathetic and satiric variants of the form and the work of female poets. This thesis claims that a double-stranded inheritance of both an ironic form from Browning, and a sympathetic form from his contemporary Augusta Webster should be recognised for the dramatic monologue in the works of contemporary female poets.

My research is focused on the work of Carol Ann Duffy, who is acclaimed as the foremost contemporary exponent of the form. My thesis argues that the recent development of feminist discourse is a contributory factor to the variation of form and diversity of content in the dramatic monologues of contemporary women poets. My findings demonstrate that much of Duffy's work with the form is inscribed with feminist polemic, and has the potential to disseminate the theories and concepts of 'feminism' into the public domain. A subsidiary element of my research suggests that there is an interrelation between autobiographical writing and women's dramatic monologues.

My readings of ironic, sympathetic and satiric dramatic monologues pay close attention to the interlocutory triad of speaker, audience in the poem, and the external audience, the

readers. My method of stylistic and discursive analysis draws upon an eclectic body of feminist concepts and theories. My own life experience is also, at times, incorporated self-reflexively into my readings.

The thesis is divided into an Introduction, four chapters of readings and analyses, and a Conclusion which ends with a dramatic monologue of my own. The Introduction interrogates existing critics of the form and defines the methodology of my research. Chapters One and Two consider sympathetic and ironic variants of the form. Chapter Three investigates Duffy's use of a multi-voiced variant. Chapter Four focuses on Duffy's fifth collection and assesses the engagement with feminist ideas.

I declare that my thesis, Reconceptualising the Dramatic Monologue: the interlocutory dynamics of Carol Ann Duffy's poetry, is my own work. It has not been submitted for the award of a higher degree elsewhere.

25/10/02

Jennifer Garrett

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Abbreviations

Carol Ann Duffy's five major collections are referenced throughout the thesis by the indicated acronyms:

SFN 1985 *Standing Female Nude* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1985)

SM 1987 *Selling Manhattan* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1987)

TOC 1990 *The Other Country* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1990)

MT 1993 *Mean Time* (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1993)

TWW 1999 *The World's Wife* (London: Macmillan, 1999)

INTRODUCTION

The Dramatic Monologue Form and the work of Carol Ann Duffy

The relatively small body of critical writing on the dramatic monologue is focused on the work of male poets and is largely restricted to consideration of the ironic dramatic monologues of Browning, Eliot and Pound. There is a surprising lack of critical attention to the work of female poets, and to an alternative sympathetic, non-ironic, exemplar of the form. This omission is addressed to some extent by Leighton , Armstrong, and Leighton and Reynolds through their work on sympathetic, non-ironic dramatic monologues written by Victorian women poets.¹ Their critiques (and celebrations) of Augusta Webster's work, allied to my own interest in contemporary women poets' work with dramatic monologue form, has led to this thesis.

The variation of form, and richness and diversity of content in the dramatic monologues of contemporary women poets, such as Carol Ann Duffy, Jackie Kay and Liz Lochhead, necessitates a revision of previous critical writing and a reconceptualization of the form. My thesis pays close attention to ironic, sympathetic, and contemporary variants of the form and argues that the development of feminist discourse is a major influence in this variation and revitalisation of the dramatic monologue.

My research is focused upon the work of Carol Ann Duffy who is critically acclaimed as the leading contemporary exponent of the dramatic monologue. Since the publication of her first collection *Standing Female Nude* in 1985 Duffy has been awarded many major poetry prizes.² Duffy has five published collections of poetry substantially devoted to this form. My concentration on her work has enabled me to explore possibilities of the form in depth. Using her five published collections, I discuss the structure, themes, imagery, discursive contexts, and socio-political function of her dramatic monologue poems.

Duffy's dramatic monologues depict a wide range of protagonists, and correspondingly, many different representations of consciousness, from the pre-Oedipal infant of 'Dies Natalis' (*SM1987*) (see Chapter Three), to the serial killer of 'Psychopath' (*SM1987*) (see Chapter Two). In *The World's Wife* her satiric re-visions of mythology and fable give a 'voice' to the silenced women of the past (see Chapter Four). It is evident from Duffy's own commentary on her work that she sees herself as an urban poet, and sees life as dependent upon socio-economic conditions, although there are occasional lyrical passages inscribing an intrusion of Romanticist individualism in her dramatic monologues.³ Dramatic monologue form is acknowledged to have an immediate appeal for readers, and Duffy's 'characters', depicted in contemporary syntax and diction, are accessible to a wide readership because of her use of speech styles and visual imagery familiar to many readers through mass-media entertainment and popular journalism.

Like Browning, Duffy has a 'rogues' gallery of ironised characters but her work also includes many speakers whose non-ironic narratives reveal the injustices of twentieth-century society in their depiction, conscious or otherwise, of race, class and gender inequalities. These ironised and sympathetic voices bring into the public domain of poetry issues that should be addressed for the wellbeing of our society. Her poems have a moral and political function where her speakers expose the destructive role of social inequality and cultural difference in contemporary Britain.

Yet however relevant to social reality, political perception does not necessarily create effective poetry. Literary value, however imprecisely defined, is an acknowledged characteristic of the poems discussed in this thesis: critical acclaim confirms that the 'crusading social sensibility' attributed to Duffy's work does not outweigh the crafting of language that tradition requires of poetry.⁴

Duffy's dramatic monologues bridge the disparate worlds of canonic and populist poetry. They also, as I argued above, exemplify a contemporary model for the moral function of

poetry: parts of society under pressure are dramatized by Duffy in her monologues, bringing the 'private moments' of many different, individual voices, clearly identified in their social specificities, into the public arena of critically-acclaimed poetry. Duffy was cited as a possible candidate in the debates preceding Andrew Motion's installation as Poet Laureate. As such, she must have been considered as a poet who might in some way represent the interests and concerns of contemporary society, despite her extensive use of a non-universalist, dramatic monologue form.

PART 1

In the first section of this part I shall discuss a representative range of definitions of the dramatic monologue form and indicate my preferred definition that determines my selection of dramatic monologues for analysis. In the second section I indicate those critics whose work is important to my own, either in the sense that my findings are initially underpinned by their concepts and theories, or in the sense that I argue against their work and contend that my own is more relevant to contemporary developments of the form. This is followed by a brief discussion of the work of a second rank of minor critics of the form whose work impinges reactively or productively upon my own. Following this I summarise the omissions and inadequacies of the critical writings I have discussed, particularly the disregard of gender differences in reading,

Definitions of the Form

There is no generally accepted formula that defines the characteristics of the dramatic monologue form. Barnet's *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* exemplifies the uncertainty that characterises most definitions of the form:

dramatic monologue. In some degree almost every poem can be called a dramatic monologue: a single speaker is saying something to someone, even if only to himself. But whereas the speaker of a lyric usually seems to be the poet, the speaker of a dramatic monologue is a fictional character (e.g., a duke who has eliminated his last duchess) or an historical figure (e.g., Fra Lippo Lippi) caught at a critical moment. His utterance is conditioned by the situation, and is usually directed to a silent audience (e.g., an emissary to the duke). The speaker

commonly reveals aspects of his personality of which he himself is unaware; in *My Last Duchess*, Browning's duke is insufferable but doesn't know it [...] ⁵

This definition identifies the possibility of elements of dramatic monologue in many poems. It also identifies a 'silent audience' as a variable feature of the form, and implies that the speaker is intended to be read ironically.

Abrams's definition distinguishes between the spoken monologue in a play, which is termed a '*soliloquy*', and a dramatic monologue, which is defined as a 'type of *lyric poem* that was perfected by Robert Browning'. This definition continues with a list of 'features' of the form, using as examples Browning's *My Last Duchess*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, *Andrea del Sarto*, 'and many other poems':

(1) A single person, who is patently *not* the poet, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment: the Duke is negotiating with an emissary for a second wife; the Bishop lies dying; Andrea once more attempts wistfully to believe his wife's lies. (2) This person addresses and interacts with one or more people; but we know of the auditors' presence and what they say and do only from clues in the discourse of the single speaker. (3) The principle controlling the poet's selection and organization of what the lyric speaker says is the speaker's unintentional revelation of his or her temperament and character... ⁶

Abrams discusses the omission of the silent auditor in several of Browning's poems. He insists that a first-person speaker who is not the poet should be firmly located in time and space and is intended to be read ironically. These features, he argues, are mandatory to distinguish the dramatic monologue from the dramatic lyric which is 'also a monologue uttered in a specified situation at a dramatic moment'.

Baldick proposes a definition that requires the 'silent auditor' which is stipulated as an option in the two previous definitions:

dramatic monologue, a kind of poem in which a single fictional or historical character other than the poet speaks to a silent 'audience' of one or more persons. Such poems reveal not the poet's own thoughts but the mind of the impersonated character, whose personality is revealed unwittingly; this distinguishes a dramatic

monologue from a *lyric, while the implied presence of an auditor distinguishes it from a *soliloquy.⁷

In all three definitions the presence of a speaker who is not the poet is indicated to be essential to the form; Barnet et al. and Abrams also stipulate specificity of time and location. There is no consensus on the necessity for the analysable presence of an auditor within the poem, and the possibility of a sympathetic, rather than ironic, form of dramatic monologue is not considered.

In many dramatic monologues it is difficult to be sure that an audience is present in the poem. Silent auditors may be surmised from the speaker's attempts to justify her/his actions and opinions. In poems where this is the case and the speaker appears to defend her/himself against anticipated criticism it can be difficult to be sure that another person, a silent auditor, is present because questions apparently directed to an auditor may be rhetorical. The speaker may be talking to her/himself, perhaps her/his own image in the mirror, as in Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock'. A further problematic that becomes apparent when reading dramatic monologues in number is a subtle dialogic interference from language itself: by this I refer to Bakhtin's insight that all language is dialogic and spoken in anticipation of a response 'every word is directed toward an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.'⁸

The possibility of an interplay between lyrical and dramatic effects in the dramatic monologue has led to various attempts to classify different categories of poems that display aspects of dramatic lyric and/or monologue form. The foremost critic attempting such a classification is Ina Beth Sessions, cited in Culler, but few critics consider this approach to be a productive interrogation of the form.⁹

Rader used an approach reminiscent of Sessions and attempted to reformulate dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric by difference in aesthetic effect, arguing that a dramatic

monologue requires the reader to imagine the speaker as 'an outward presence', whereas the dramatic lyric requires the reader to understand the character from the inside by seeing through the eyes of the speaker.¹⁰ Rader suggested that two further categories of this type of poem might be the 'masked lyric' and the 'expressive lyric'. Radar's attempt to establish these sub-categories of 'Dramatic "I" Poems' is not productive for my own interrogation of the dramatic monologue form, and does not appear to have resulted in revisionary work from other critics in the field

My preferred definition of dramatic monologue form is that finally proposed by Sinfield in his monograph *Dramatic Monologue*.¹¹ Initially, working with Browning's 'My Last Duchess' and 'Fra Lippo Lippi' he arrives at a definition similar to the combined characteristics of those above:

A definition of dramatic monologue constructed from these two poems, then, should include a first-person speaker who is not the poet and whose character is unwittingly revealed, an auditor whose influence is felt in the poem, a specific time and place, colloquial language, some sympathetic involvement with the speaker, and an ironic discrepancy between the speaker's view of himself and a larger judgment which the poet implies and the reader must develop (p.7).

This definition is an improvement on those quoted above because it suggests the complexity possible in some dramatic monologues where a degree of sympathy is appropriate for the speaker. It also gives an indication of the nature of ironic reading, 'a larger judgment...[which] the reader must develop', that I discuss in Part II below. However, an inconsistency here is his universalist stipulation of a general reader, whereas earlier in his discussion of irony, he identifies the specificity of readers:

Yet we cannot be sure that we have the exclusive interpretation. Judgment is not blocked but is indirect and depends upon our individual reading (p.6).

Sinfield is dissatisfied with this formulation and finally proposes a simplified definition in which the dramatic monologue is 'simply a poem in the first person spoken by, or almost entirely by, someone who is indicated not to be the poet'. In his chapter 'A

Broader View' he defends this decision, examining the characteristics cited by other definitions and comparing these with early precursors of the form and ironic and sympathetic monologues by Wordsworth, Tennyson, Southey and Burns. He concludes:

I believe that taking it as a poem in the first person spoken by someone who is indicated not to be the poet avoids separating 'My Last Duchess' from poems with which it has significant features in common and gives the best insight into the essential nature of the form (p.21).

I have adopted Sinfield's preferred definition in my choice of dramatic monologue poems analysed in this thesis: accordingly the selection of poems in the following chapters conforms to the definition that a dramatic monologue is 'a poem in the first person spoken by someone who is indicated not to be the poet'.

Insistence upon a specific time and place would eliminate many of Duffy's most innovative multi-voiced dramatic monologues where she uses discontinuities of time and place to locate the utterances of several 'speakers' in her poems. However, Baldick's argument that specificity of time and place differentiates the dramatic monologue from the dramatic lyric has some relevance to the reading effect of some of the chosen poems: where time and place are indeterminate, the narration moves towards a lyrical effect, as I discuss in my readings. Where this is the case, the poems are predominantly dramatic monologues with lyrical elements.

Major Critics of the Dramatic Monologue

Robert Langbaum's account of the dramatic monologue *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* is the foremost critical account of this poetic form.¹² Most critics writing in this field engage with, and often subsequently rebut, Langbaum's claim for the reading-response elicited by the dramatic monologue form; none offers a critique recognising gender as a source of difference in reader response. This thesis contends that the time has come to radically challenge his definition

of the form and function of dramatic monologue, which he developed largely from his interrogation of Robert Browning's ironic dramatic monologues, specifically 'My Last Duchess'.

For the sake of clarity, throughout my discussion of Langbaum's theory I shall use the term 'empathy' in place of his chosen term 'sympathy'. Langbaum himself explains the 'sympathy' of his theory as a type of empathy (Preface to the 1985 edition). This use of 'empathy' will avoid confusion in my later discussion of 'sympathetic', rather than ironic, dramatic monologues where the speaker appeals for sympathy in the conventional understanding of the term.

Langbaum argues that the act of reading Browning's ironic dramatic monologues generates 'tension' between empathy with the 'character' which permits us to understand him, and our own moral judgement: 'we suspend moral judgment(sic)' in order to be able to read the speaking character. This phenomenon, he asserts, 'renews our sense of moral judgment in a relativist age' when we perceive how far we have deviated from widely accepted values that promote the common good. The logic of Langbaum's theory suggests that if 'we' exercised our moral judgement while reading, we would inhibit ourselves from understanding the speaker: this would render the poem ineffective as a dramatic monologue. Langbaum demonstrates his argument using Browning's most famous/notorious character, the Duke from 'My Last Duchess' as his paradigm.

In common with many readers, to judge from his preface, I have difficulty with Langbaum's concept of empathic reading for such a 'reprehensible' villain as the Duke. Despite Langbaum's confident use of the universalising 'we', I find his argument alien to my own reading experience. Two aspects of his theory cause this alienation; his simplification of the reading act, and his depiction of a non-gendered reading position.

In reading Browning's 'My Last Duchess' I find the duke appalling. I believe I read him analytically as 'Other' rather than with empathy: yet I am convinced that I do clearly perceive the duke's delight in his dead wife's beauty, and the self-serving motivation behind his sadistic treatment of her. As noted above, Langbaum replied to his critics with an explanation of his term 'sympathy' as an experience analogous to 'empathy', rather than that of sympathetic identification with the character. Neither term describes my reading experience: clearly it is different from that prescribed by Langbaum. I watch the Duke closely to see what he does; I observe him as something unknown and potentially unpleasant. My attention oscillates between curiosity and repugnance towards the Duke and concerned interest for the Duchess.

Initially this complex reading effect bears some similarity to Langbaum's concept of 'tension' but diverges from his theory when the following clarification of his argument is considered:

The dramatic monologue does not allow moral judgment to determine the *amount* of sympathy we give to the speaker. We give him all our sympathy as a condition of reading the poem, since he is the only character there. The difference is that we split off our sympathy from our moral judgment (Preface to 1985 edition).

I have to take issue on this point. Langbaum's theory fails to address gender specific differences of interpretation, and subsequent response, for these texts. Contrary to his claim that all the reader's attention must go to the speaker who is the only 'character' present, there is often a silent/silenced character in the ironic monologue. In 'My Last Duchess' my attention is drawn to the dead wife, a silent/silenced character in the drama: the Duke's actions are constantly reviewed from her point of view as I read the poem. In addition, an 'unheard' envoy is present, listening (no doubt with dismay) to the Duke's unwitting revelations of his 'reprehensible' behaviour. This calls into question Langbaum's assessment of the totality of empathy we project on to the speaker because he does not account for the other 'characters' in the narrative. Langbaum's argument

contends that for this 'tension' between empathy and judgement to be generated in the reading effect 'both poles must be fully operational'. This totality of empathy and the subsequent tension does not occur for readers similar to myself whose attention is continually diverted to the unvoiced victim of the murderous duke. The reading effect that Langbaum theorizes as the chief characteristic of this form does not apply universally.

Langbaum's theory does not consider the social contiguities of the poems he explores, nor for that matter, those of his own readings. His theory is predicated upon his ability to look *inside* the monologue. Consequently his delineation of the form does not withstand interrogation from a contemporary critical perspective. Clearly my self-reflexive account of reading 'My Last Duchess' problematizes Langbaum's theory of the dramatic monologue 'experience' and indicates that his universalist reading position which, in particular, ignores gender difference may be the cause of this discrepancy.

Langbaum's acclaimed seminal text, essentially a product of 1950's and 60's literary critical approaches predates the woman-oriented revision of literary criticism that has developed with contemporary gynocriticism, and the subsequent project of the rediscovery and re-assessment of nineteenth century women writers who used the dramatic monologue form. This historic effect may explain Langbaum's depiction of a universalist reading position, his narrow focus on the ironic dramatic monologue, and his failure to consider the poems of Browning's near contemporaries, such as Webster (discussed below), who wrote monologues, critically acclaimed at the time, in which the speaker directly or indirectly appeals to readers' sympathy for their plight.

Langbaum's contention that this poetic form teaches us 'how to re-invalidate(sic) moral judgment' cannot apply to sympathetic (non-ironic) dramatic monologues in the sense of a renewal of moral judgement. In this development of the form, readers have no need to depart from a moralist stance in order to understand the 'character'. Certainly the non-

ironic monologues I discuss in Chapter One have the potential to inculcate a stronger moralist stance towards social injustice but there is no necessity for readers to suspend what sense of morality they already possess in order to perceive the speaker's experience, as Langbaum maintains in his theory.

Langbaum has little to say about the use of satire: 'the dramatic monologue is not the best vehicle for satire; although some of the Browning dramatic monologues contain satirical elements, none is pure satire'. This dismissal of satire obscures the mismatch between his theory and the reading experience of dramatic monologues when twentieth-century women poets, such as Duffy, are considered. These poets use both direct and indirect satire to construct the polemic of their dramatic monologues.

My own readings will argue that the satiric tone that Duffy uses in, for example, *The World's Wife*, entices certain readers to recognise the polemic of the text. Admittedly there is an intellectual movement for readers in recognising the satire and its target but this is not a reversion to values and objectives that are opposite to those promoted by the speaker, as Langbaum argues. I shall argue that the satiric dramatic monologue provides an entertaining, enticing, reading experience which accounts for its popularity among twentieth-century women poets, and that the development of feminist discourse in literature has facilitated their effective, critically acclaimed use of the form.

Sinfield's monograph *Dramatic Monologue* addresses many of the areas vulnerable to interrogation in Langbaum's theory. His understanding of the dramatic monologue form is more pertinent to my own research. His comment on Browning's speakers that 'It may well be that the more we understand him the less we like him' problematizes Langbaum's concept of 'total empathy' and concurs with my own opinion.¹³

Sinfield however, does not identify gender difference as a potential source of reader alienation. Nevertheless, as I commented earlier, his assessment of the mechanism of

irony in the dramatic monologue is more perceptive than that of Langbaum and appears to allow for the specificity of an individual reader's development of the text.

This implication of the specificity of readers' responses to potential irony, despite his continuing (mis)use of a universal reader, is disappointingly not repeated in his critical appraisal of the satiric form of dramatic monologue, where Sinfield oversimplifies the interaction between writer, text and readers by generalising the reader-response:

At the other extreme from the sympathetic monologue is the satirical poem which promotes the poet's views by making the reader react against the speaker. Dramatic monologue is valuable here because the reader receives the impression that the speaker has full opportunity to state his case but is found wanting out of his own mouth, and because such speakers, appear to be justifying themselves and hence sound smug and self-satisfied (p.14-15).

In addition to his citation of a general reader, Sinfield overlooks the variable functions of satire in ironic and sympathetic dramatic monologue poems. My work on satiric monologues in Chapter Four demonstrates the different ways in which satire can function in this poetic form.

Unlike Langbaum, Sinfield considers the sympathetic dramatic monologue to be a significant variation of the form, and discusses Romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Southey who depicted sympathetic speakers 'to arouse concern for oppressed people'.

Sinfield's assessment that 'the combination of sympathy and judgement occurs in varying proportions in dramatic monologues of all periods confronts Langbaum's insistence on the totality of empathy as a characteristic of the (ironic) dramatic monologue form. This recognition of the potential movement between sympathy and irony in readers' response concurs with my own reading experience and led to my identification of the function of 'stereotyped speakers', which are used in both ironic and sympathetic poems by Duffy.

At the beginning of this discussion of Sinfield's monograph I remarked that his findings were more relevant to my thesis than Langbaum's long-acclaimed conceptualisation of the dramatic monologue form. Perhaps the most important insight is his recognition of the characteristic of a 'divided consciousness' that is present in dramatic monologues:

A divided consciousness always results from the use of the first person by a speaker who is indicated not to be the poet. Writers of all periods use the form as a way of communicating their views (p.55).

My thesis considers both ironic and sympathetic forms of the dramatic monologue and argues that the poems have a political function. This being the case, the intentionality of the poet, which I discuss in Part II, is a significant aspect of the polemical nature of the poems: Sinfield's concept of a 'divided consciousness' supports my argument for Duffy's political intention that develops from my analytical readings.

Culler's 'Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue', cited by Sinfield, argues that nineteenth-century 'monodramas' were influential in the development of the dramatic monologue (a term not used at the time).¹⁴ Culler describes a type of dramatic performance intended to arouse the audience's sympathy:

By way of summary, then, one may say that there arose in the decades immediately before and after the turn of the century [eighteenth] several related art forms that focused on a solitary figure, most frequently a woman, who expressed through speech, music, costume, and gesture the shifting movements of her soul. That the figure was solitary and that virtually the entire text consisted of her utterance was evidence of an attempt to focus on her subjectivity: that she was feminine was a further indication that the drama was one of passion (p.375).

His argument raises the question of why critical response since Browning has largely concentrated on the ironic form, to the neglect of the sympathetic dramatic monologue developed by poets contemporaneous with Browning.

Drew's 'How to read a Dramatic Monologue' challenges Langbaum's stipulation of total empathy with the speaker when reading Browning's dramatic monologues.¹⁵ He suggests a 'provisional identification' with certain speakers but argues that the reading process is a more complex mechanism than that argued by Langbaum: readers sympathise, compare, and judge continuously in a reading process in which all three manoeuvres continually overlap. His understanding of the reading process is similar to my own, although as I indicated above, I dispute the 'provisional identification' with the Duke that is suggested by Drew. His explanation is founded on the notion of a general, rather than specific, reader and consequently takes no account of specificities such as gender, class or race.

In general Langbaum, Sinfield and Drew have little to say about the implied listener to whom the protagonists narrate their story. Mermin has made a study of the implied listener in dramatic monologue poems in *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* and argues that the unvoiced listener is not a passive feature of the poem but actively contributes to the character of the protagonist.¹⁶ Her insight has contributed to my own understanding of the construction of the potential for sympathy or irony in dramatic monologues (Chapters One and Two).

A more recent commentator on the form is Howe whose *The Dramatic Monologue* offers 'a guide to the genre'.¹⁷ Disappointingly she considers only the ironic form, briefly mentions women poets, Rossetti, Webster and Levy in passing, and omits to consider gender difference in reader-response.

Martin's *Browning's Dramatic Monologues And The Post-Romantic Subject* offers an interesting Marxist, linguistic commentary on Browning's poems including the relation between the speaker of the poem 'the reader', and the poet but does not consider gender difference in his account of readers' roles in interpretation.¹⁸

Christ's psychological critique of Modernist poets, 'Self-Concealment and Self-Expression in Eliot's and Pound's Dramatic Monologues', is concerned with Eliot's use of dramatic monologue form 'to project psychic material into a dramatic persona which he separates from himself by some degree of irony'; and Pound's use of the form for 'a reflexive play between the poet and his mask'.¹⁹ I use the terms 'persona' and 'mask' in my own analytical commentaries but not in the sense that Christ argues for Eliot and Pound. Where Duffy uses a 'mask' or 'persona' it follows the materialist tradition from Victorian women poets using the dramatic monologue form as a 'masked critique', as described by Armstrong (see below). I argue that two factors are relevant to Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue 'mask': firstly the mask enables her to articulate a wide range of socio-political issues in a way that pre-empts attribution directly to the poet herself (as might be the case if she employed a lyric form); and secondly, social conditioning that encourages females to empathise with others contributes towards a double-effect whereby women poets have both the disposition and the ability to narrate their concerns through significant others. This sociological effect is different from Christ's discussion of a psychological mechanism in Eliot's and Pound's use of the mask of dramatic monologue.

Carleton's *The Dramatic Monologue: Vox Humana*, studies the ironic dramatic monologue 'from philosophical, psychological, and aesthetic angles' and considers the 'music-like interplay between feeling and thought'.²⁰ My own analysis, in complete opposition to this perspective, concentrates on the interrelation between poet, speakers, internal audience, and external readers of dramatic monologue poems as socially situated subjects whose utterances and responses reflect the socio-economic realities of contemporary society.

Roberts's *Robert Browning Revisited* undertakes revised close reading of Browning's poems and is included in this survey because of his remarkable reading of 'Porphyria's Lover' where he maintains that the lover is insane and only fantasises Porphyria's death

because the strangulation does not disfigure her: a perverse example of the necessity to avoid the universalising term 'the reader' when discussing response to dramatic monologue poems.²¹

The body of critical writing discussed above concentrates on the relation between poet and speaker, or speaker and a generalised reader. The 'auditor' or listener in the poem is largely overlooked with the exception of Mermin. My thesis addresses this omission and closely examines the interrelation between speaker, internal listener/s, and external readers.

I have found in my survey that critics of the dramatic monologue do not consider the effect of gender difference in reader-response. This universalisation of readers results in the gender-blind prescriptions of properties of the form argued by the various critical approaches surveyed above. Sinfield, as I commented, moves towards recognition of specificity of readers' response when discussing irony but does not identify gender difference as an aspect of reader-response.

My thesis undertakes a reconceptualisation of the dramatic monologue form by addressing the omissions of the critics that precede my work; I consider the function of the internal listener/s of the poem and the interrelation between this 'audience' and the external 'audience' of the poem, the readers; I integrate the sympathetic and satiric forms of dramatic monologue into my enquiry; and I argue for the fundamental difference that recognition of gender can bring to both writing and reading dramatic monologue poems.

PART II

In the first section of this part I shall explain my contention that contemporary dramatic monologue form should be considered as drawing upon a tradition of both ironic and sympathetic forms inherited from Browning and his contemporary Webster. I support this contention with citations from Leighton's commentary on Webster's life and work,

and my readings of extracts of Webster's poems 'Faded' and 'A Castaway'. I include a short consideration of the use of dramatic monologue as 'masked critique'.²² I follow this with a resume of the use of both forms in Duffy's five collections. The second section considers the interrelation between contemporary feminist discourse and the work of women poets using the form. The third section reviews critics of Duffy's dramatic monologues whose work is relevant to my own.

A Double-Stranded Inheritance for the Dramatic Monologue Form

My attention was first drawn to the sympathetic form of dramatic monologue, and its potential as a political text, by the poems of Augusta Webster, a contemporary of Browning, whose life and work is discussed in Leighton's *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against The Heart*. Leighton argues that Webster is one of eight major women poets whose work deserves as much attention as that of Swinburne, Meredith, Clough and others. Several of Webster's poems are included in the subsequent anthology *Victorian Women Poets*. In this anthology Leighton discusses Webster's poems and their focus on gender inequalities in the socio-economic conditions of Victorian society. She recommends Webster as the period's most effective exponent of dramatic monologue, describing her as the most 'ruthlessly materialist' of all Victorian women poets.²³

In this necessarily small selection of Webster's poems, sympathetic monologues such as 'Faded' and 'A Castaway' powerfully dramatize the socio-economic misfortune of the ageing spinster and the 'fallen woman' in Victorian society.²⁴ A characteristic of this representative sample of Webster's work is a lack of the ironic tone conveyed by many of Browning's speakers, her monologues do not construct that overt discrepancy between the speaker's perception of herself and the likely judgement of readers. Webster's characters invite readers to sympathise with their plight as they reveal, and at times interrogate, the oppression caused by nineteenth century cultural definitions of femininity.

In 'Faded' Webster focuses on the trivialization of women's lives, the importance of physical appearance for females, and the diminished status in society that comes with the loss of youthful bloom. 'Tis pity for a woman to be old' her speaker says to her own reflection in the mirror:

We have so many many after years,
 To use away (the unmarried ones at least)
 In only withering leisurely. Ah me!
 Men jeer us clinging, clinging pitifully,
 To that themselves account whole for us;
 Aye, but what man of them could bear, as we must,
 To live life's worth a stinted dozen years.
 And the long sequel all for learning age.

Why, if we try to cheat the merciless world
 That bids us grow old meekly and to the hour,
 (Like babes that must not cry when bedtime comes)
 And, being old, be nothing [...] (ll.43-54)

In 'A Castaway', the speaker depicts the invidious position of a woman forced to earn her living, and faced with the choice of support as a fashionable (immoral) woman, or independence as an inadequately-educated, poorly-skilled female in an overcrowded job market:

Well, I came back,
 Back to my slough. Who says I had my choice?
 Could I stay there to die of some mad death?
 And if I rambled out into the world
 Sinless but penniless, what else were that
 But slower death, slow pining, shivering death
 By misery and hunger? Choice! what choice
 Of living well or ill? could I have that?
 And who would give it me? I think indeed
 If some kind hand, a woman's - I hate men -
 Had stretched itself to help me to firm ground,
 Taken a chance and risked my not falling back,
 I could have gone my way not falling back;
 But, let her be all brave, all charitable,

How could she do it? Such a trifling boon -
 A little work to live by, 'tis not much -
 And I might have found will enough to last;
 But where's the work? More seamstresses than shirts;
 (ll. 249-66)

Webster's monologues differ from Browning's. The absence of irony, in the sense of a strong mismatch between the likely values of readers and those of the narrator, and the invitation to sympathy in Webster's monologues does not cause the 'heightening of moral sensibility' which Langbaum claims as the chief effect of Browning's dramatic monologues upon 'the reader'. Langbaum's account of the reading effect of ironic dramatic monologues amounts to an examination of conscience, whereas Webster's non-ironic, sympathetic dramatic monologues must produce a sense of dismay, perhaps even outrage, in readers who perceive the poverty of self-expression and life-chance revealed by the non-ironic monologues of her female speakers.

What I find then is not a single tradition for the dramatic monologue but a double-stranded inheritance established in the initial development of this form during the nineteenth century: the ironic treatment of self-absorbed miscreants and aberrant personalities, and the sympathetic portrayal of socially marginalised and economically penalised females whose misfortunes potentially alert readers to recognise women's struggle to escape the determinism of cultural stereotypes in that era.

Duffy's dramatic monologues demonstrate the double-stranded inheritance that I have argued for the form: some of her speakers are constructed to be read ironically, following the tradition of Browning; whilst others, following a parallel tradition from Webster, are depicted with less self-deception and potential for ironic judgement, whereby readers are positioned to read them sympathetically. In general her ironic monologues extend the tradition inherited from Browning through their interrogation of many different socio-political issues. A specific example of this development of the ironic form is a group of stereotypical representations of male chauvinism which function to identify/condemn

male violence and aggression towards women (see my analytical reading of 'Psychopath' (SM 1987) in Chapter Two). Duffy also extends Webster's sympathetic form in multi-voiced monologues such as the sympathetic triptych, 'A Clear Note', and those monologues which alternate sympathetic and ironised speakers, for example 'Comprehensive' (see Chapter Three).

Feminist Discourse

Sinfield's *Dramatic Monologue* considered the work of twentieth-century male poets, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Lowell, Larkin and Hughes, and closed his monograph lamenting the disuse of the form with the following statement:

For the most part dramatic monologue has returned to occasional use, available when it seems to offer the appropriate form for a particular poem. Sadly, it is often undervalued because of popular prejudices about the Victorians. . . dramatic monologue is a specially immediate way of presenting character, that affords an oblique mode of self-expression and an unusually teasing reading experience.²⁵

Twenty years later the dramatic monologue form is widely used, and critically acclaimed, among contemporary women poets. The development of feminist discourse is a factor in this regeneration of the dramatic monologue form.

Feminist criticism in many different fields of academic enquiry, as diverse as literary critical theory and earth sciences, has deconstructed the concept of a universalist approach to human activity. The possibility of a universal voice that must have underpinned the stance of the Poet Laureate since the institution of that privileged position, must now seem untenable to writers and critics who recognise the issue of cultural specificities that has been identified by feminist discourse.

This feminist recognition of the invalidity of a universalist stance and the social reality of cultural determinants appears to have given many contemporary women poets the impetus to explore their personal concerns through the medium of the dramatic

monologue form. Use of a persona or mask of the speaking 'character' provides an acceptable public voice to explore concerns and issues related to culturally-determined differences, particularly that of gender. Women poets using this poetic form do not have the problem of attempting to assume the 'universal voice' of the male poet. In addition, the dramatic monologue form permits feminist rage in a culturally acceptable form: the rage expressed is not directly attributable to the poet.

However, the issue of sexual/textual politics concerning gender and poetic identity persists, despite an increasing public awareness of gender issues: a male poet is still able to make a public statement about his personal concerns which is likely to be accepted as 'universal'; whereas when women poets reveal their personal concerns in their work it is still considered inferior poetry which lacks relevance to a 'universal' human truth.²⁶

Armstrong's discussion of women poets of the late nineteenth century who 'adopted the dramatic monologue as a way of making a "masked" critique' has been important to my understanding of Duffy's work.²⁷ In discussing the possibilities for Victorian women poets to concern themselves with political statements she identifies Webster and Levy as poets who recognised the opportunity for making explicit comment through the use of the dramatic monologue. She praises Webster as an outstanding practitioner of the form: 'Her own powerful work, deceptively plain in language and immediately accessible in its diction, declares itself as a dramatisation of a series of feminine consciousnesses and an analysis of their cultural determinations'. The same strengths are evident in Duffy's work.

Armstrong argues that Webster works through 'intensely analytical psychological exploration which discloses contradiction in the construction of feminine subjectivity'. Several of Duffy's female monologues focus on the psychology of their speakers and depict the ideological construction of their twentieth century female subjectivity, 'Whoever She Was' (*SFN 1985*) is an example; while others interrogate oppressive masculinist attitudes towards women through their narratives of specific social, rather

than psychological, events such as 'A Provincial Party, 1956' (*SFN 1985*). Like Webster's, Duffy's work is powerful and accessible but her range of 'speakers', use of both sympathetic and ironic forms, and inscription of feminist discourse facilitates an extended 'masked critique' that interrogates issues related to race, class and cultural difference as well as that of gendered subjectivity.

Critics of Duffy's Dramatic Monologues

Duffy's poems and her plays for theatre and radio are now widely reviewed in journals and the literary supplements of national newspapers. Reviewers of Duffy's five collections have remarked on the skill and innovation of her poetic craft and the wide range of her interests. Their acclaim can be summarised by Peter Porter's assessment of her work, which I cited at the beginning of this Introduction.²⁸ Porter's validation is often cited by Duffy's critics in acknowledgment of her poetic status. There is now a small body of critical writing on Duffy's work, and her poems are included in study schedules ranging from GCSE English to degree level. A substantial collection of references and critical notes on her work is available on the web.²⁹ I identify major critics of her dramatic monologues below, and discuss how their work differs from or interacts productively with my own.

Rees-Jones's recent monograph on Duffy and her work requires detailed consideration.³⁰ Her short study is promoted as making a case for Duffy as 'a serious and important poet who engages with key issues of gender and identity in innovative and important ways'. It includes a biographical account of Duffy's life and her development as a poet, and offers Lacanian readings of a selection of her dramatic monologues and love poems. Duffy is described as 'a ground-breaking and original voice' whose work shows the influence of, among others, Jacques Prevert, Pablo Neruda, Aime Cesaire, Wordsworth, Browning, Philip Larkin, Dylan Thomas and Ted Hughes. Rees-Jones acknowledges Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue as a medium for social critique but concentrates on readings that identify her work as a 'bridge between a feminist and postfeminist *poetics*'. She claims

that 'Duffy does not privilege an authenticity of everyday lived experience' but balances political awareness with an interrogation of the (im)possibility of self-representation through language.

In the short chapter on Duffy's dramatic monologues, 'Masquerades', Rees-Jones cites Armstrong on nineteenth century women poets' use of the female dramatic monologue as a 'masking device' but does not identify Webster's importance to the form. In her discussion of female poetic identity and Duffy's interrogation of this problematic in her poems, she reads a small selection of monologues and argues that a model of the woman poet's subjectivity derived from Montefiore's Lacanian readings and Irigaray's essays on love poems is effective for reading Duffy. Rees-Jones' demonstration of the 'postfeminist *poetics*' of Duffy's monologues largely confines itself to Lacanian interrogation of the relation between the subjectivity of the poet and her 'speaker' and does not concern itself with the dynamics of the interlocutory relation between speaker and intradiegetic listener/extradiegetic reader of these poems. Because of this, Rees-Jones does not consider the political function of irony or sympathy in the relation between poet, text and reader that my readings contend is a substantial part of Duffy's effective and innovative use of the dramatic monologue form.

Rees-Jones offers a reading of 'Psychopath' (*SM1987*) in which she says 'we see again a connection being established between the voice of the poet and the monologist whose voice she 'takes on'. She reads this as 'a sense that the persona is not fully adopted'. Her Lacanian reading of Duffy's poetic identity and the depiction of this protagonist implies that this is a psychological event. My own reading of this monologue (see Chapter Two) assesses the irruption of Duffy's 'voice' *into* the narrative (rather than *out of* the narrative in a Lacanian sense) as a feminist, political judgment on the character, rather than a

psychological slippage between the subjectivity of the 'character' and Duffy herself.

Rees-Jones claims that:

Calling the poem 'Psychopath', Duffy presents us with a character about whom we are not asked to declare some kind of moral judgement; stating at the beginning that this is a monologue of a figure who is (or must be?) mad, the judgement has already been made. Yet this is a judgement that is both accusation and exoneration.

Rees-Jones's claim assumes a non-ironic reading of the title itself. My own readings of dramatic monologues do not override Duffy's socio-political objective with an interpretation that usurps both the potential for irony or sympathy, and the interruptions of the implied poet's judgemental commentaries, in favour of a Lacanian reading that subsumes these textual phenomena within the problematic of women's poetic identity.

Rees-Jones's brief summary of *The World's Wife* is introduced with the remark 'Duffy's return to the politicized writing of the Women's Movement in the 1970's is in some ways an extraordinary one'. The brevity of her short commentary on this latest collection carries the implication that Duffy's work is no longer amenable to Lacanian interpretation, does not maintain a balance of feminism and postfeminism, and is therefore less noteworthy because of its focus on feminist discourse. My own assessment is that Rees-Jones has not identified the socio-political reason for Duffy's return to articulation of explicit feminist discourse in *The World's Wife*. In the prologue to her study she supported her claim for Duffy's position as 'a bridge between feminist and postfeminist poetics' with the statement that women writers in the 1990s 'while still not holding an unproblematic position with the poetic tradition, have benefited from twenty years of feminist activity and radical changes in their position within society - political, sexual and economic'. My notes from Duffy's 1997 poetry reading, which included readings and her comments on 'Mrs Midas' Mrs Tiresias' and Mrs Aesop', recorded her insistence that 'anger is important': this 'anger' is evident in the overt satire and ironic potential that Duffy writes into many of these dramatic monologues.³¹

'The World's Wife' throws emphasis back on to the socio-political aspect of Duffy's work and her social identity as feminist, lesbian, woman poet. My analysis of these monologues identifies an important aspect of Duffy's revision of myth and fable: the representation of gender politics in many of the 'ancient voices' of these monologues can be linked to the gender politics of contemporary society. This transhistorical effect has the potential to facilitate an increased feminist consciousness in readers. This latest collection suggests that Duffy does not share Rees-Jones's optimistic assessment of radical change achieved by contemporary feminist activity.

Rees-Jones suggests that this return to politicized writing is 'perhaps in part enabled by a new confidence arising from the positive reception of her work'. My own discussion of the dramatic monologue form and contemporary women poets contends that Duffy's extensive interrogation of feminist discourse in this collection is related to the development of feminist discourse in both public and literary domains in recent decades. Duffy's focus on representations of women (that puzzles Rees-Jones) can be seen as a rebuttal of the concept of postfeminism and an intention to play with the form in a way that engages readers of poetry while at the same time articulating the politics of her own social position. While acknowledging the popularity of the form for both women poets and their readership, Rees-Jones' study does not consider the different ways in which dramatic monologues have the potential to function as didactic and political texts.

Thomas's Lacanian readings of a selection of Duffy's dramatic monologues and love poems from her first two collections (*SFN 1985* and *SM 1987*) include readings of several poems that I consider in my thesis.³² Her lucid exposition of Lacanian theory applied to Duffy's work is of great value and interest because of its accessibility; which is not a characteristic of the majority of Lacanian readings. However, Thomas's interrogation of Duffy's poems, summarised with 'Carol Ann Duffy's work is primarily concerned with pushing to the full the limits of human consciousness, and examining the weakness of language as well as interrogating its power' considers neither the political

function of the potential for irony or sympathy that Duffy writes into her text, nor the concept of a discursive community of readers perceptive of the social politics inscribed in her dramatic monologues. Using Hutcheon, my thesis argues that ironising and sympathetic writing and reading strategies for the dramatic monologue form have a political dimension that is significant in the interlocutory dynamics of these poems.³³

Kinnahan considers Duffy's dramatic monologue, lyric and narrative poetry. She claims that Duffy's poetry contextualises a 'fusion of the poetic and philosophical within the social'.³⁴ Her critical project is to examine the 'experimental interaction' between the dramatic monologue form and the exposure of the ideological construction of the 'self' that she claims Duffy undertakes in her monologues. Kinnahan exemplifies her arguments with readings of 'Standing Female Nude' (*SFN 1985*) and 'Translating the English, 1989' (*TOC 1990*). She briefly alludes to readers with the question 'At what point does innovation preclude social communication?' (p.252) but does not consider this matter further. My work shares Kinnahan's identification of Duffy's concern with ideologies that determine subjectivity. However, this is subsumed within my extensive reconceptualisation of the dramatic monologue form, and focuses on the material political function of the different ideologies inscribed in Duffy's poems. As a consequence, readers' agency in interpretation, and the socio-political context of both poet and readers are a major concern.

Robinson is not concerned with the dramatic monologue form as such but reads several of Duffy's monologues as 'feminist perspectives on sexual relationships, often employing a speciously comic exaggeration that carries a barbed contempt'. This comment reveals his perception of the ironic potential of certain poems but does not identify the sympathetic aspect of some of Duffy's dramatised 'characters'. His reading of 'A Provincial Party, 1956' (*SFN 1985*) bears some relation to my own reading of the scenario of this 'sympathetic' dramatic monologue: 'The contrived situation is deliberately extreme to illustrate the polarisation of gender', but I contest his description

that Duffy's depiction is extreme . Robinson seeks to demonstrate issues of gender difference in his reading of two of Duffy's monologues but does not recognise gender difference in his own interpretation. This is evident in his reading of the victimised young wife of 'A Provincial Party': 'Her ingenuousness and circumscribed register...challenge the reader to patronise her naivete; to do so is to fall into the trap of trivialising female objectification as merely all good fun'. His judgement of the young women reveals his gender and class attitudes, and his stipulation of a singular reader is universalist, and therefore male-oriented. His reading of 'Standing Female Nude' (*SFN* 1985) identifies the Freudian and Marxist discourses that Duffy employs but leaves the protagonist as a disempowered victim denying her the potential for resistance and agency that my own reading offers. Robinson has fallen into the 'trap' of identifying some of the concepts of feminist discourse without recognising his own masculinist interpretation.³⁵

PART III

Because I am concerned with the interlocutory dynamics of the dramatic monologue form in the work of contemporary women poets, my analysis of Duffy's poems is centred around the interrelations of the speaker/narrator, the narrative of the poem, the audience in the poem, and the external audience of the poem, that is, the readers. These entities are not necessarily singular: several of the poems I have chosen are multi-voiced (Chapter Three); sometimes the internal audience of the poem is addressed as plural (Chapter Four has several examples). Furthermore, an important factor of my analysis is that the potential readership of poetry is not homogeneous, consequently I avoid the universalist term, 'the reader', that is used in reader-response theories implied or cited by the majority of critics of the dramatic monologue. Sinfield has touched upon the different responses of readers to potential irony, as I commented in my survey above; but he does not develop this and commonly cites 'the reader' in his discussions.

A strand of self-reflexivity runs through many of my readings and subsequent analyses. This has at times felt awkward in the context of thesis writing, particularly where I

identify my own acquaintance with Duffy the poet, occasional poetry workshop experiences with her as tutor, and where I cite both my own audience-response and her comments in performance at poetry readings. However, this self-reflexivity is not innovatory: Miller, Tompkins and more recently Bertram have identified the un-ease of this critical position but have convincingly argued for its recognition in the critical reading of texts.³⁶

The methodology for my stylistic and discursive analysis of Duffy's dramatic monologues is described in three sections; Theories and Concepts; Irony; Feminism, Politics and Intentionality. These are followed by a summary of the project and an outline of the chapters.

Theorists and Concepts

In order to define the location in time and place of different characters within a monologue that are established or implied by the narration and narrative, and the relation between internal and external audiences of the narrator's monologue, I have adapted the terms used by Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*.³⁷ In her discussion and theorisation of narrative levels Rimmon-Kenan defines and explains the contemporary poetics of narrative fiction. Although her analysis of prose narrators of 'story' cannot be directly transferred to dramatic monologue poems, because of the first-person autobiographical style of narration, her terms for different levels of narration can be adapted to add clarity to my own analysis of the interlocutory dynamics of these poems.

Rimmon-Kenan uses the term 'diegesis' for a fictional narrator's 'story', that is, the events that are related by the narrator. I have transposed this term to indicate the protagonist's narrative in the dramatic monologue poem. I use the term 'intradiegetic' to identify the audience/listener in the narrative. External listeners to the monologue, the readers, are identified as 'extradiegetic'. Where there is another 'voice' in the narration, commenting

on the protagonist or her/his narrative I designate this as a 'hyperdiegetic' commentator (see my analysis of 'Shooting Stars' in Chapter One). Conversely, where there is another level of character, discussed by the protagonist but not present at his narration, I designate this as a 'hypodiegetic' character (as in 'Poet For Our Times', Chapter Two).³⁸

There is often ambiguity in dramatic monologue poems over the presence/absence of a listener. Even where no intradiegetic listener (internal auditor) is directly indicated, as Sinfield has suggested, sensitivity (in the narrator) to a likely response gives enough ambiguity to challenge insistence on an intradiegetic listener/ auditor as an essential feature of the dramatic monologue. The textual presence/absence of an 'implied auditor' is not easily determined when this may only be surmised by the dialogic nature of the speaker's remarks. Webster's long dramatic monologue 'A Castaway' demonstrates that the use of rhetorical questions can cloud the dividing line between the physical presence or absence of an intradiegetic listener.³⁹

At a more subtle level Bakhtin's widely accepted concept of the dialogic nature of texts has a bearing on any analysis of dramatic monologue for the physical presence of an intradiegetic listener.⁴⁰ Even without speech directly addressing an intradiegetic listener/auditor there will always be difficulty in asserting that no listener is present, particularly in a first-person narrative, for as Bakhtin revealed, close scrutiny of the speech must suggest the possibility of a listener, however ambiguous, unless this dialogic effect is negated by the speaker's insistence that s/he is alone: in which case nuances of an implied listener may be overridden. My readings of the monologues closely interrogate the presence or absence of intradiegetic listeners, and acknowledge Bakhtin's theory where this textual 'presence' is ambiguous.

In order to analyse and expand upon the different ways in which actual readers might relate to these monologues, I have adopted concepts and ideas from Mills's *Gendering*

The Reader and Feminist Stylistics.⁴¹ I shall not repeat in paraphrasis the precisely detailed exposition and validation that Mills undertakes for the various linguistic and discursive concepts that underlie her invaluable discussion of a method of feminist critique 'Reading as/like a feminist'. For the sake of clarity I shall briefly describe their derivation, and indicate their relevance to my own analyses.

In my analytical re-readings of the monologues I discuss the different levels of narrative in the poem, their content, and their function, for example, one level of narrative may be the protagonist's 'story', another 'hyperdiegetic' level may function as a different voice commentating on the protagonist's version of events. Although my discussions consider different sections of potential readership for Duffy's poems, I use Mills's term 'dominant reading', which she explains as 'commonsense' understanding of what a narrative means to a general readership, as a starting point from which to argue for covert, coded readings of certain poems. Mills discusses her 'reservations' about the concept because, as she argues, readers 'negotiate' with the information in the text, and the 'dominant reading' of a text is not the only interpretation. My discussions consider these reader negotiations but support the validity of the term, which is particularly apt for the narratives of Duffy's dramatic monologues that are the spoken testimonies of different characters in a realistic speech style that can be read as 'stories'.

Mills cites Fairclough whose work on linguistic 'cues' is also relevant to the concept of a 'dominant reading' based on shared knowledge among a readership for Duffy's poems:

The producer of the text constructs the text as an interpretation of the world, or of the facets of the world which are then in focus; formal features of the text are *traces* of that interpretation. The traces constitute *cues* for the text interpreter who draws upon her assumptions and expectations... to construct her interpretation of the text.⁴²

Although Mills cites Fairclough for her discussion of Fetterley's 'the resisting reader', I use his theory of linguistic 'cues' rather differently. It is not only relevant to the concept

of a dominant reading, but also supports my argument for 'specialist' readers able to decode esoteric 'cues' in collusion with the writer in a specific 'interpretation of the world'.⁴³ This is pertinent to my discussions of Duffy's incorporation of feminist discourse into her texts and my arguments for the intentionality of the poet.

Mills discusses the way that texts construct an 'implied reader' that offers a reading position for actual readers with which to align themselves, which will then make sense of the text.⁴⁴ The concept of an 'implied reader' is helpful for my discussions of extradiegetic listeners, the readership of Duffy's dramatic monologues. However, my readings of certain monologues indicate that the construction of an 'implied reader', a position for actual readers to adopt to make sense of the text, is inconsistent. This is caused at times by the use of linguistic cues that offer development into a materialist, radical critique of contemporary society that are in conflict with traces of the discourse of Romanticist characterisation.

Pearce terms this textual construct as the 'preferred reader' in her discussion of the 'emotional dimension of the reading process'.⁴⁵ I shall use both terms, choosing Pearce's 'preferred reader' in my discussions of the political function of Duffy's monologues and the intentionality of the poet herself, because the notion of preference conveys a nuance of the political dynamic between the writer and her text for which I argue.

The textual phenomenon of 'address' to particular readers is a component in the construction of an 'implied reader'. For my own research into the interlocutory dynamics operating between text and actual readers I use the analytical terms described by Mills.⁴⁶ In Chapter 3, 'Gender and Reading', using images and texts from commercial advertising posters, Mills demonstrates how 'the reader in a wide range of texts is positioned predominantly as male': my readings use Mills' analytical strategies to argue that Duffy's texts position readers as female.

Mills's analysis identifies linguistic elements 'which attempt to position you as a particular type of reader'. She discusses how texts gender readers and how readers themselves become aware of gender as an inclusionary or exclusionary aspect of reading particular texts. She argues that readers are 'addressed' in two ways: directly by the use of various ways of hailing/naming (a device which Duffy frequently uses in her later monologues), and/or indirectly by the content of the narrative.

Readers may feel included by a 'direct address' that identifies an aspect of their own subjectivity: a narrator may open, or continue her/his narrative with an address to particular groups of people citing, for example, gender or race or social activities, even several social determinants. Mills cites Montgomery and his exemplification of the ways that different sections of a radio audience can be hailed/addressed directly by reference to particular birth dates or astrological signs and other ways of 'naming' different groups of listeners.⁴⁷ She also discusses the possibility for readers who are not directly addressed by a text but who 'overhear' the address to negotiate inclusion, rather than exclusion, as readers and engage in some way with the message or argument of the text. I use these concepts of address, inclusion, exclusion, and readers' negotiation to discuss the wide readership of Duffy's 'feminist' monologues.

The second mode of address identified by Mills is 'indirect' where, although there is no direct naming of a particular type of listener, the content of a text may contain knowledge (and in Duffy's poems, a concern with social issues) that is shared by sections of its readership. Readers may feel included as addressees because they relate in some way to the content of the text, conversely, they may feel excluded by the content because they recognise it as specific to a different group of readers.

The strategies and analytical tools that I have outlined so far have considered the ways in which a text may position readers but as Mills and Pearce have argued, readers have the power to self-position themselves in the interpretation of texts.⁴⁸ As both critics remark

this is not a matter of total autonomy in the construction of 'meaning' but indicates the potential for readers' choice of subject position from which to read. A development of this is the recognition that readers are both positioned and self-positioning in relation to the text that is exemplified in Pearce's 'intellectual autobiography' in which she describes her progress from positioned reader (male) to self-positioning lesbian critic.⁴⁹

In my analysis of Duffy's monologues, my discussion of address and/or exclusion is extended to theorize an interaction between dramatic monologue and subjectivity, and attempts to elicit ways in which readers may identify aspects of their own lives; their social position; their sense of 'self', through identification with, or antipathy to, the speakers depicted in contemporary monologues.

Irony

The notion that readers are both positioned and self-positioning is relevant to the understanding of how irony is generated in/by the reading process, and why it is regarded as a potentially ambiguous and shifting property of some texts. Many critics have written at length on the nature of irony and how it may, potentially, be generated by both the content and structure of texts.⁵⁰ Therefore, rather than re-articulate the extensive critical interrogation of ironic communication/reception in literature I shall briefly discuss salient points that are relevant to my work.

Swift's 'A Modest Proposal' and Browning's 'My Last Duchess' are notable examples of texts that should produce an ironic reading response because the moral values expressed, even celebrated, by the protagonists are likely to oppose those held by readers, and can be identified by rhetorical strategies emanating from the writer. However, these examples are sometimes mis-read by young students, unable to identify the rhetorical strategies, who do not realise that they are not expected to align themselves with the values expressed by the protagonist, and that the project of the writing is to promote the covert, opposite values articulated by the text.

This phenomenon of naïve reading indicates that texts should be regarded as having a potential to stimulate an ironic reading, but that the process of generating irony is neither totally attributable to the writer nor the text. Readers themselves have agency in the formation of an ironic reading. Fish's theory of 'interpretive communities' gives useful insight into the way that students are taught to read ironically and are conditioned to recognise 'irony' but Hutcheon's recent development of Fish's 'interpretive communities' into her concept of 'discursive communities' is invaluable in my discussion of the political function of Duffy's dramatic monologues and the intentionality of the poet.⁵¹

Hutcheon considers the socio-political context of ironic readings:

The interpreter as agent performs an act - attributes both meanings and motives - and does so in a particular situation and context, for a particular purpose, and with particular means. Attributing irony involves, then, both semantic *and* evaluative inferences. Irony's appraising edge is never absent⁵²

She moves from her argument for the political process of an individual's ironic reading of a text, in collusion with the writer, to the concept of a community of readers with shared discursive contexts who will read particular texts ironically. This concept is important for my own readings where I argue that Duffy's ironic texts are inscribed with feminist issues that will be identified by feminist readers, and where I extend this to argue for Duffy's political intentions as a ironist. I also argue for particular poems that the 'preferred' discursive community of Duffy's readers is feminist , socialist and educated.⁵³

Hutcheon's identification of the historicity of discursive communities, 'Different discursive communities may certainly exist in different countries, for different generations, but also at different times in one person's life' supports my contention that the development of feminist discourse is a factor in the popularity and critical acclaim of dramatic monologue poems by contemporary women writers.⁵⁴

My readings of ironic monologues (Chapter Two) show that the potential for ironic readings changes the way that intra- and extradiegetic address functions. Readers are likely to reject the values promoted by an ironised speaker and search for the 'unsaid' and opposite values covertly inscribed in the narrative, in effect, they reject the overt inclusive devices of the speaker's narration. In other words, inclusive address has an exclusionary effect, because readers are more likely to identify with the covert address of the alternative values coded into the narrative.

Feminism, Politics and Intentionality

As I discussed earlier, feminist discourse has developed in many fields of inquiry since the Women's Movement of 1960's. My readings refer to specific concepts from a large body of feminist social and literary theory, and, where appropriate, cite individual critics and their theories.⁵⁵ Duffy's life and work is contemporaneous with this development of feminist thought.

There is a range of feminist and non-feminist positions from which to read Duffy's poems. In my analyses I consider some of the ways in which readers occupying a different subject position from myself might read her work; while at the same time I recognise that my discussion can only be speculative because of the highly specific nature of individual reading positions where a number of intersecting social determinants, such as race, education, class and sexual orientation construct the subjectivity of readers.

In my discussions of intentionality and the content of Duffy's monologues a superficial tension may arise between my use of the determinant 'where the speaker is not the poet' for my choice of dramatic monologues from Duffy's five collections, and my readings that argue for a degree of authorial intention in the 'message' of the narratives and subsequently for the political inflection of these intentions. The apparent conflict is located where my analyses formulate dominant and covert readings for Duffy's poems

that are substantiated by her discursive and linguistic choices because, in effect, these choices are aspects of the poet inflected into the text. The conflict is compounded where I validate my arguments for a relation between Duffy's intentions and her text with her own testimony at her poetry readings, and with the biographical facts of her life now available on the web. Because of this apparent tension, I should add that the phrase 'where the speaker is not the poet' is intended to indicate that Duffy is using the device of a dramatised character as the narrator: it is not intended to deny the existence of the varying degrees of correlation between Duffy, the poet, and the protagonists of her dramatic monologues, that my readings subsequently explore.

Duffy uses a wide range of dramatised characters. In my readings I use the terms 'mask' and 'persona' when discussing the relation between Duffy and her narrators. I cite Duffy's use of the 'mask' as a device for social critique but use it specifically for female protagonists, particularly where the narrative is autobiographical in style and content. Where the speaker is male and appears to perform the same function of critique, I use the term 'persona'. Elsewhere, where the narrator's language appears to be Duffy's, rather than characteristic of the protagonist, I use the term 'ventriloquism'.

I want to make it clear that I do not suggest that the individual interiority of Duffy, the poet, is accessible from her monologues even where she testifies to an 'autobiographical' link. Since Wimsatt and Beardsley's exposition of the 'intentional fallacy' many critics have discussed authorial intention and the im/possibility of reading this from a text.⁵⁶ Barthes' exposition of the materiality of language is also relevant to the issue of authorial intention. Eagleton succinctly summarizes Barthes' argument against those who seek the author from her/his text: 'Such an attitude 'dematerializes' literature, strives to reduce its material density as language to the intimate spiritual encounter of living 'persons'.⁵⁷

At a more 'common sense' level Wayne Booth's concept of the 'implied author' articulated what a critical reader might be expected to assume, that is, writers construct

an authorial persona for their writing activity, and they may alter this from one work to another.⁵⁸ I accept that a poet may well enjoy exploring the form and its possibilities, particularly in ironic mode, by setting up a dynamic contradiction between a speaker's narrative and the conventional values, unvoiced but detectable, that are implied by the speaker's unwitting self-revelation, but these covert values may not be held by the poet.

Nevertheless, while acknowledging the validity of these arguments against an unmediated transference of the poet's mind and will through her poems, I argue that Duffy's agency in the construction of her monologues is sufficient to support my contention that these poems have a political function.

Summary of the Project of the Thesis

My thesis will argue for a reconceptualisation of the dramatic monologue form by identifying a double-stranded inheritance of both ironic and sympathetic forms (non-ironic) derived from Browning and Webster, and analysing how poet, text, and readers interrelate in Duffy's dramatic monologues. Political intention feeds into this triadic relationship from both the poet, through her positioning of readers, and from readers by their self-positionings.

A second strand of my thesis contends that although Duffy's texts are constructed with many of the discourses circulating in contemporary society, a substantial engagement with feminist ideas can be seen in her dramatic monologues.

A third and minor strand of interrogation will be identified throughout the readings, and will be addressed in the conclusion to the thesis: I shall consider two aspects of female subjectivity, a disposition to empathize with others, and the tendency to narrate aspects of 'self' through others. I shall discuss the possibility that these interact in a way that enables and predisposes women poets to explore their own concerns through the persona of an Other. I shall argue that women poets use the dramatic monologue form more

readily because it is part of their gendered subjectivity to understand their own experience through relation to others: a characteristic that is less likely in a male poet who inserts himself into the tradition of English Literature dominated by the egocentric male 'voice'. The development of contemporary feminist discourse is a contributory factor in the current popularity of this form among women poets.

Outline of the Chapters

My readings and analyses of Duffy's dramatic monologue poems are organised into four chapters. These are followed by a Conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter One addresses the inheritance of the sympathetic, non-ironic, form of dramatic monologue poem from Webster. In my readings and analysis of a representative selection of Duffy's 'sympathetic monologues' drawn from her first four collections, I discuss the structural devices and textual features of the monologues which create the potential to generate 'Sympathy' in the writing/reading process; and I argue for a reconceptualisation of the form through the evidence of Duffy's work.

Chapter Two considers the second strand inherited from the nineteenth-century, the ironic form of dramatic monologue for which Browning is acclaimed as the foremost exponent. My readings and analysis of selected monologues argue for Duffy's extension of the poetic devices, the purpose, and the critical inquiry widely attributed to Browning's dramatic monologues. I contend that Duffy's ironic dramatic monologues have the potential to function as effective socio-political instruments.

Chapter Three explores monologues in which several voices narrate. In several of the poems, sympathetic and ironised characters alternate in the formation of the narrative. Duffy experiments with this multi-voiced form using a variety of linking devices to give coherence to the narratives. She also achieves an effective hybrid form of sympathetic

dramatic monologue and autobiography in her outstanding three-part dramatic monologue 'A Clear Note'.

Chapter Four considers Duffy's fifth collection *The World's Wife* and its explicit dedication to a female readership. My readings demonstrate Duffy's use of a wide range of textual effects and strategies to construct a variety of feminist reading positions. In addition I discuss the use and function of satire in the dramatic monologue form: this has been overlooked or over-simplified in previous critical accounts. I also argue that Duffy's dramatic monologues have the potential function of disseminating the concepts and debates of feminist discourse in an entertaining and instructive way into the public domain.

In the four chapters of my readings I initially read through each poem, paraphrasing where necessary to clarify my interpretation of 'the story'; in some of the more complex monologues I discuss the location within the main narrative of different voices/characters. I then re-read each poem analytically, interrogating the text through the discursive frameworks and stylistic analytical methods that I have described above.

NOTES

¹ Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against The Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

² An extensive bibliography of Duffy's 'works' and 'edited works' together with a list of critical studies and interviews is available in Deryn Rees-Jones, *Carol Ann Duffy*, 2nd edn. (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2001). A compilation of Duffy's biography, work, bibliography and press cuttings is available on the South Bank University website www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/carolannduffy

³ Andrew McAllister, 'Carol Ann Duffy: An Interview with Andrew McAllister' in *Bête Noire*, Issue Six, (Winter 1988), 69-77. Duffy discusses aspects of her work, life, and the poets that have influenced the development of her poetry. I cite extracts from Duffy's comments and arguments in this interview in my reading and analysis of several of her

poems, particularly where I am speculating on the intentions of the poet and the political function of the dramatic monologue form.

⁴ Critical acclaim from Peter Porter, reviewer/critic for the *Observer* newspaper at the time, was quoted on the back cover of Duffy's first collection *Standing Female Nude* (1985): 'Carol Ann Duffy is a very pure poet [...] It is good to see a crusading sensibility refusing to surrender any touch of art to the urgency of its cause'. His acclaim is representative of the many celebratory notices that Duffy's work has attracted since her first collection.

⁵ Sylvia Barnet, Morton Berman and William Burto, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (London: Constable, 1964).

⁶ M.H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th edn. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1988).

⁷ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

⁸ M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) is quoted by Arthur Asa Berger, *Cultural Criticism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995), pp.35-6.

⁹ Ina Beth Sessions's paper 'The Dramatic Monologue', *PMLA*, 62 (1947), 503-16, argued for seven characteristics that defined the 'Perfect Monologue', and extended her argument to include such categories as the 'Formal Monologue', the 'Approximate Monologue' and others. Sessions is cited in A. Dwight Culler, 'Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue', *PMLA*, 90 (1975), 366-85 (p.367).

¹⁰ Ralph W. Rader, 'Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic 'I' Poems and their Theoretical Implications', *Victorian Poetry*, 22 no.2 (Summer 1984), 103-21.

¹¹ Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977).

¹² Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985). I refer to this second edition (1985) in my comments on sympathy/empathy and in my subsequent response to Langbaum's conceptualisation of the dramatic monologue form.

¹³ Sinfield (1977), p.6.

¹⁴ Culler (1975).

¹⁵ Philip Drew, *The Poetry of Browning: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1970), pp.22-35.

¹⁶ Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

- ¹⁷ Elizabeth A. Howe, *The Dramatic Monologue* (New York: Twayne; London: Prentice Hall International, c1996).
- ¹⁸ Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, c1995).
- ¹⁹ Carol T. Christ, 'Self Concealment and Self-Expression in Eliot's and Pound's Dramatic Monologues', *Victorian Poetry*, 22 no.2 (Summer 1984), 216-26.
- ²⁰ Frances Bridges Carleton, *The Dramatic Monologue: Vox Humana* (Salzburg: Inst. f. Engl. Sprache u. Literatur, University of Salzburg, 1977).
- ²¹ Adam Roberts, *Robert Browning Revisited* (New York: Twayne, 1996).
- ²² Leighton (1992) discusses Webster's work in the context of other nineteenth-century male and female poets. See Leighton and Reynolds (1995) for texts of 'Faded' pp.424-28, and 'A Castaway' pp.433-48 and other dramatic monologues. Also see Armstrong (1993), 'A Music of Thine Own: Women's poetry - an expressive tradition?', pp.318-77, for 'masked critique' (pp.372-3). I expand my discussion of this term in the four chapters of readings.
- ²³ Leighton (1992) p.2 and pp.164-201. Leighton and Reynolds (1995) pp.417-50.
- ²⁴ A substantial collection of Webster's poems can be seen on University of Indiana website www.indiana.edu/cgi-bin-ip/letrs/vwwplib.pl
- ²⁵ Sinfield (1977) p.76.
- ²⁶ Germaine Greer, *Slipshod Sybils: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Viking, 1996). Greer is a recent example of this type of criticism. Her assessment of women's poetry fails to engage with the differences of content and poetics that are currently recognised, and valued, by feminist critics.
- ²⁷ Armstrong (1993) pp.372-3.
- ²⁸ Peter Porter's acclaim of Duffy's work (see note 4) typifies critical response to both her highly developed skills with pitch, rhythm and semantics, and her ability to 'voice' the social issues of contemporary British society.
- ²⁹ Critical notes and essays on Duffy's poems, interviews, and details of poetry readings at literature festivals are available on the web. Three such points of access are: www.poetrysoc.com <http://home.clara.net/stevebrown/html/duffy> under the English Open Access scheme and www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/carolannduffy which also provides substantial biographic detail of her life events and professional career together with an extensive bibliography of her poetry, plays and other projects.
- ³⁰ Deryn Rees-Jones (2001) 2nd ed.
- ³¹ I refer here to Duffy's Poetry Reading at St. Martin's College, Lancaster on the evening of 1 May 1977. Tony Blair's New Labour party was about to win the National Election.

Duffy's comment on the expected victory, that the 'wasted years' of Conservative government would be redressed, and her subsequent comments and readings of feminist, lesbian poetry before an academic audience supports my argument (that emerges in the following chapters) that much of her poetry addresses a socialist, feminist, lesbian, educated readership.

³² Jane E. Thomas, 'The Intolerable Wrestle With Words: The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy', *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 78-88.

³³ Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³⁴ Linda Kinnahan, 'Look for the Doing Words: Carol Ann Duffy and Questions of Convention', *Contemporary British Poetry*, ed. by James Acheson and Romana Huk (New York: State University of NY, 1996).

³⁵ Alan Robinson, *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1988). In the chapter 'Declarations of Independence: Some Responses to Feminism' (pp.195-99), Robinson reads 'A Provincial Party', 'Standing Female Nude' and 'Whoever She Was' from *Standing Female Nude* (1985).

³⁶ Nancy Miller, *Getting Personal* (London: Routledge, 1991); Jane Tompkins, 'Me and My Shadow' in *Feminisms*, ed. by Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (London: Macmillan, 1991); Vicki Bertram, "'Tidal Edges" in Contemporary Women's Poetry: Towards a Model of Critical Empathy' in *Women's Lives/Women's Times* (New York: State University New York, 1997), ed. by Linda Anderson and Treva Broughton.

³⁷ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983).

³⁸ My intention is to distinguish between those characters, the speaker and the internal audience, that embody the main narrating scenario and those characters referred to by the protagonist who are not present as speakers or listeners in the main narrative. The term 'hypodiegetic' is perhaps best explained in opposition to 'hyperdiegetic'. If 'hyperdiegetic' is used to signify a commentary (and therefore another 'character') above or after the narrative of the protagonist of the monologue, the term hypodiegetic can function to signify a character or event indicated below/before the main narrative, the diegesis, of the protagonist.

³⁹ A particular passage in Webster's text, lines 245-88, contains so many rhetorical questions from the speaker that I begin to wonder if there really is another, silent character present. However, I must acknowledge that this effect may not have arisen in a nineteenth century reader accustomed to a more intensive use of such tropes.

⁴⁰ Berger (1995) pp.35-6.

⁴¹ Sara Mills, 'Reading as/like a feminist' in *Gendering The Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), pp.25-47, and 'Chapter 3 'Gender and Reading' in *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.66-79.

- ⁴² Mills (1995), Chapter Three 'Gender and Reading' pp.66-79, cites Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 1989).
- ⁴³ Judith Fetterley, *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction* (Bloomington,IN: Indiana University Press, 1978). I found Fetterley invaluable at the outset of my studies in Feminist Criticism: she validated the discomfort I experienced when attempting to read male-authored American Literature. However, she does not offer a feminist reading strategy to address the sexual/textual issue of gendered reading position, other than to identify the need to read in 'active dialogue' with texts that gender 'the reader' as male.
- ⁴⁴ Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982). Mills is using Iser's concept of a 'network of response-inviting structures' which positions readers to interpret the text in a particular way.
- ⁴⁵ Lynne Pearce, "'I" the reader: text, content and the balance of power' in *Feminist Subjects, Multi-Media Cultural Methodologies*, ed. by Penny Florence and Dec Reynolds (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.160-70.
- ⁴⁶ Mills (1995), pp.66-79.
- ⁴⁷ Martin Montgomery, 'DJ Talk', *Media, Culture and Society*, 8.4 (1986), 421-40.
- ⁴⁸ Mills (1994) p.34, and Pearce (1995).
- ⁴⁹ My own reading of Browning's 'My Last Duchess' in my critique of Langbaum, see Part I above, exemplifies the self-positioning of a woman-oriented reader.
- ⁵⁰ Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), and Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994) are keystone texts for my understanding of Irony and Sympathy in writing/reading dramatic monologue texts.
- ⁵¹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge,MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), and Hutcheon (1994), 'Discursive Communities: How Irony "Happens"', pp.89-115.
- ⁵² Hutcheon (1994), 'Risky Business: The "Transideological" Politics of Irony', pp.9-36, (p.12).
- ⁵³ I am using Pearce's (1995) term because as I argued above, it carries a nuance of the political context of the writing and reception of these poems.
- ⁵⁴ Hutcheon (1994), p.115.
- ⁵⁵ Reading Bertram's discussion of women poets' familiarity with the concepts and language of 'high theory' was reassuring (and entertaining) when I had reached the stage of close analysis of Duffy's *The World's Wife*. See Bertram in Anderson and Broughton (1997), pp.262-4.

⁵⁶ W.K Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley, 'The Intentional Fallacy' in *The Verbal Icon* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

⁵⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.120-1.

⁵⁸ Booth (1974).

CHAPTER ONE: SYMPATHETIC DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

Duffy has written many dramatic monologues that depict speakers that are likely to appeal to readers' sympathy, rather than produce an ironic response. In my Introduction I argued that this use of a non-ironic form follows a tradition which can be traced back to Augusta Webster, a contemporary of Browning, and demonstrates a double-stranded inheritance in Duffy's work of both sympathetic and ironic forms of dramatic monologue derived from both Webster and Browning.

In this chapter I establish the reading method, outlined in the Introduction, that I use for all four chapters of readings. Using Rimmon-Kenan's narratological terms, I consider the construction and function of the speaker, the intradiegetic listener/the audience in the poem, the extradiegetic listeners/audience/ readers, and the interrelation between these three entities.¹ I discuss Duffy's use of 'masks' and 'personae' in my considerations of her speakers, and use Mills' concepts of indirect, direct and 'negotiated' address, and 'dominant readings' in my discussion of the readership for these poems.² I consider the content of the monologues, their social and literary context, and their significance in Duffy's work. I also discuss the autobiographical aspects of the relation between the hyperdiegetic voice that is established in several of the poems and Duffy herself.

At the end of the chapter, drawing upon my analyses of the poet's structural and rhetorical strategies, and the variety of different reading positions that I identified, I define 'Sympathy', which I propose as the opposite quality to Irony, and consider how a sympathetic response is generated in readers. Finally, I summarise Duffy's use of thematic material, complex time schemes and gendered (and in one case, universal)

extradiegetic address, and theorise how these affect the interlocutory dynamics of the dramatic monologue form.

The poems analysed in this chapter are; 'Selling Manhattan' (*SM 1987*), 'Shooting Stars' (*SFN 1985*), 'A Provincial Party' (*SFN 1985*), 'Standing Female Nude' (*SFN 1985*), 'Whoever She Was' (*SFN 1985*) and 'Recognition' (*SM 1987*). They are chosen to demonstrate the range of issues interrogated in Duffy's sympathetic dramatic monologues, and to show the connection with Webster's work and her use of the 'masked critique'.

'SELLING MANHATTAN' (*SM 1987*)

I shall initially read through the poem, paraphrasing the content to identify the 'scenario' and main features of the text. I shall then re-assess the poem analytically using the terms I identified in my introductory paragraph.

This dramatic monologue has three speakers: there is an italicised prologue of four lines in which a trader addresses his customer as 'Injun'; the main body of the poem depicts one 'character' and is in four five-line stanzas with an ending of one separated, single line sentence; finally there is a three-line epilogue in a third voice. I have not, however, categorised 'Selling Manhattan' as a multi-voiced dramatic monologue similar to the poems in Chapter Three because the main articulation of the poem is the 'voice' of one character, while the other two speakers frame this 'character' and provide a scenario for his monologue. This scenario initially depicts a history of the events preceding his speech, and finally, and somewhat ambiguously, depicts a location for the speaker's articulation.

The main speaker is the spirit of a dispossessed Native American who addresses a representative of twentieth-century industrial society with 'Man who fears death'. His monologue is a reprimand to the immigrant colonisers of North America and their subsequent, industrialising society that has polluted the land and destroyed the indigenous culture.

Italicised fragments of reported speech from early colonisers form a prologue to the speaker's monologue. This ironised, representative character reveals the initial exploitation and subsequent displacement of the native inhabitants of North America:

*All yours, Injun, twenty-four bucks' worth of glass beads,
gaudy cloth. I got myself a bargain. I brandish
fire-arms and fire-water. Praise the Lord.
Now get your red ass out of here.*

This 'character' is ironised by his disingenuous trade exchange with the 'Injun', and his invocation of homage to the Christian 'Lord' as the justification for his actions. There is also a marker for the writer's intention of irony in the striking assonance of 'fire-arms and fire-water'; and in the phrase 'I brandish' which suggests the writer's objective relationship with the character rather than the speaker's expression of his subjectivity. This ironised speaker is constructed as a stereotypical model of colonial oppression rather than as a speaking persona and functions to provide a condensed history of the early confrontation of the two opposing cultures.

The main speaker is depicted sympathetically as someone from a culture that differs from the Judeo-Christian tradition: his culture is based on close personal identification with the ecosystem. Throughout his monologue he personalises the natural environment: the ground can speak to him, as can the 'spirit of the water'. His knowledge and

understanding of natural history/science is expressed metaphorically as 'the world's slow truth'; his heavy-hearted grief is related to his natural surroundings 'My heart is on the ground'; and his philosophy of life is embodied in 'the solemn laws of joy and sorrow'. He identifies the cultural difference of the colonisers and their lack of empathy with the life system about them, which separates them from the natural cycle of death and regeneration, with his address 'Man who fears death'. He describes the oppressive control of his people with the trope of an inexplicable natural phenomenon: 'a boy feels his freedom/vanish, like the salmon going mysteriously/out to sea'.

In his opening stanza, the ghost of a Native American identifies the destruction of his intuitive and non-exploitative relationship with the land by the colonisers' bribery with alcohol and promises of an easier life:

I wonder if the ground has anything to say.
You have made me drunk, drowned out
the world's slow truth with rapid lies.

He argues that he now recognises the threat to the ecosystem of his land through the misuse of natural resources:

But today I hear again and plainly see. Wherever
you have touched the earth, the earth is sore.

In the next stanza he challenges the belief that land and natural resources can be privately owned and exploited, and argues for his own reciprocal relationship with the natural rhythms of the earth:

I wonder if the spirit of the water has anything
to say. That you will poison it. That you
can no more own the rivers and the grass than own
the air. I sing with true love for the land;
dawn chant, the song of sunset, starlight psalm.

He then warns of impending disaster and compares the heaviness of his heart at the pollution of the land with the time when his 'loved one' died. He describes his own philosophy, his understanding of the inevitable mixed fortunes that arrive with every day:

Trust your dreams. No good will come of this.
My heart is on the ground, as when my loved one
fell back in my arms and died. I have learned
the solemn laws of joy and sorrow, in the distance
between morning's frost and firefly's flash at night.

He addresses the cause of this destruction, modern Industrial Society, as 'Man who fears death', and questions his progressive acquisition of land and resources to cast the influence of his own (industrial) power over the earth:

Man who fears death, how many acres do you need
to lengthen your shadow under the endless sky?
Last time, this moment, now, a boy feels his freedom
vanish, like the salmon going mysteriously
out to sea. Loss holds the silence of great stones.

He concludes his monologue with a single line, the assertion of his own non-death where his spirit will pass into the natural world about him: 'I will live in the ghost of grasshopper and buffalo.' This last comment contains a sense of further natural disaster because of the intimation that grasshoppers and buffaloes may themselves vanish from the land, only to be present as the 'ghost' in which he will metaphysically continue a form of existence.

The final three-line stanza appears to be an epilogue from another speaker, an omniscient narrator, passing comment on a momentary event. The language is figurative but does not suggest the otherness of the main speaker in the poem. I shall consider the function of this final speaker in my analysis below.

Address

The speaker addresses his oppressor, the 'Man who fears death', intradiegetically, but taken in the context of the argument of the poem, this address functions extradiegetically to directly address readers of both genders. It is widely accepted amongst feminist critics that the universalising term Man[kind] is rarely inclusive of women: close analysis of its use in specific contexts commonly reveals a gender discrimination in favour of male values/attitudes that is disguised by the collective noun. In this poem however, the term does function as a universal address because the issue of pollution and destruction of the world's ecosystem is one that involves us all, through our active or tacit acceptance of western industrialisation; because of this shared responsibility, the extradiegetic address here is to all readers: unusually, it is not gendered as in much of Duffy's work.³

In other sections of the poem the status and function of the speaker's address is more difficult to determine. As I discussed above, the opening italicised speech is a collection of fragments suggesting early colonial attitudes to the indigenous Indian population.⁴ The address is intradiegetic to the 'Injun' with the exception of the phrase 'I brandish' where there is a shift towards an indirect extradiegetic address to readers because of the opportunity for irony that is created. Readers recognising the possibility of ironisation of this speaker are in effect positioned as the audience outside the poem to whom the covert message of the ironising strategy is addressed. The irony and the shift towards extradiegetic address identifies this first character as a representation of western capitalist society against which the protagonist subsequently speaks. This ironised representation sets up the target for the 'message' of the poem that is articulated by the sympathetic speaker.

In 'Selling Manhattan' the speaker functions to voice a contemporary ecological issue, that is, the environmental costs of the rapid industrialisation of Western Society. He personalises the pollution issue in terms of his own wellbeing: 'My heart is on the ground, as when my loved one/fell back in my arms and died.' He warns of future catastrophe with an intradiegetic address, 'Trust your dreams. No good will come of this', that functions largely to address extradiegetic listeners/readers. His question, 'Man who fears death, how many acres do you need/to lengthen your shadow under the endless sky?' is rhetorical and identifies the issues of industrial pollution.

A third voice ends the poem in a three-line epilogue that describes a location in which the ghost of the Native American may have uttered his monologue:

The evening trembles and is sad.
A little shadow runs across the grass
and disappears into the darkening pines.

The significance of this epilogue is ambiguous: the tone is impersonal and no intradiegetic addressee is implied. It appears to be a lyrical passage voiced by an omniscient witness to the fulfilment of the speaker's prophecy 'I will live in the ghost of grasshopper and buffalo'. The 'little shadow' suggests the metaphysical presence of the Native American sensed or imagined at twilight by this third 'voice'. This final voice can be read as a hyperdiegetic presence. The figurative language suggests that it may be closely aligned with Duffy. Taken in context with the ironising consciousness present in the prologue, this epilogue suggests that a personal concern over environmental issues had led to Duffy's creation of this dramatic monologue, in which the ghost of the Native American 'voices' the issue of environmental exploitation and pollution in the intensely industrialised society of the USA.

Time

Time is fluid in this poem. The speaker is a ghost from the past, as is his colonial oppressor, but his monologue is spoken as if he stood before his addressee: 'You have made me drunk [...] But today I hear again and plainly see.' His rhetorical question to extradiegetic readers, 'Man who fears death, how many acres do you need/to lengthen your shadow under the endless sky?', read as a critique of Western Society, identifies the contemporaneous ecology debate of the second half of the twentieth century. The time reference of his subjugation also puts his own fate into the time context of all subsequent generations: 'Last time, this moment, now, a boy feels his freedom/vanish'. Finally, ambiguously, the epilogue places an impersonal, omniscient 'voice' in the present time and suggests a present-day witness to the 'ghost' of the speaker.

Summary of 'Selling Manhattan'

I shall begin my summary of the specific features that arose in my reading and analysis with a comment on Duffy's uncharacteristic delineation of her protagonist, the Native American. Duffy has insisted in interview: 'I don't think that I'd be capable of writing about landscape. Its people and use [sic] that I'm interested in'.⁵ The speaker of 'Selling Manhattan' belies the stricture of her self-assessment because the character brings together these two categories that she regards as antithetical: the delineation of a speaking character and fresh, innovative, metaphoric language in the description of her protagonist's 'landscape', for example, 'the distance/between morning's frost and firefly's flash at night'. This use of figurative language develops a lyrical element of sadness and nostalgia in the poem. However, the scenario created by the prologue and epilogue speakers constructs the poem as dramatic monologue form.

Few of Duffy's poems use a male character that can be categorised as a 'mask'.⁶ Yet, if the 'message' of the poem relates to Duffy's concern at the development of global pollution, the protagonist of the poem can be read as Duffy's 'mask', where the values expressed by the protagonist are closely aligned to Duffy's. This is feasible because in this poem Duffy addresses a universal issue and uses a 'universal' address.

'Selling Manhattan' depicts an innovatory use of the dramatic monologue form. The subject of the poem, the industrial pollution of the natural environment in the USA and the oppression and debilitation of the indigenous population, has been widely debated and politicised in the later decades of the twentieth century. This political debate has been extensively articulated in the mass media and academic institutions, Duffy's poem extends the range of subject matter of the dramatic monologue while at the same time potentially increasing the readership of the debate through her synthesis of polemic, poetic discourse, and dramatic monologue form.

'SHOOTING STARS' (*SFN 1985*)

The device of a hyperdiegetic presence suggested in the final lines of 'Selling Manhattan' is also used in this dramatic monologue but forms a more substantial feature of the narrative, in which the female speaker describes the scene of her death: an episode of the massacre and mass burial of Jewish men, women and children in the Holocaust. The poem has six four-line stanzas. In the first four stanzas the speaker relates the details of her execution; in the fifth stanza a different 'voice' comments on the scene described and articulates a moral judgement on the world's tacit acceptance of such inhuman acts. The poem ends with a return to the protagonist who pleads with the generations who follow her to remember her fate.

Each of the first four stanzas contains a concrete image that details the terror felt by the holocaust victim and her companions, and the cruelty of the soldiers that murder them.

The first stanza opens with a brutal image and ends with an appeal to an unidentified audience of the future:

After I no longer speak they break our fingers
to salvage my wedding ring. Rebecca Rachel Ruth
Aaron Emmanuel David, stars on all our brows
beneath the gaze of men with guns. Mourn for the daughters,

The event of their deaths is described as if in the present, 'they break our fingers', but the time context of 'Mourn for the daughters' is ambiguous because it can be read as the speaker's appeal to a future audience that is looking back at this historical event, or it can be read as another 'voice', a hyperdiegetic presence commenting on the speaker's narrative.

In the second stanza the speaker addresses a companion who died alongside her and recalls her friend's final moment. She then appeals again to a future audience to remember their fate:

upright as statues, brave. You would not look at me.
You waited for the bullet. Fell. I say Remember.
Remember these appalling days which make the world
forever bad. One saw I was alive. Loosened

As in the first stanza, the appeal 'Remember these appalling days which make the world/forever bad' constructs an uncertainty about the time context. The appeal starts with a first-person pronoun, 'I say Remember.' but the judgement 'which make the world/forever bad' creates a confusion of time context because of the present tense used rather than the future tense, that is, 'which [will] make the world/forever bad'. The

judgement 'forever bad' seems more apposite for a commentator looking back at the events, but in that case the statement would be articulated as '[those] appalling days' rather than 'these appalling days'. This uncertainty of time context makes it difficult to determine whether the appeal is attributable to the protagonist or the hyperdiegetic speaker/commentator ambiguously implied in the opening stanza.

The third stanza continues the depiction of the protagonist's terror at the threat of rape, and the graphic murder of a child still alive among the dead bodies:

his belt. My bowels opened in a ragged gape of fear.
Between the gap of corpses I could see a child.
The soldiers laughed. Only a matter of days separate
this from acts of torture now. They shot her in the eye.

The concrete imagery depicting the child's death is interrupted by a comment on the atrocity 'Only a matter of days[...]' that can be attributed to the protagonist but is more convincingly read as that of the hyperdiegetic commentator, discussed above. If the comment is attributed to the intradiegetic speaker, the protagonist, there is a time discontinuity between 'this', which refers collectively to the details of the execution, and 'acts of torture now' which identifies a later time. This would require a scenario in which the ghost of the victim speaks, and in which the variation between past and present in her narrative signifies that she sometimes speaks at the time of the massacre and at other times speaks as a 'ghost' narrator, looking back at the past. If, however, the comment is attributed to the hyperdiegetic 'voice' there is an implication that this commentator is speaking in the presence of an unspecified recorded testimonial, for example, historical records of some nature. This hyperdiegetic comment argues that the atrocities cited in the speaker's narrative only differ from continuing 'crimes against humanity' by their location in the timeline of human history and not by the nature of their perpetration.

The fourth stanza begins with a question in the present tense that can be attributed to the hyperdiegetic voice 'How would you prepare to die [...]?'. This question has the potential to function as a direct extradiegetic address to readers because they are positioned to respond to the question and closely empathise with the protagonist. The use of pastoral imagery depicts the scene of the massacre as a pleasant and gentle social occasion for the execution squad:

How would you prepare to die, on a perfect April evening
with young men gossiping and smoking by the graves?

An inflection of the inhumanity of such an event is strengthened by the ironic juxtaposition of the request to empathise with the reality of the death described, and the description of the relaxed enjoyment of the young men resting by the graves. The final two lines of the stanza return to the protagonist with sensual imagery that focuses the narrative closely on to her physical consciousness of her final moments: 'My bare feet felt the earth and urine trickled/down my legs until I heard the click. Not yet. A trick.'

The fifth stanza appears to be the present tense articulation of an omniscient narrator whose 'voice' can also be attributed to the hyperdiegetic commentator implied in the preceding stanzas. The tone is initially ironic because of the juxtaposition of the citation of recently inflicted human suffering with the visible normality of innocuous social activities:

After immense suffering someone takes tea on the lawn.
After the terrible moans a boy washes his uniform.

The tone appears to change again in the next two lines towards a seemingly impersonal comment on the mundane nature of daily life among human societies:

After the history lesson children run to their toys the world
turns in its sleep

This generalisation is ironised by the concluding phrase and ellipsis, 'the spades shovel soil Sara Ezra ...!', implying that parallel to this stratum of innocuous human activity is another in which persecution and murder are continually enacted somewhere in the world. The omission of punctuation and the ellipsis suggest the unending continuation of this two-fold aspect of human life and an endless list of victims of similar atrocities that continue to become invisible to society and history.

The final stanza is articulated by the protagonist and appeals three times to an extradiegetic audience:

Sister, if seas part us do you not consider me?
 Tell them I sang the ancient psalms at dusk
 inside the wire and strong men wept. Turn thee
 unto me with mercy, for I am desolate and lost.

The address is gendered and direct, and reaches outside the narrative to an extradiegetic female audience, the readers of her narrative. In the Jewish religion it is not customary for the men to listen to women singing prayers; this functions to prevent the women from religious singing in public. If Duffy is aware of this fact, the protagonist's singing may signify a loss of her Jewish identity, and perhaps that of her hearers who permitted her to sing. Her final appeal in the style of a biblical quotation suggests an allusion to countless ages of people suffering at the hands of their fellow humans.

Time

As my reading shows, the protagonist's narrative and appeals to an audience are situated in a complex time scheme. At the beginning of the poem the protagonist speaks in the present tense then changes to a past tense description of her friend's death. The time location and attribution for the plea for remembrance in the second stanza is uncertain.

The third and fourth stanzas are narrated in the past tense, except where the hyperdiegetic commentator speaks in the present tense, as I discussed above. The fifth stanza narrated in the present tense is an ironic, objective commentary on the events, contextualising them with mundane, everyday life. The protagonist's final stanza uses the present tense. This movement between past and present creates ambiguity in both the source of the utterance and the status of the audience. It is unambiguous where the protagonist addresses her intradiegetic graveside companion, but elsewhere, appeals for empathy and comments on the narrative are more convincingly attributed to a hyperdiegetic presence that may represent another character who is reading her narrative and consequently addresses a different audience. This hyperdiegetic presence, initially suggested in the first stanza, 'Mourn for the daughters', is implied in all the stanzas except the final one.

If all the comments, including the fifth stanza, that have the potential to function as a hyperdiegetic narrative commenting on the protagonist's narrative are envisaged as the articulation of a hyperdiegetic presence, it is possible to clarify the structure and meaning of the poem by abstracting and collating these as if they were a hyperdiegetic speech articulated after the events described by the protagonist:

'Mourn for the daughters [...] Remember these appalling days which make the world forever bad.[...] Only a matter of days separate this from acts of torture now.[...] How would you prepare to die, on a perfect April evening/with young men gossiping and smoking by the graves? (I have altered the format of these fragments from various stanzas in order to convey the cohesion of meaning that underlies this hyperdiegetic narrative.)

After immense suffering someone takes tea on the lawn.
 After the terrible moans a boy washes his uniform.
 After the history lesson children run to their toys the world
 turns in its sleep the spades shovel soil Sara Ezra...

Physically deconstructing the poem in this way reveals it to be a sympathetic dramatic monologue unusually constructed with the 'sympathetic' protagonist's narrative, a succession of concrete images representing the death and final plea of a Holocaust victim, and an interspersed 'sympathetic' commentary on the events described.

The construction and use of intradiegetic address is particularly interesting in this poem. The presence of an intradiegetic audience is regarded as a defining feature of the dramatic monologue form by some critics (as I discussed in the Introduction). In 'Shooting Stars' there is very little use of clearly defined intradiegetic address. The protagonist does directly address a companion in the second stanza, as I argued in my initial reading: 'You would not look at me./You waited for the bullet.' However, with the exception of the protagonist's overt extradiegetic address of the final stanza, other instances of address have the potential to function extradiegetically, rather than as intradiegetic address, and are attributable to either the protagonist or, more convincingly, the hyperdiegetic presence that I defined in my analysis above. The protagonist does not address the hyperdiegetic presence.

Gendered extradiegetic address and the hyperdiegetic voice

Extradiegetic address functions in various ways in the two, alternating sympathetic narratives. The Holocaust victim's narrative is constructed with descriptions of the atrocities that in themselves form an indirect address to extradiegetic readers, and contains instances of ambiguously located direct, extradiegetic address, that ends with

the direct, gendered, extradiegetic address from the grave to readers. The hyperdiegetic 'voice' articulates an extradiegetic address, in some instances not clearly differentiated from that of the protagonist (as I argued earlier). This passes comment on the protagonist's narrative, and places it in the context of the mundane, daily life of human society and the parallel stratum of world-wide oppression and suffering that are the reality of human existence. In effect, this hyperdiegetic voice functions as an extradiegetic address, rather than as a delineation of character.

The gendered, extradiegetic address in 'Shooting Stars' is an early example of Duffy's use of feminist discourse with dramatic monologue form, although this may not be apparent to readers that are not gender-conscious and insist that response to the atrocities represented in the poem must be one of 'universal' abhorrence. Duffy has used a gendered address to listeners/readers that becomes overt, invoking a community of women, in the final stanza: 'Sister, if seas part us do you not consider me?' This gendered address is implied in the opening stanza, where, although the victims of the massacre are cited as both male and female, the address is 'Mourn for the daughters'. The female gender of the speaker is established in the allusion to rape in the second and third stanza. The mass murderers are defined as callous males 'young men gossiping and smoking by the graves'. This marked division between the genders where the females are represented sympathetically and the soldiers are ironised as cruel killers must affect readers' response to the text in different ways.

In view of the content of the poem, I shall expand my discussion here to consider this potential division of the readership and the phenomena of dominant readings and reader exclusion.⁷ The consideration of the many different categories of reader that may be

excluded by Duffy's texts is not part of my main reading method for this thesis but needs to be examined here because of the subject of 'Shooting Stars'.

The Jewish Holocaust is a subject likely to engage the sympathy of most readers of the Judeo-Christian West where it is widely regarded as the nadir of human oppression.⁸

The dominant reading of 'Shooting Stars' would be expected to be one of sympathy among Duffy's readership, but this is not unproblematic.

Duffy's differential gendering of the victim and her murderers is likely to generate some tension in the response of male readers predisposed to engage sympathetically with the subject of the poem. If gender-conscious male readers are to feel themselves addressed, rather than alienated, by the poem there must be some process of 'negotiation' of reading-position taking place.⁹ The concept that male readers, apparently excluded by the gendering, may self-position themselves as readers by a process of 'negotiation' permits me to argue that, although the content of 'Shooting Stars' may be read by both genders, it is a 'feminist' poem and, as such, is an early example of Duffy's use of gendered extradiegetic address and feminist discourse with the dramatic monologue form.

I shall return now from the consideration of reader 'exclusion' to the hyperdiegetic 'presence' that I identified in my reading as a 'voice' articulating the commentary on the protagonist's narrative. This 'presence' is established by a set of values and attitudes rather than by idiosyncratic features representing a 'character'. This textual phenomenon is more like a mask than a persona and suggests a close alignment between the writer's own convictions and the attitudes depicted in the poem. In fact one might even argue

that, in the absence of any delineation of 'character', the voice could be read as a direct intervention by Duffy, that is, a lyrical element expressive of her own 'voice'.

Duffy has in interview situated her work in the context of the second half of the twentieth century's social history:

What I am doing is living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the radio news every day and going out every day and reading the newspapers every day and meeting people who've had wonderful or horrifying experiences, and sometimes that will nudge me towards a poem.¹⁰

'Shooting Stars' was published in 1985 by which time globalisation of mass media 'news' had developed. Journalists from the developed West were able to broadcast 'news' of conflicts and injustices as they occurred throughout the world with the use of portable satellite links to the West's broadcasting networks. In view of Duffy's testimony and my argument for the presence of her own 'voice' in the hyperdiegetic commentary, it seems reasonable to assess the line 'Only a matter of days separate/this from acts of torture now' with its specific time indicator, as a direct reference to Duffy's own conviction of the continuation of oppression and suffering as human history proceeds.¹¹

Summary of 'Shooting Stars'

I shall now bring together my comments on the extradiegetic address, the commentary of the hyperdiegetic 'voice' and the implied extradiegetic listener, the readership of Duffy's poem. Both the protagonist and the hyperdiegetic commentator address an extradiegetic audience. The purpose of this is to convey knowledge of the content of the dramatic monologue, the Jewish Holocaust, the injustice, suffering and cruelty of this historic event, and the writer's values and attitudes concerning this specific historic event. I have argued that the commentary suggests that the hyperdiegetic 'speaker' functions as a mask

for Duffy or even as her own 'voice', and that the values and attitudes are ones that she wishes to promote as her own. Critics of Browning have argued that much of his work in dramatic monologue form embodied arguments and resolutions that related to his own personal concerns with matters of Art, Religion and Morality.¹² Duffy's poem differs from that Browning tradition because she genders both the social situation and the readership for her poem. Furthermore, following in the tradition of Augusta Webster's work, her concerns are not the grand abstracts that Browning chose as the underlying subjects of his dramatic monologues, but the material conditions and events of twentieth century human existence.

Duffy uses a non-linear time scheme for both 'Selling Manhattan' and 'Shooting Stars', this enables the narrative to move smoothly between the present and the past, emphasising a historical connection between atrocities of the past and those continuing into the twentieth century. The transitions between past and present in both poems are like a seamless interface rather than a sharp disjunction. In effect this fluidity in time enables Duffy to use a historical situation to address continuing problems. Because she does not cite specific contemporary conflicts, the poem conveys a sense of the continuous juxtaposition of aggression and catastrophe with mundane daily activity in human history.

I have differentiated 'Shooting Stars' from the multi-voiced dramatic monologues of Chapter Three because, although readers are positioned to empathise with the fate of the protagonist through the judgement of the hyperdiegetic commentary, there is really only one speaking 'character' in the poem; whereas in the 'multi-voiced' poems in Chapter Three, sympathetic and/or ironised narrators, sometimes stereotyped, follow one another

as speaking 'characters' throughout the poem to represent the dialectic of a contemporary social issue.¹³ A significant innovation in 'Shooting Stars' is the unusual construction where a sympathetic narrative is alternated with a hyperdiegetic sympathetic commentary, which functions as an almost transparent 'mask' for Duffy herself, perhaps even as her own 'voice'.

The device of hyperdiegetic commentary is used in a different way in the following poem, it is inflected throughout the narration, but this problematises the status of the speaker

'A PROVINCIAL PARTY, 1956' (*SFN 1985*)

The scenario of this dramatic monologue is that of a young married woman attending her first 'blue movies' party with her husband. The poem has four, six-line stanzas and narrates the young woman's experience:

A chemical inside you secretes the ingredients of fear.
Is it fear? You know for sure you feel
uneasy on that black, plastic sofa, even though
the ice melts in a long tumbler behind red triangles.
You don't find it sexy your first blue movie
in a stranger's flat, but you watch it anyway.

Embarrassment crackles like three petticoats. You never
imagined, married two years and all. A woman
cackles a joke you don't understand, but you laugh anyway.
On one stocking, you have halted a ladder
with clear varnish.
There are things going on
on the screen which would turn your Mam to salt.

The era is precisely identified in the title and in the details of domestic furnishings and fashion in clothes: the 'black, plastic sofa', the tumbler with the 'red triangles', and the 'Cyril Lord' carpet; the fashion for stiffly- gathered nylon net petticoats, and the practice

of using nail varnish to halt the 'runs' in the expensive, newly-available, fine-denier nylon stockings. Duffy seldom locates her narrators in an explicitly visual scene. Here, the 'black' and 'red' colours of the opening lines suggest an ambience of drama, perhaps even danger, which may have registered with the young woman who recalls aspects of the event in minute detail.

The young woman has accompanied her husband to a stranger's flat and is embarrassed and confused in her reactions to a 'blue movie'. She regards herself as sexually experienced but is shocked by what she sees: 'You never/imagined, married two years and all.' The sexual orientation of the events in the film is ambiguous because her comments suggest a variety of sexual acts that are abhorrent to her:

Suddenly, the whole room is breathing. Someone hums
Magic Moments and then desists, moist lips apart.
 Two men in the film are up to no good. *Christ*.
 You could die with the shame.

Here there is a suggestion of homosexual intercourse; while the final stanza suggests the inclusion of heterosexual acts that she regards as perverted:

You daren't look, but something is happening
 on the Cyril Lord. Part of you tells yourself it's only
 shaving-cream. You and him do it with the light off.
 This will give him ideas.

The scenario of the poem predates the sexual permissiveness of the 1960's and her reactions are a reflection of the conservative attitudes towards sexual explicitness that prevailed before the sexual liberation of 'flower-power' and the 'hippy generation'.

The poem ends with her mute appeal to her husband to leave with her. He rejects her unspoken message and allies himself with the glamorous host:

You nudge and nudge
till your husband squirms away from you and smiles
at the young, male host with film-star eyes.

The character of the young woman is delineated in her attitudes and in the colloquialisms 'married two years and all' and 'there are things going on/that would turn your Mam to salt', the latter indicating the speech of a Northerner. The italics of '*Christ*' suggest her uttered response at the time. The use of the present tense together with the impersonal 'you' can be read as the narration of the young woman as she graphically relates the event, as it happened at the time, to an intradiegetic audience.

However, there is something 'unnatural' about the persistent use of the second-person pronoun throughout the narration: speakers rarely maintain the impersonal effect of the second-person pronoun with consistency, and usually lapse into the first-person in parts of their narrative. Duffy has inferred that her characters should speak 'naturally' with plain language:

I don't talk, when I'm talking about life and death matters - things that are important to me, in anything other than very plain simple language. And no-one else does. And I think poetry needs that.¹⁴

This loss of naturalness in the speaker's narration causes a problem in unequivocally locating the 'voice' of the poem because it creates the potential for the monologue to be read as either as the dramatic monologue of the young woman herself, or as the narration of an omniscient observer who objectively describes the young woman's experience and seems to understand her predicament.

Extradiegetic Address or Dramatic Monologue 'by proxy'?

Throughout the monologue the speaker uses the second-person pronoun 'you' and the possessive 'your'. Speakers often use the second-person pronoun as an indicator of

inclusiveness when they are referring to experiences or attitudes likely to be shared or understood by their audience. This usage also circumnavigates the solipsism of calling attention to the speaker as an autonomous individual. If the narration is that of the young woman character (rather than an omniscient narrator) and she is talking to an intradiegetic audience, the address 'you' carries the implication that she is relating the event and expecting a sympathetic response from an understanding listener or one who has shared a similar experience.

However, in dramatic monologue form, the use of the second-person pronoun 'you' also functions, potentially, as a singular or plural direct extradiegetic address to readers. This suggests that the poem embodies a specific gendered address to female readers. If the poem is read in this way the speaker can be identified as a young woman revealing the reality of such events to readers. Some like myself, with no direct knowledge of 'blue movies' will negotiate an indirect address by the poem through a sympathetic response to the content of her narrative; others, who share a similar experience, will perhaps feel directly addressed by the second-person pronoun.

I shall return now to my earlier comment on the problematic status of the speaker. I have discussed 'address' which is relevant to the dramatic monologue form but will now consider the implications of an alternative reading. The narrative can be read as the voice of an omniscient narrator (who may be closely aligned with the writer) who has access to the innermost thoughts of the young woman. The objective description of the opening line and the following question suggests that this interpretation is tenable:

A chemical inside you secretes the ingredients of fear.
Is it fear? You know for sure you feel
uncomfortable on that black, plastic sofa

A different consciousness from that of the young woman is evident in the figurative language and internal rhyme 'cackles [...] crackles' of the second stanza:

Embarrassment crackles like three petticoats. You never
imagined, married two years and all. A woman
cackles a joke you don't understand, but you laugh anyway.

If the poem is read as the omniscient observer's narrative the young woman functions as the object of the poem rather than as its subject. This objective distance between the narrator and the young woman suggests a potential for irony. There may be readers who perceive the young woman as culpably naïve, (she ought to know better), but a feminist perspective is likely to give more significance to the woman's disadvantage in the male-oriented ambience and event, and read the character sympathetically.

If the narrative is that of an omniscient observer this is not the same effect as the hyperdiegetic presence in 'Shooting Stars' because this ambiguous, alternative voice is inherent throughout the poem through the use of the second-person pronoun. There is not the sense of two different voices in the poem, nor is there the effect of an ironising double-consciousness except, as I commented, where the use of figurative language suggests the poet's conscious choice of metaphor.¹⁵

The uncertain source of the narration raises the question: is the young wife the subject or the object of the monologue? One solution to this dilemma is to assess the poem as a dramatic monologue 'by proxy' where the narrator sympathetically relates the young wife's experience for her. Reading the narrator as a conventional omniscient observer has the problem that the physical details, such as the 'pinching' suspenders seem too

intimate to be convincingly attributed to an observer, however empathic. This being the case, overall the narrative is more convincing as the wife's own version of the event.

This notion of reading the poem as a dramatic monologue 'by proxy' arose as a result of experimentally reading the dramatic monologue using the first-person pronoun 'I'. In the conventional form using the first-person pronoun, the narration becomes more dramatic, in fact it seems melodramatic *'I daren't look, but something is happening/on the Cyril Lord. Part of me tells myself it's only/shaving-cream'*; the speaker seems less sympathetic because of her consciousness of self *'My suspenders/pinch me spitefully, like kids nipping spoilsports'*.

Re-reading the poem in the 'I' form reduces the effect of sympathy and creates a stronger potential for irony. The implied personality of the protagonist is changed from that of an embarrassed young wife seeking to avoid focusing attention on herself to that of a self-dramatising character. There is the loss of the presence of a sympathetic intradiegetic listener implied by the use of 'you', and correspondingly the loss of the potential direct extradiegetic address to readers that I discussed above.

Duffy's text, as it is, positions readers to respond sympathetically to an issue in gender politics, despite the unconvincing sections of narration that I discussed. The cumulative affect of changing the monologue to the conventional first-person narration would be to lose that positioning. This may be Duffy's reason for using the second-person pronoun throughout the narration with the resultant ambiguity that I have described as a potential for 'dramatic monologue by proxy'. Despite the ambiguity of the narrating voice, Duffy's

strategy sympathetically conveys the invidious position of a female disadvantaged by the oppressively male-oriented 'blue movies' event.

Summary of 'A Provincial Party, 1956'

'A Provincial Party, 1956' uses a gendered perspective to illuminate the feminist issue of the lack of subject position for females in the male-oriented discourses of our society.

There is a correspondence between the problematic 'voice' of this dramatic monologue, that is, the absence of 'I', and the impossibility of an authentic female subject position.

The poem ostensibly depicts the oppression of the young wife in the specifically masculinist milieu of a 'blue movie' party. An analytical reading of the poem reveals a subtext which illustrates the problematic of an 'authentically female' subject position for the speaker: she can either adopt a masculine position, as does the woman who 'cackles a joke you don't understand, but you laugh anyway', or she can position herself in empathy with female characters in the film who are the objects of the male-oriented sexual practices portrayed by the male actors.¹⁶

'A Provincial Party, 1956' could also be categorised as an example of those poems that lie ambiguously between the poetic forms of lyric and dramatic monologue.¹⁷ The scene is constructed with an intimacy of detail, the laddered stocking, the pinching suspenders, that suggests strong empathy with the character, perhaps even shared experience. This could lead to an interpretation of the poem as a covert autobiographical narrative, inflected with traces of the poet's own experience. This would suggest that the character here, as in several of the poems in this thesis, functions as a mask for the poet herself. However, Duffy pre-empts this autobiographical interpretation with the precision of the dated title 'A Provincial Party, 1956' and the detailed placing of the scenario in that era

which indicate that the poem should be read as a dramatic monologue rather than otherwise.¹⁸ It seems that in depicting the instability of subject position for her speaker Duffy has created instability in the form of the poem itself, that is, she has opened up the potential for the poem to be read as a lyric rather than as a dramatic monologue. However, this is pre-empted with the caveat of the dated title and defined era of the 1950s finally safeguarding the text from biographical determinations.

'STANDING FEMALE NUDE' (*SFN 1985*)

This sympathetic monologue shares the theme of female subjectivity but in contrast with 'A Provincial Party, 1956' the female speaker is empowered through her active rejection of the role of objectified Muse for the artist for whom she sits. Unlike the discomfited wife at the 'blue movie' party, the speaker claims agency as a participant in the commercial transaction by which she identifies her work as an artist's model.

The monologue has four seven-line stanzas depicting the scenario of a model, posing nude in an artist's studio. The speaker is the young woman who is posing for the painter who pays her to model for his nude study. The speaker's voice is present continuously through the poem without the uncertainty of utterance that characterises the previous poem. The poem begins and ends with a statement of the commercial nature of her relationship with the artist: 'Six hours like this for a few francs.' and 'I say/Twelve francs and get my shawl. It does not look like me.' The artist is indirectly voiced through reported speech, for example in the first stanza 'further to the right,/Madam. And do try to be still.' An intradiegetic audience is implied where the speaker names the artist, and in the final stanza with 'I ask him Why do you do this?'

The model's narrative reveals her own analytical materialist perspective on her function as a model, and that of the artist and his patrons, in the discourse and practice of Art. Her analysis constructs both a critique of the commodification of Art and the function of the British Monarchy as the summit of the elite group that benefits from this social practice, and a Freudian determination of the artist's creative impulse.

In my reading of the poem I shall paraphrase the speaker's narrative and identify the different components of her critique stanza by stanza. I shall conclude with a comparison of this dramatic monologue with both Christina Rossetti's sonnet 'In an Artist's Studio', and refer to the materialist tradition inherited from Augusta Webster.

In the opening stanza the speaker is depicted as a materialist critic of the artistic milieu in which she works, in both the opening line 'Six hours like this for a few francs', and the end of the stanza, 'The bourgeoisie will coo/at such an image of a river-whore. They call it Art.' She portrays her work as a commercial transaction rather than as a Romantic acquiescence to a painter's vision of her as his Muse. The patrons wealthy enough to invest money outside their immediate needs are portrayed as despicable in the implied exoticism of their reaction to the resultant painting: 'such an image of a river-whore'.¹⁹ Her comments identify her own materialist understanding of her work and the commodification and social exclusivity of the 'Art' world: 'They call it Art.' The objectification of her body is implied with the absence of punctuation in 'Belly nipple arse in the window light,' and she suggests that the final painting will be an abstraction rather than realistic: 'he drains the colour from me [...] I shall be represented analytically'.

The second stanza sets up a judgemental opposition between her own basic need for food and his concern with the conventions, and ultimately the arbitrary aesthetics, of two-dimensional art:

Maybe. He is concerned with volume, space.
I with the next meal. You're getting thin,
Madame, this is not good.

She reveals her own dismissive and irreverent attitude to future artistic appreciation of the image produced in the transaction between herself and the artist, and identifies the British Monarchy as the most important/powerful patron in the social stratum that creates the discourse of Art, and enriches itself thereby:

In the tea-leaves
I can see the Queen of England gazing
on my shape. Magnificent, she murmurs
moving on. It makes me laugh.

Reading the pattern of tea-leaves left in a cup is a relic of folklore in which the superstitious would attempt to foresee the events of their future. Here it can be read as both a metaphor for an imagined future occasion, and as a somewhat ironic self-assessment of the speaker's participation in the process and production of Art.

The third stanza moves from a materialist commentary on the production of Art to the interaction between the speaker and the artist. The model frames her importance as Muse to the painter in Freudian terms where his brush symbolises sexual penetration of his model:

...They tell me he's a genius.
There are times when he does not concentrate
and stiffens for my warmth. Men think of their mothers.

He possesses me on canvas as he dips the brush
repeatedly into the paint. Little man,
you've not the money for the arts I sell.

However, her unsympathetic Freudian reduction of his painting activity is mitigated by the sympathy of her class solidarity revealed in the next line: 'Both poor, we make our living how we can.'

The artist's voice is heard again in reported speech in the final stanza: 'I ask him Why do you do this. Because/I have to. There's no choice. Don't talk.' The Romanticism implied in his self-identification as a subject driven by his creative 'daemon' is dismissed at the end of the monologue with her materialist verdict on the nature of their relationship and the value of the artist's painting:

... When it's finished
he shows me proudly, lights a cigarette. I say
twelve francs and get my shawl. It does not look like me.

Throughout the monologue the speaker reveals herself as the subject of conflicting discourses in contemporary society: she insists on the materialist nature of her relationship with the artist and perceives the commodification of his creative impulse, yet she demonstrates an inflection of Romantic individualism in her expectation of a 'realistic' portrait, 'It does not look like me', because she wishes to recognise herself in the image; in effect the painting denies her self-defined subjectivity. She reduces the artist's painting to Freudian symbolism of sexual drive, yet counters this with a more fundamental materialist sympathy for their shared socio-economic disadvantage.

The speaker is likely to promote a sympathetic response, despite the conflict in her expressed attitudes, from readers who recognise the disadvantage of her economic

marginalisation. A sympathetic assessment of the speaker suggests a dominant reading that characterises her as a feisty materialist determined to empower herself in the relationship between artist and model, which she insists is commercial.

The Potential for Irony

There is, however, the potential here for an ironic reading of the monologue because the speaker's positive demeanour equivocates her characterisation as a 'victim', in comparison with the speakers of 'Selling Manhattan' and 'Shooting Stars'. Readers with a less radical perspective on 'Art' and its function and distribution in Western society may read the speaker ironically and characterise her as an aggressively ignorant, drink-addicted prostitute working the riverside pubs: she implies prostitution with her ironic comment 'Little man,/you've not the money for the arts I sell' and her admission 'At night I fill myself/with wine and dance around the bars'.

This potential for an ironic reading of the speaker conflicts with my proposal that this is a sympathetic dramatic monologue, and indicates that a dominant reading of 'Standing Female Nude' as sympathetic is uncertain. My sympathetic reading argued that Duffy intended her speaker to reveal the social realism and gender politics of the Romantic narrative of struggling artist with his starved, favourite model producing significant development in figurative Art: the speaker herself is 'sympathetic' but her attitude to the production of 'Art' is ironic. If the poem is assessed in the context of Duffy's collected works and her stated political position it is clear that the speaker is intended to be read sympathetically.²⁰ Nevertheless, readers with a less radical perspective have the opportunity to read ironically 'against the grain' of Duffy's intention. (I shall discuss

issues concerning the generation of 'Sympathy' in and by a text at the end of this chapter.)

Although the sympathetic reading that I proposed empowers the speaker in the artist/model scenario, the poem also reveals the limit of her power. She can reject the false role of 'artist's Muse' in the micro economics of the painter's studio, but both she and the artist are exploited by the economically-powerful Art market that functions in our society: global corporations invest in traditional and contemporary Art to increase their capital, and the British Monarchy possesses one of the most 'valuable' collections in the history of Art.

Extradiegetic Address

A dramatic monologue can often 'sound' like an interior monologue where there is no overt address to an intradiegetic/extradiegetic audience. The first two stanzas of 'Standing Female Nude', narrated in the present tense, can be read as such. However, the third stanza suggests an intradiegetic audience when the speaker names the artist 'Georges'. This effect is confirmed in the opening of the fourth stanza where the narration suggests the presence of an audience to whom the speaker is relating the conditions of her work 'I ask him Why do you do this?' and 'These artists/take themselves too seriously'.

There is no direct extradiegetic address to readers in this monologue but, as in much of Duffy's work, the content itself will engage certain readers. In this case gender and class politics are encoded in the narrative, and will indirectly address readers who position themselves to identify and acknowledge these features in the text. Readers who feel

addressed by the content and register a sympathetic response to the speaker are likely to respond to her narrated question in the final stanza 'I ask him Why do you do this?' by actively considering the issues involved, which are encoded in the previous three stanzas. I suggest that here, and in other dramatic monologues that contain opportunities for direct or indirect extradiegetic address, the use of a question has a dynamic quality that energises the address to readers ('Shooting Stars' (*SFN 1985*) is an example).

A Comparison with Rossetti's 'In An Artist's Studio'

It is revealing to compare Christina Rossetti's poem in sonnet form, 'In an Artist's Studio', with Duffy's dramatic monologue.²¹ Both poems address issues concerning the relations between artist and model. There are several interesting points of difference in the content of the two poems and the different potential functions of the two forms.

In the sonnet, 'In an Artist's Studio', Muse and artist are observed by a third person who describes her/his own understanding of the interaction between artist and Muse:

One face looks out from all his canvasses,
 One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans;
 We found her hidden just behind those screens,
 That mirror gave back all her loveliness.
 A queen in opal or in ruby dress,
 A nameless girl in freshest summer greens,
 A saint, an angel; - every canvas means
 The same one meaning, neither more or less.

Rossetti's poem does not give agency to the artist's model. She is depicted as a victim of his vision:

He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:

Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

The model is the subject of the poem but the focus of Rossetti's attention is the artist's vision. The model is depicted as suffering from depression caused, perhaps, by the development of her relationship with the artist. The artist is depicted as failing to recognise this, and restricts his attention to the portraits he painted which reflect his own desire/vision, rather than the 'subjectivity' of his model. Rossetti's poem predates the feminist issue of the dominance of the male gaze but she appears to understand the artist's relationship to his Muse in much the same way as many contemporary feminist critics.²²

The development of socialist-feminist discourse enables Duffy to depict her model with a politicised consciousness and a subsequent rejection of a victim's role in her relationship with the artist. In contrast, Rossetti's model is depicted as a victim in her relationship with the poet. He keeps his painting of her in his studio: a beautiful image of her in her prime. He does not see her as she is now that their relationship has changed:

He feeds upon her face by day and night,
 And she with true kind eyes looks back on him
 Fair as the moon and joyful as the light:
 Not wan with waiting, not with sorrow dim;
 Not as she is, but was when hope shone bright;
 Not as she is, but as she fills his dream.

However, as Leighton argues, Rossetti 'frames the framer' and sets up another perspective, that of the reader, which undermines that of the artist.²³ Rossetti's poem can be recognised now as a 'feminist' appraisal of the artist/model relationship although this is framed in the discourse of Romantic individualism rather than the socialist-feminist discourse available to Duffy.

By configuring the artist/model scenario in dramatic monologue form, and depicting her character as conscious of the politics of gender and socio-economics Duffy moves the issues surrounding these aspects of the production of Art from the private to the public domain. Rossetti's poem was published, and as such was a public text, but her 'narrative' related to the private concerns of three individuals, a situation that she saw enacted within her own circle of friends, whereas Duffy's speaker connects her situation to society at large, and to the elitist structures that dominate its activities. The indirect, extradiegetic address to readers that I identified above, with the added dynamic of the question in the last stanza, substantiates Duffy's dramatic monologue as a political instrument.

Augusta Webster was contemporaneous with Rossetti but did not share her Romantic understanding of women's subjectivity. Despite the shared scenario of artist and model with Rossetti's poem, 'Standing Female Nude' is more strongly linked to Webster's materialist depiction of her female speakers in dramatic monologues such as 'Faded' and 'Castaway'.²⁴ This link is formed by both the materialist vision of women's lives held by Webster and Duffy, and the potential for direct extradiegetic address to readers that is achieved by use of the dramatic monologue form.

The speakers of the following two poems, in contrast to the 'feisty' model and the materialist focus of 'Standing Female Nude', attempt to define themselves through marriage and children. The inscription of feminist discourse is more substantial than in the preceding poems.

'WHOEVER SHE WAS' (*SFN 1985*)

The themes of memory and self-identity in this poem illustrate an aspect of selfhood that is demonstrated in many women's autobiographical writings, that is, the difficulty of integrating the different stages of a woman's life into a unified sense of 'self'. This difficulty of integrating the different 'personas' of life as perceived by the individual, and reconciling these with the identity/identities perceived by others is often discernible as a psychic split in women's autobiographical writings.

'Whoever She Was' has a symmetrical format of alternating six- and eight-line stanzas. The scenario is that of a woman recalling her life as the mother of her children, as she attempts to review her life, sum up her achievements and conclude Yes that was me; her narrative is a form of autobiography.

The opening lines of the monologue are ambiguous, and the tone has a trace of formality: 'They see me always as a flickering figure/on a shilling screen. Not real'. This formality suggests that the speaker addresses an audience, rather than soliloquising alone. The speaker is a mother talking about her children's memory of her; 'shilling' can be read as a metaphor for 'silver' and the screen may refer to home cinefilm of family events.²⁵ She remarks that this visual image is 'Not real.' And describes her own 'real' sensory memories of early motherhood:

My hands,
still wet, sprout wooden pegs. I smell the apples
burning as I hang the washing out.

She relates that she still hears the voices from the past of her little children telephoning her:

Mummy, say the little voices of the ghosts
of children on the telephone. Mummy.

The stanza ends with 'Mummy' emphasised as a syntactically isolated word suggesting that she finds it strange and somewhat alien to her present sense of 'self'. This depiction of strangeness reiterates the ambiguity of the opening lines and sets up the theme of the poem, that is, the apparent misfit between the speaker's present sense of 'self' and the identity of the woman recalled by both her own memories and those that she attributes to her children.

The second stanza lists mother-and-child memories that many readers will share, including the half-truths and promises that mothers use to re-assure or pacify their offspring:

A row of paper dollies, cleaning wounds
or boiling eggs for soldiers. The chant
of magic words repeatedly. I do not know.
Perhaps tomorrow. If we're very good.

She suggests that these long-past events circulate in her memory like a cinefilm in her mind, 'the film is on a loop', and perhaps also in the memory of her children if this is connected back to the open lines and the 'flickering figure/on a shilling screen'.

Duffy brings freshness to a cliched childhood 'memory' often cited in autobiographical accounts by enriching the event with sensory images:

When they
think of me, I'm bending over them at night
to kiss. Perfume. Rustle of silk. Sleep tight.

The next stanza begins with a memory from the past but then shifts into the present suggesting that the speaker is mentally, or perhaps physically, moving around her home, and possibly addressing a listener with 'This was the playroom' and 'These are the photographs'. Her comment 'My maiden name/sounds wrong' suggests that she has not heard or used it for many years. This brings ambiguity to the location and time of her memories; she may be remembering her own childhood back in the past before her marriage and motherhood, not that of her children:

Where does it hurt? A scrap of echo clings
to the bramble bush. My maiden name
sounds wrong. This was the playroom.
I turn it over on a clumsy tongue. Again.
These are the photographs. Making masks
from turnips in the candlelight. In case they come.

The fourth stanza leaves this ambiguity of time and location and seems to return to the scenario that occupied the speaker's mind in the opening lines of the monologue.

However, although the speaker appears to have returned to a similar mental vision of her children's memory of her, she reveals a psychic split between her sense of 'self' and the family memories/mementoes that she acknowledges are her own:

Whoever she was, forever their wide eyes watch her
as she shapes a church and steeple in the air.
She cannot be myself and yet I have a box
of dusty presents to confirm that she was here.

There is an interesting illustration here of Berger's theory, part of which proposes that women have a sense of themselves as being objects of 'a gaze' and reflect this back to objectify their own social presence.²⁶ Duffy's woman illustrates this in a doubling fashion: her sense of self-alienation causes her to objectively gaze at the woman who is the object of her children's gaze.

The last four lines of the stanza contain a striking contrast between the apparent transparency and nursery-rhyme quality of 'You remember the little things. Telling stories/or pretending to be strong. Mummy's never wrong' and the enigmatic italicised final lines '*You open your dead eyes to look in the mirror/which they are holding to your mouth.*' The significance of this ending is difficult to determine. I shall look closely at the various forms of address in the monologue in order to explore this difficulty.

Intra- and Extradiegetic Address

The speaker of the poem functions to illustrate the psychological phenomenon of a split between the sense of inner self (here in old age) and the outer self perceived by others, in this case her children. The potential for an intradiegetic audience is constructed by the opening lines of the poem and the demonstratives of the third stanza 'This was the playroom' and 'These are the photographs'. The use of the second-person pronoun in the final stanza also constructs an intradiegetic address but has the additional potential to function as a direct, extradiegetic address to readers; in the context of the stanza this address is gender specific to 'mothers': 'You remember the little things. Telling stories/or pretending to be strong. Mummy's never wrong'. If 'you' is read as a universalising pronoun or as an attempt of impersonality by the speaker to avoid the assertiveness of the 'I' form, the overall function of this part of the narrative is still an address to readers who have shared the experiences of motherhood described in the monologue.

A complication arises because the second-person pronoun is also used in the final italicised lines and this creates an insoluble ambiguity. Is this usage perhaps intended to suggest a consciousness beyond the moment of death or is the 'speaker' a different

consciousness relating the moment of death of the protagonist? In several poems that I analyse Duffy uses italics to quote titles of songs and to indicate reported speech. In this poem I suggest one interpretation could be that she intends the italics of the final lines to represent the poet's 'voice' commenting that the psychic split in the protagonist's sense of identity persists to the end of life. There is some correspondence in this notion of the poet's voice intervening here with my discussion of the dramatic monologue 'by proxy' for 'A Provincial Party, 1956' (*SFN 1985*).

The final lines convey the sense that the speaker of 'Whoever She Was' is never able to reconcile the alienation between her inner and outer 'self'.²⁷ An alternative reading of the ambiguous ending is to consider it as a metaphor which alludes to the woman's sense of self being obliterated by the mirror images that she perceives are her children's notion of her identity.

Although I have argued that the address is gender specific, it is likely that given the childhood events described in the narrative, which many readers will have experienced, few readers will feel strongly excluded by the address. This potential for an inclusive readership suggests a low level of polemic, however, Duffy's text does have a political function because the speaker articulates a feminist account of aspects of difference between women's autobiographical writings and the traditional parameters of the Autobiography genre. The woman's narrative conveys the sense of her searching to build a coherent sense of self from episodes of memory that will not knit together. This lack of wholeness is partly due to the shifting, fragmentary nature of memory and partly due to a characteristic of female autobiography that has been the subject of feminist critical inquiry.

Feminist discourse in the 1970's and 80's concerned with critical commentary on women's writings and autobiography theorised the difficulties for women to write their life narratives according to the conventions of the traditional male genre in which the protagonist presents himself an authentic individual, seemingly self-determined, whose life is narrated as a reasoned progress from one stage of life to the next. Female subjectivity, it was argued, was determined ideologically or psychologically differently from that of males, and this was evident in their unconventional autobiographical writings. Theorists concerned with ideology argued that female subjectivity was defined by the dominant male culture and as such was alien to women's innate sense of self. Many feminist psychoanalytic theorists pursued a line of inquiry derived from Chodorowian psychoanalytical definition of female subjectivity, and identified women's autobiographical characteristic of defining their lives in relation to significant others, particularly mothers.²⁸ The selfhood addressed by these two different approaches to female subjectivity has been aptly diagnosed by Benstock as 'the self that would reside at the center of the text is decentred - and is often absent altogether - in women's autobiographical texts'.²⁹ Recent feminist commentators on women's autobiographical writings have revised and problematised these earlier accounts. Cosslett's introduction to a recent anthology of feminist essays, *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods*, gives an invaluable historical account of the earlier theories and present preoccupations of those working in this field of feminist scholarship.³⁰

In 'Whoever She Was' the narrative illustrates an aspect of the ideological determination of female subjectivity where it depicts the protagonist's sense of alienation from her social presence, 'She cannot be myself': cultural representations and prescriptions of 'femininity' can be envisaged as metaphorical mirrors, holding the images of womanhood

with which a female must self-identify or register an alienation between her 'inner self' and the social presence perceived by others. What emerges from the complete poem is a narrative of alienation in the speaker who is not conscious of the destructive effect on her sense of selfhood caused by the ideological fiction of motherhood. The speaker seems to intimate that she is more than a mother, and yet cannot articulate that other part of her sense of 'self' and integrate it with her memories of motherhood (and possibly her own childhood) to achieve a unified 'self'. The protagonist appears to embody a feminist account of 'autobiography' that was contemporaneous with the publication of the poem. Duffy's triptych of female autobiography, 'A Clear Note' (*SFN 1985*), is published in the same collection and illustrates the female characteristic of narrating the self through significant others that I discussed above. ('A Clear Note' is included in my readings in Chapter Three.)

A Comparison with Webster's 'A Castaway'

Webster's 'sympathetic' dramatic monologue, 'A Castaway', illustrates a similar phenomenon of psychic split, where the speaker stands outside herself and speculates on the difference between the memories of her youth, the person that others 'see', and her own sense of identity.³¹ The speaker is a 'fallen' woman and reads an entry from her girlhood diary:

Well washed and starched and freshened with new bows,
And take tea out to meet the clergyman.

As with Duffy's speaker, there is a subsequent pronoun shift from first- to third-person to illustrate a sense of alienation from her earlier self:

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

Webster's long poem illustrates a remarkable analysis of women's moral and socio-economic determination in the patriarchal structures of Victorian society. Her speaker struggles to understand how her own life's journey can have led from the promises of girlhood to her present predicament of social outcast. Leighton discusses the use of 'self-encounter' in Victorian women's dramatic monologues and suggests that this supports the idea of a 'deep-rooted split in the very nature of the female self'.³² This 'deep-rooted split' corresponds to the psychic split that I have argued is inscribed in Duffy's speaker.

Leighton's comments are part of a discussion on the use of the mirror image in several poems 'which function to bring the divided subject and object together'. To some extent Duffy replicates the mechanism but her mirror image is not the physical reflection of her speaker, as in Webster's poem, but the metaphorical mirrors of cultural representation or the visual images retained in her children's memories: 'They see me always as a flickering figure/on a shilling screen'. Interestingly, and perhaps unexpectedly, in 'Whoever She Was' Duffy's emphasis is on the psychological predicament of her speaker rather than the socio-economic disadvantages of her gender, as is the case in many of her poems.

Memory is a theme in Webster's poem but is the structuring principle of Duffy's 'Whoever She Was': the fragmentary nature of memory is substantiated as the speaker's memories slip backwards and forwards in time as the poem develops. Duffy also uses the phenomenon of the 'psychic split' as a method of constructing her female speaker. This culminates in the final stanza with the revelation of the dramatic alienation between the inner sense of 'self', memories of earlier times, and the outer 'self' as perceived by

others. This dramatic effect is increased if my suggestion that the italicised voice is that of the poet is incorporated into a reading.

'RECOGNITION' (*SM 1987*)

A similar phenomenon of self-alienation is illustrated in 'Recognition' where the depiction of the speaker's sense of loss of her youthful self leads to a dramatic illustration of the character's psychic split at the end of the poem. The scenario is that of a woman confiding to an acquaintance a distressing experience that happened whilst she was out doing her shopping. The narrative is constructed with her account of the shopping trip, memories of her youthful courtship which erupt into that account, and items from a shopping list. Different threads of memory weave in and out of the narrative, memories of the past and the shopping expedition, and memory of items that the speaker intends to purchase. I shall read through the stanzas to clarify the construction and 'meaning' of the narrative. I shall then discuss the different ways that the dramatic monologue illustrates the self-alienation of the speaker.

The poem opens with the speaker addressing an intradiegetic listener who questions her about her family. It is an intimate conversation although the use of the impersonal pronoun implies that the listener is not a close acquaintance:

Things get away from one.
I've let myself go, I know.
Children? I've had three
and don't even know them.

The two familiar clichés are unexpectedly effective in conveying the impression of a depressed middle-aged woman who no longer maintains her appearance according to the

conventions that prescribe 'femininity'. Duffy's comment on the use of clichés offers an explanation of why clichés can be effective:

You can put little spotlights on phrases, like clichés, that will show how although they look like a plastic rose in fact they've got roots underneath. They have meaning. And I'm interested in that because I don't talk, when I'm talking about life and death matters - things that are important to me, in anything other than very plain simple language and no-one else does. And I think poetry needs that.³³

'I've let myself go' suggests that according to the societal conventions of 'femininity', which she has internalised, she regards herself as no longer an attractive 'woman', for example, her hair may not be styled, her clothes may be unfashionable, and her figure overweight and no longer shapely. What she has 'let go' is her effort to maintain the appearance of 'femininity'. She is a mother but unlike the previous speaker she does not primarily self-identify through motherhood. The presence of a responding addressee is indicated with her repetition of the question 'Children?'.

The second and third stanza contain such intimate details of her depression about her appearance and her stale marriage, voiced in the present tense, that it seems more convincing to read them as her private thoughts, rather than revelations to her companion:

I strain to remember a time
when my body felt lighter.
Years. My face is swollen
with regrets. I put powder on,

but it flakes off. I love him,
through habit, but the proof
has evaporated. He gets upset.
I tried to do all the essentials

on one trip. Foolish, yes,
but I was weepy all morning.

The change to reverie and the present tense begins at 'My face is swollen' and reverts to the past tense account of a shopping expedition at 'I tried to do all the essentials'. The single word 'Years' suggests that the woman is beginning to cast her mind back over the past with resignation. 'My face is swollen/with regrets' suggest that she has been weeping over the course that her life has taken. Her self-excuse in the fourth stanza 'Foolish, yes/but I was weepy all morning.' implies that she is menopausal and is admitting to her listener that she does not have the energy to undertake a heavy shopping expedition .

This fourth stanza continues with the first item from a shopping list and a vivid memory of her youthful courtship from the past:

Quiche. A blond boy swung me up
in his arms and promised the earth.

As in the second stanza, the intimacy of the memory suggests that the speaker is unlikely to reveal it to any one less familiar than a sister or a close confidante, but the opening stanza has identified the addressee as someone who does not know the speaker's family details. This ambiguity reveals a tension that runs throughout the poem until the final stanza. This tension is caused by the compaction of the three different strands of narrative: the account relating the shopping trip to the intradiegetic addressee; the memories from the past that erupt into that narrative; and the items from the shopping list.

The fifth stanza begins with an intradiegetic address, which implies that she has related her memory of the 'blond boy' to her companion:

You see, this came back to me
as I stood on the scales.
I wept. Shallots. In the window,
creamy ladies held a pose

which left me clogged and old.

The shopping list narrative 'Shallots' erupts again into her conversation with her listener and is followed by her self-comparison with the display models in the shop window.

These anonymous representations of women are slender-bodied with etiolated limbs and immaculately styled wigs. This representation of femininity, oppressive because it bears little relation to the norm, is a threat to the speaker's self-esteem. The figurative 'creamy ladies' disturbs the characterisation of the speaker by foregrounding Duffy's consciousness.³⁴

The sixth stanza continues with the speaker's description of her embarrassment at the 'checkout' and the unsympathetic shopgirl's reaction:

The waste. I'd forgotten my purse,
fumbled; the shopgirl gaped at me,
compassionless. Claret. I blushed.

Characteristically Duffy often uses the device of syntactic isolation of a short phrase or single word. These often read as ambiguous yet portentous, as is the case here. 'The waste' implies a mass of regrets that are connected in some way to youth, and romantic ideals of marriage and relations between the sexes that register as unfulfilled longings that cannot be articulated.

The seventh stanza opens with two items from the shopping list, and an italicised fragment of speech:

Cheese, Kleenex. *It did happen.*
I lay in my slip on wet grass,

laughing. Years. I had to rush out,
blind in a hot flush, and bumped

The speaker appears to reassure herself that life once held promise '*It did happen*', and returns to the memory of the 'blond boy' depicted in the fourth stanza 'I lay in my slip on wet grass,/laughing.' The remark 'Years' which first occurred in the second stanza, reiterates the speaker's realisation of the passing of time and how distant her remembered youth is from her present life. The stanza ends with a depiction of the woman overwhelmed by her menopausal condition 'blind in a hot flush' and rushing out of the store.

The final stanza dramatically illustrates the psychic split that I discussed in my reading of 'Whoever She Was':

into an anxious, dowdy matron
who touched the cold mirror
and stared at me. Stared
and said I'm sorry sorry sorry.

The speaker has run from the checkout desk and collided with one of the reflecting glass windows of the exit. She has not recognised her exterior social self: the inner self-image that she has somehow preserved, despite the acknowledged reality of her heavy body and swollen face, does not correspond with the exterior image of her reflection, 'an anxious, dowdy matron'.

My reading suggests that 'Recognition' incorporates three different 'narratives': the account of the shopping expedition to an acquaintance; a more intimate narrative of vivid memories of youthful courtship, and self-critical details of the speaker's personal appearance and stale marriage; and the itemised shopping list. Duffy used a complex

narrative for 'Shooting Stars' that my reading separated out into two coherent but interwoven accounts: that of the protagonist's narration of an episode from the Jewish Holocaust, and that of a later hyperdiegetic commentator. In 'Recognition' the complexity is difficult to unravel because of two features. The first problem is that the intimacy of parts of the narrative is in tension with the implied characterisation of an unseen, unheard listener who is inferred by the protagonist initially using the impersonal pronoun 'one' in the opening line of the poem. The second complexity is the interruption of the shopping items which, without the incorporation of a verb, are difficult to assign to either the speaker's account of her shopping expedition or her thread of intimate memories that erupt into that account.

The intradiegetic address of this dramatic monologue also functions as a potential extradiegetic address to readers. The opening line of the poem uses the impersonal pronoun in 'Things get away from one'. As I argued in my reading this can be read as a formal, rather than intimate, remark to an acquaintance. It can also function as an address with a degree of universality, as if the speaker were addressing a more formal gathering than a private conversation between friends. The use of the second-person pronoun in the fifth stanza 'You see, this came back to me' also has the potential to function as a singular or plural extradiegetic address to readers. The extradiegetic address in 'Recognition' is not as overt as in 'Shooting Stars' but does add the function of public statement to the poem.

Summary of 'Whoever She Was' and 'Recognition'

At first glance 'Recognition' may seem to be the depiction of the individual distress of a menopausal woman unable to come to terms with the effects of ageing. However,

Duffy's poem moves this from a private concern to a public, political statement through its illustration of society's oppressive conventions of femininity that cannot be maintained into late age. The menopausal protagonist of 'Recognition' reveals that she achieved her sense of self as a young woman through her configuration with these conventions. This essential self-identification is lost in her middle-age when she can no longer be swept off her feet in a young man's embrace 'A blond boy swung me up/in his arms and promised the earth.'; can no longer cosmetise her face to achieve 'femininity' because her powder 'flakes off'; and is confronted by the unattainable shape of the display models which made her feel 'clogged and old'. Many women, particularly in youth, maintain that they self-identify through the performance of 'femininity' but at present the social reality is that, as they age, public perception of them will change. Although ageing women may attempt to configure femininity with cosmetic surgery, dieting, hair implants, and numerous other techniques, they will find that societal attitudes reflecting a gendered form of 'ageism' will lead to 'readings' of their appearance as an attempt to recapture 'lost youth' rather than as evidence of femininity.

The psychic split that feminist theorists maintain is a characteristic of female subjectivity is depicted in two different ways by these two dramatic monologues. The speaker of 'Whoever She Was' attempts to self-identify through her role as mother but is unable to match up her inner sense of self with both the perceptions of her children, and her own understanding of those perceptions. In 'Recognition' the narrator does not self-identify through motherhood and is alienated from a subjectivity dependent upon the performance of femininity. Her psychic split arises from her inability to perform femininity as she did in her youth.

As Leighton's discussion indicates, Duffy's depiction of self-encounter using a mirror has a well-established tradition in women's poetry, the remarkable feature of this dramatic monologue is the final image of the woman rushing out, bumping into the mirror and repeatedly apologising to her unrecognised reflection; this creates a dramatic, energised account of the psychological phenomenon which is depicted in both poems.³⁵

THE GENERATION OF SYMPATHY IN DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

In this chapter I have cited a tradition from Webster of dramatic monologues that elicits a sympathetic, rather than ironic, response from readers. I shall now consider more closely the quality that generates this sympathetic reading response in the interaction between text and reader. In order to avoid confusion with the sympathetic response itself which may be registered by readers I have used inverted commas and an upper case 'S' to distinguish this quality of 'Sympathy' that is constructed by aspects of the text and the reading position.

Few critics have considered the sympathetic dramatic monologue, in fact, some consider irony a prerequisite for the form. Many have written at length on the nature of irony and how it is generated in the reading process. Hutcheon, although a keystone text for my understanding of Duffy's dramatic monologues and Irony also facilitates an insight into strategies of writing/reading texts to produce a sympathetic response. Hutcheon's discussion of 'How irony happens' in discursive communities bonded by 'ideological complicity' can be extended to the notion of collusion between a writer and her readership sharing an intention to ironise particular representations of life/the world.³⁶ This concept of 'ideological complicity' can also be applied to the understanding of the generation of 'Sympathy' in/by texts: there can be collusion between Duffy and those

readers who share her view of the world to read certain poems with a sympathetic response (and other poems ironically).

In the situation here of my own readings, there is the additional factor relevant to collusion, that is, knowledge of Duffy herself, her collected work and its social and literary contexts often indicates that she intends a sympathetic, non-ironic reading of certain poems. Nevertheless there may be passages of text that produce a different response from other readers, even a reading 'against the grain', as I have indicated in my reading of 'Standing Female Nude'.

I shall now discuss 'Sympathy' as a quality inherent in non-ironic dramatic monologues, and as a phenomenon of reader-response that is the opposite of irony and causes readers to read/react with a sympathetic response to the predicament of the speaker of the poem

As in the case of textual irony, there is fluidity and complexity in the interrelation of 'speaker' - intradiegetic listener - extradiegetic reader; there is also an unquantifiable relation between 'speaker' - writing persona - and the writer herself. The opportunity for 'Sympathy' can be constructed by the poet's text, the readers' interpretations, and the ambiguities and complexities arising from the opacities of language; all three sources may contribute to a greater or lesser degree to the development of 'Sympathy' arising from a particular text.

The quality of 'Sympathy' may be constructed by the poet's text through the accumulated effect of choice of 'speaking' persona, the content of the narrative, the rhetorical and structural strategies employed to construct the style of narration, and the energy of the

extradiegetic address to readers. 'Shooting Stars' is perhaps the paradigm: Duffy has chosen a Holocaust victim who relates an horrific massacre of Jewish civilians and pleads for remembrance with a positive, gendered address whose dynamic is increased by the question format of 'Sister, if seas part us do you not consider me?'.

The perspective of the reader is also a dynamic in the generation of 'Sympathy': particular phenomena of social and psychological experience will result in varying degrees of sympathetic response from individual readers. This response will be stronger for some poems and some readers than for others, dependent upon the content of the narrative and shared values between reader and speaker. Readers' response of sympathy or ironic judgement may vary according to their own 'portfolio' of political perspectives.³⁷ Some conservative readers will read the speaker of 'Standing Female Nude' ironically, as a subversive prostitute, despite the mitigating circumstances of her socio-economic disadvantage; whereas a feminist perspective, as I argued in my reading, is likely to categorise her as a politically-conscious, self-reliant woman determined not to be victimised by her life-chances, and therefore a sympathetic character.

In her general discussion of irony, Hutcheon argues that irony always has an evaluative edge 'Irony's appraising edge is never absent'. I suggest that this is also the case for 'Sympathy': where a direct, extradiegetic address is gendered, Hutcheon's 'appraising edge' is illustrated by readers' recognition of gender politics, a degree of affiliation with these, and a sympathetic response to that address.³⁸ Sympathetic readers of female-gendered, extradiegetic address may vary in their political position from feminist liberal humanist to radical marxist: this self-positioning may alter the degree of 'Sympathy' arising from a poem as I indicated in my reading of 'Standing Female Nude'.

Although I have categorised the speaker of 'Shooting Stars' as unmistakably sympathetic it does perhaps require a human event of such noxious immorality to produce a dominant reading that cannot be challenged. A factor that may problematise argument for a dominant reading is that gender difference may affect reader-response to sympathetic dramatic monologues. My reading of 'Shooting Stars' discussed the likelihood of a 'negotiated' address for male readers sympathetic to the speaker's plight who may have felt excluded by the speaker's direct extradiegetic address to females. This negotiation might not occur for excluded readers where speakers are depicted with a lesser degree of victimisation because there would be less opportunity in the text for 'Sympathy' and consequently less potential for 'Sympathy' to be generated in a male-gendered reading position.

However, this suggestion that 'gender' may be a decisive factor in reading-response needs further qualification. An awareness of gender issues has developed in the public domain since the resurgence of 'feminism' in the 1960's. Sexual/textual politics are increasingly recognised and adopted in literary criticism. It is possible that male readers, aware of gender issues may override the obstacle of the direct female gendered extradiegetic address of 'Shooting Stars', as well as respond sympathetically to the indirect universal address of the content.³⁹

There may be another level of sympathetic response for the speaker arising from a different and additional type of 'Sympathy', where readers choose to assess the concerns of the speaker as closely aligned to those of the poet. In this case, readers responding sympathetically to a character may imagine they are responding to the poet herself by

conflating the work and the poet. This conflation between speaking character and poet is less likely in ironic dramatic monologues, and would require ironisation of the speaker and the poet. I shall discuss this in the following chapter on ironic dramatic monologues.

An unusual example of reader-positioning is depicted in 'Selling Manhattan'. My reading identifies the Native American speaker as a 'sympathetic' character, but I suspect that the sympathetic response to his predicament is increased by the ironisation of the early coloniser represented in the italicised prologue of the poem.

This presence of a demonised 'other' appears to be a factor in the generation of 'Sympathy'. It functions to delineate the protagonist as a victim who complains with just cause and results in a sympathetic response from readers. The feature of a blameworthy opponent is present in the other five poems of this chapter, although they do not speak as in 'Selling Manhattan': 'Shooting Stars' has the extreme example of the murderous young soldiers; 'A Provincial Party, 1956' has the male host of the blue movies party; 'Standing Female Nude' has the Queen representing the socio-economic structures that disadvantage the protagonist; 'Whoever She Was' has the societal attitudes and structures that discriminate against women's sense of a coherent 'self' and which they internalise to their own disadvantage; 'Recognition' has the 'compassionless' shopgirl who represents oppressive societal attitudes towards ageing females.

An interesting feature of 'A Provincial Party, 1956' is the effect of the unusual use of the second-person pronoun throughout the narration: which I argued functions to avoid melodrama and increase the opportunity for 'Sympathy'. It seems likely that readers are

positioned to respond more sympathetically in this particular case through the use of what appears to be dramatic monologue 'by proxy'.

Summary of the Chapter

The five sympathetic dramatic monologues that I have analysed in this chapter illustrate a range of issues arising from the politics of Race, Class, and Gender (including the issue of Female Subjectivity). Duffy, unusually, uses a male protagonist for 'Selling Manhattan'; the speaker articulates ecological and ethnological consequences of Western Industrialisation in a narrative that interrogates issues arising from the interaction of racial and imperialist oppression. Controversially, Duffy has chosen to focus on male aggression and cruelty in her depiction of the Holocaust victim of 'Shooting Stars'. She increases the polemic effect of the monologue with an address in the final stanza that potentially functions as a direct extradiegetic address to female readers and adds gender issues to those of race/religious culture inscribed in the monologue. 'Standing Female Nude' most clearly reveals Duffy's inherited tradition from Webster: the speaker succinctly articulates the socio-economic analysis of her social position that Leighton argues is the strength of Webster's poetry:

She reduces every shining myth or idealism of her time to the social facts of class, money and power. She is, probably, the most ruthlessly materialist of all Victorian women poets.⁴⁰

All six poems contain autobiographical material: the speakers narrate aspects of their lives. 'Whoever She Was' can be read as a form of female autobiography: the dying woman, or one unable to recuperate a stable sense of 'self' in old age, illustrates phenomena theorised by contemporary feminist critics of women's autobiographical writings. The title itself articulates one of the conundrums of women's autobiography,

that is, how to write 'a life' when for most women 'life' consists of several different stages of social experience, and is subject to the influence of changing and often conflicting prescriptions of female subjectivity. 'Recognition' articulates a similar alienation between inner and outer self/subjectivity and illustrates the psychic split, gradually disclosed in 'Whoever She Was', in the dramatic and dynamic confrontation of the final stanza.

Time is not linear in these poems, with the exception of 'A Provincial Party, 1956' and 'Standing Female Nude'. In 'Selling Manhattan' and 'Shooting Stars' the speakers' narratives move fluently between past and present. This mechanism enables Duffy to use the history of past atrocities to draw attention to contemporary conflicts. She does not interrogate specific contemporary events such as the Bosnian catastrophe but her use of this movement from one era to another has the potential to prompt readers to make the comparison between historic and contemporaneous events: this is exemplified in 'Selling Manhattan', 'Last time, this moment, now, a boy feels his freedom/vanish...' The hyperdiegetic narrator of 'Shooting Stars' which functions as an extradiegetic address, explicitly details scenes to stimulate readers' imaginations, and makes the connection between the Holocaust and contemporaneous, unseen atrocities for readers. An advantage of not specifying contemporary events is that Duffy's poems will still function to prompt future readers when conflicts such as Bosnia are no longer 'news'.

The non-linear time scheme of 'Whoever She Was' and 'Recognition' functions differently. It depicts the way that memory works in its shifting backwards and forwards in time, moving from one area of experience to another. It also illustrates characteristics of female autobiography that correspond with contemporaneous feminist theory of women's autobiography. The non-linear narrative is perhaps a truer representation of a

woman's life than the seamless narrative of the canonic tradition and implicitly depicts the instability of a subject position for self-identifying females.⁴¹

I shall now consider the specific features of the dramatic monologue form, how Duffy uses them, and how her poems prompt a reconceptualisation of the form. In dramatic monologues a speaker tells someone about an event in her/his life. Readers overhear this and consider the content of the narrative. In the non-ironic, sympathetic form inherited from Webster, readers may identify with the speaker in some way: they may sympathise with the speaker's predicament, they may have shared a similar experience, or may have gained an insight into their own concerns.

The dramatic monologue form enables Duffy to rehearse debates and issues that are currently in the public domain of the mass media. The use of a non-ironised first-person narrator facilitates a dramatised articulation, in some cases an interrogation, of a variety of social concerns. Readers are positioned to respond sympathetically to the speakers' predicaments and to consider the social and economic contexts of their narrated experiences. In 'Shooting Stars' and 'Selling Manhattan' Duffy uses more than one style of narration to construct a hyperdiegetic presence that functions to comment on the content of the protagonist's narrative.

Duffy's speakers address extradiegetic listeners/readers indirectly by the content of their narrative or/and directly through the use of an intradiegetic address using the second-person pronoun, which has the potential to function as a singular or plural extradiegetic address to readers. This extradiegetic address functions as a 'universal' address in 'Selling Manhattan' because of the content of the speaker's narrative but Duffy's use of

gendered, extradiegetic address in the other poems has brought an added dynamic to this function of the dramatic monologue form through the dramatised articulation of feminist issues to female readers.

Many of these functional aspects of feminist content of narrative, and address to readers apply to other forms of literature: the novel genre, for instance, has traditionally been used to illustrate and interrogate the whole complexity of human existence and is seen by many commentators as a valuable political instrument. The dramatic monologue form fulfils the same functions through its use of narrative and characterisation but it has the added advantage that polemic is condensed into a shorter text.

A similar claim could be made for the narrative poem form: what distinguishes the dramatic monologue from the narrative poem is the reading-effect of hearing the 'voice' of a first-hand witness to the argument/issue inscribed in the narrative. This brings an additional dynamic to the address from text to readers.

Each of Duffy's collections contains dramatic monologues covering a whole prospectus of current debates and issues, each of which is succinctly contained within one poem. In these sympathetic dramatic monologues the speakers function as a 'mask' through which Duffy can articulate her concerns. Armstrong has argued, in her discussion of Webster's use of the dramatic monologue poem as a method of 'masked' critique, that Duffy's materialist predecessor valued this form for its potential as a 'mask' and for the licence to speak against the strictures of social taboos regarding the voice and subject matter of women poets:

Augusta Webster, whose *A Woman Sold, and Other Poems* (1867) indicates the more open kinds of statement available to women at this time, discussed the

question of dramatic poetry in an article, 'Poets and personal pronouns', and her discussion suggests how liberating the explicit dramatic mode could be.⁴²

Armstrong's argument for Webster's engagement with 'the explicit dramatic mode' of the dramatic monologue poem offers an insight to Duffy's work. The dramatic monologue offers Duffy the safety-net of an established canonic form with which to articulate overt, often radical, social critique without using the lyrical 'I' (as Webster perceived). What has changed the potential of the form since Webster's era is the development of feminist discourse in the second half of the twentieth century. Use of Webster's sympathetic version of the form, a similar materialist vision of society, and the incorporation of direct and indirect gendered extradiegetic address extends the potential of Duffy's poems to function as political critique of contemporary society from a feminist perspective. This synthesis of polemic and poetry has the potential to increase the readership that is exposed to feminist political debate.

It seems that feminist discourse has spread into the domain of poetry because of its own social momentum. However, this may not be a one-way dynamic: my readings of Duffy's poems suggest that her engagement with feminist discourse may be more accurately assessed as a two-way exchange: feminist discourse has infiltrated and enriched poetry, and Duffy's work has expanded the domain and enriched the articulation of feminist thought.

In the following chapter I shall consider the second strand of Duffy's inheritance: her use of the ironic form inherited from Browning.

NOTES

- ¹ Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fictions: Contemporary Poetics* (London: Routledge, 1983). See my Introduction Part III, Theorists and Concepts for a discussion of the terms I have adapted for my analysis of dramatic monologues.
- ² See my Introduction Part II, Feminist Discourse, for my adoption of Armstrong's notion of the dramatic monologue as 'masked critique', Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry, Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993). See my Introduction Part III, Feminism, Politics and Intentionality for my scheme using 'masks', 'personae, and 'ventriloquism'; and Theorists and Concepts, for Mills's terms that I have adapted for my analyses, Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
- ³ Clearly certain agents/sectors of capitalist industrialisation are more culpable than others because power is in the control of a male hegemony, but in this thesis it is appropriate to identify the political argument of Duffy's poem in a general sense as of concern to us all.
- ⁴ I do not wish to imply that all the colonisers were racist, but it is likely that a sense of racial superiority was dominant.
- ⁵ *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 68-77 (p.70). 'Carol Ann Duffy: An Interview with Andrew McAllister'.
- ⁶ See note 2 above.
- ⁷ The issue of my own exclusion by the text of 'Comprehensive' (*SFN 1985*) is discussed in Chapter Three.
- ⁸ Clearly there are unsympathetic political commentators, such as ultra-right historians, and, possibly, readers positioned outside the religious traditions of the West.
- ⁹ I am drawing upon Mills's discussion of the possibility of 'negotiation' in the reading process where certain readers are not addressed, perhaps even excluded, by the text. See my Introduction Part III, Theories and Concepts.
- ¹⁰ *Bête Noire*, the interview, p.70.
- ¹¹ Duffy's poem can be contextualised with the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Bosnian war in 1980's.
- ¹² Examples of this type of criticism are Philip Drew, *The Poetry of Browning: A Critical Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1970), and Ian Jack, *Browning's Major Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).
- ¹³ 'Comprehensive' (*SFN 1985*) addresses issues of race/cultural discrimination; 'Model Village' (*SM 1987*) addresses the uncertain status of conventions of 'reality'; 'Dies Natalis' (*SM 1987*) depicts four different representations of consciousness.

¹⁴ *Bête Noire*, the interview, p.76.

¹⁵ Alan Sinfield, *Dramatic Monologue* (London: Methuen, 1977). I am referring here to Sinfield's concept of the 'double consciousness' which he argues is the characteristic of the dramatic monologue poem. See my Introduction Part I.

¹⁶ Alan Robinson, *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1988), Chapter 8 'Declarations of Independence: Some Responses to Feminism', pp.196-7. Robinson has identified this feminist issue of female subjectivity in this poem in his brief discussion of 'polarisation of gender roles' but does not concern himself with the dramatic monologue form, the political potential of its various textual features and the gendered extradiegetic address of the poem.

¹⁷ Ralph W. Rader, 'Notes on Some Structural Varieties and Variations in Dramatic "I" Poems and their Theoretical Implications', *Victorian Poetry*, 22 no.2 (Summer 1984), 103-21. See my comments in my Introduction, Part I.

¹⁸ Carol Ann Duffy was born on 23rd December 1955 in Glasgow.

¹⁹ I have used the term 'exoticism' to denote the potential for sexual titillation for the 'bourgeoisie' speculating on the physiognomy and sexual practices available from a female outside their own social class (or race). I am drawing upon the depiction of celebrities such as Mata Hari who is invariably represented as sexually 'exotic' and fatally attractive to her 'victims', the upper echelons of the military and diplomatic milieus; although her attractions are never defined.

²⁰ See my Introduction, Part II, Critics of Duffy's Dramatic Monologues, where I refer to Duffy's stance as a socialist, feminist and lesbian poet at her Poetry Reading at St Martin's College, Lancaster on 1 May 1977.

²¹ *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.365.

²² The concept of the dominance of the male gaze, developed from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin: Harmondsworth, 1972) has given rise to extensive feminist theorising concerning the way in which women form their self-image by internalising male objectification of their bodies.

²³ Leighton and Reynolds (1995). See Leighton's comments in her Introduction II. p.xxxvii.

²⁴ Leighton and Reynolds (1995), pp.424-28 and pp.433-48.

²⁵ My interpretation of silver for shilling probably arises from the incidence of 'silver shilling' in Scottish folk songs; Duffy often uses titles and quotes from popular song. An alternative could be the cost of going to the cinema in the 1940-50 era.

²⁶ Berger (1972).

- ²⁷ Jane E. Thomas, 'The Intolerable Wrestle With Words: The Poetry of Carol Ann Duffy, *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 78-88. Thomas demonstrates the mismatch of experienced reality with the inadequate subject positions available to the woman in her Lacanian reading of 'Whoever She Was' and other poems.
- ²⁸ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (London: University of California Press, 1978).
- ²⁹ *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Shari Benstock (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).
- ³⁰ *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories and Methods*, ed. by Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (London: Routledge; 2000), 'Introduction' pp.1-21.
- ³¹ Leighton and Reynolds (1995), pp.433-48.
- ³² Leighton and Reynolds (1995), Introduction II pp.xxxvii.
- ³³ *Bête Noire* interview, p.76.
- ³⁴ I am referring here to consciousness of the poet in the narration, that is Sinfield's (1977) 'double consciousness'.
- ³⁵ Leighton and Reynolds (1995), Introduction II p.xxxvii.
- ³⁶ R. Chambers 'Irony and the Canon', *Profession 90* MLA:18-24 cited in Linda Hutcheon, 'Discursive Communities: How Irony "Happens"', *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge; 1994).
- ³⁷ Hutcheon (1994) 'Discursive Communities'.
- ³⁸ Hutcheon (1994), p.12.
- ³⁹ It is not rare to find male critics writing with a 'feminist' perspective, although the viability of this is challenged by some feminist commentators.
- ⁴⁰ Leighton and Reynolds (1995), p.419.
- ⁴¹ E. Jelinek, *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: from Antiquity to the Present* (Boston, Mass.:Twayne, 1986).
- ⁴² Isobel Armstrong (1993), 'A Poetry of Thine Own: Women's Poetry', pp.372-3.

CHAPTER TWO: THE SUBJECT MATTER AND RHETORICAL STRATEGIES OF DUFFY'S IRONIC DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

In this chapter I consider the other half of the double-stranded tradition for the dramatic monologue that I argued is Duffy's inheritance, that is, the ironic form inherited from Browning. Before I discuss Irony and my choice of poems from Duffy's four collections it is worthwhile remarking on a small but significant difference in the way that the two poets entitle their dramatic monologues: Browning names his characters as individuals, for example, 'Bishop Blougram' and 'Mr Sludge' but Duffy does not. Her titles are usually a clue to the issues interrogated by the poem, for example, 'Psychopath' identifies the category of character that is interrogated by her poem, whereas Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' does not indicate what the content might be.

The rhetorical strategies adopted by writers to produce an ironising reading-response have been extensively theorised since Booth's seminal historical account of Irony, and his interrogation of its various categories and their function in different genres.¹ I do not think it necessary to re-articulate his findings here. I have already discussed in my Introduction, Part III, the shifting ambiguous nature of 'irony'; my use of the conditional phrase 'potential/opportunity for irony'; and the positioning and self-positioning of writers and readers in the generation of irony according to Hutcheon's concept of 'discursive communities'.²

The potential for irony, and in some poems an unmistakable positioning of readers to respond ironically, alters the way in which address functions in ironic monologues. My summary of this chapter will discuss this difference in address, the content of the

monologues, their social and literary context, their significance in Duffy's work, and their relation to the ironic tradition inherited from Browning.

In my readings I shall continue the method used in Chapter One. The poems analysed in this chapter are; 'Head Of English' (*SFN 1985*), 'Poet For Our Times' (*TOC 1990*), 'Translating The English, 1989' (*TOC 1990*), 'What Price?' (*SFN 1985*), 'Fraud' (*MT 1993*), and 'Psychopath' (*SM 1987*). I have chosen these particular dramatic monologues because as a group they encompass the wide range of ironising strategies, and the variety of characterisations and subject matter that Duffy's ironic poems display.

'HEAD OF ENGLISH' (*SFN 1985*)

This dramatic monologue has five six-line stanzas and depicts a scenario in which the head teacher of a school English Department is introducing a visiting poet to a class of girls. My analysis of the initial reading will include a discussion of the time scheme and the location of the narration, which seems at times to be inconsistent with the characterisation of the protagonist.

The first stanza introduces the visiting poet to the Head of Department's class:

Today we have a poet in the class.
A real live poet with a published book.
Notice the inkstained fingers girls. Perhaps
we're going to witness verse hot from the press.
Who knows. Please show your appreciation
by clapping. Not too loud. Now

An unusual feature of this poem is the doubled intradiegetic audience. The audience is plural, there is a classroom of girls present, but the presence of the poet adds a second, different category of listener to the speaker's introduction. Because the poet is present,

the speaker's address is divided, that is, when she addresses the pupils she knows that her remarks will also be heard by the poet. The ambiguity of the speaker's divided address is the first marker for an ironic reading of the speaker, and the implication of irony is strengthened by the presence of the poet. There is a tone of ridicule directed towards the poet in the personal comments on her achievement and the possibly metaphorical reference to her 'inkstained fingers'. These patronising remarks would not necessarily be ironic if the poet was not present: the remarks might read as cheerful enthusiasm to an audience of young pupils. However, as the poet is present this provides the opportunity for an ironic reading that converts the speaker's remarks to a veiled criticism of her, and implies that the teacher has a reactionary attitude to contemporary poetry in her reference to 'verse hot from the press'. Mermin has discussed the presence of the 'audience in the poem' and how this reflects back on to the utterance and characterisation of the speaker.³ She argues that, even when totally passive, the auditor/listener, as a presence in the 'world' of the speaker, has the potential to respond to the speaker and therefore is active in the characterisation of the protagonist. The presence of the silent, visiting poet provides an opportunity for an ironic reading because it changes the tone of the teacher's introduction to the pupils.

The teacher's reactionary attitude to contemporary poetry is substantiated in the second stanza:

sit up straight and listen. Remember
 the lesson on assonance, for not all poems,
 sadly, rhyme these days. Still. Never mind.
 Whispering's, as always, out of bounds -
 but do feel free to raise some questions.
 After all we're paying forty pounds.

The instruction to 'sit up straight and listen' carries an implication that the ensuing session with the poet is not going to be fun and absorbing, rather it will require concentration and determination to maintain attention. The speaker is depicted with a preference for end-rhyme and infers that, in its absence, assonance is an inferior poetic device. This preference for end-rhyme is wittily ironised by Duffy's rhyming use of 'bounds' and 'pounds'. The speaker's remarks 'Still. Never mind.' and her reference to the visitor's fee depict her as resigned about contemporary developments in poetry and resentful at being obliged to recognise 'modern' poets. The line 'After all we're paying forty pounds' is unlikely to have been addressed to the children, and is more convincingly read as the teacher's unspoken thought.

The third stanza begins with the implication that the school is in an urban area where a percentage of immigrant children do not have English as their first language:

Those of you with English Second Language
see me after break. We're fortunate
to have this person in our midst.
Season of mists and so on and so forth.
I've written quite a bit of poetry myself,
am doing Kipling with the Lower Fourth.

The reference to the poet as 'this person' functions to avoid outright citation of Duffy herself and permit a wider reading of the 'poet in the class' than a self-reflexive, autobiographical reference. However, the phrase also functions to succinctly characterise the speaker's articulation as a derogatory attitude towards the poet, derived from the English 'class system' which positions the poet as unranked and socially inferior to the teacher. The derogatory sense of 'this person' indicates the speaker's ironic intention in her praise of the poet 'We're fortunate'.

The potential for irony is compounded by both the Head of English's citation of Keats' poem 'To Autumn' as a clichéd reference to the Autumn term, and her inability to complete the first line of the poem which has the status of a sacred text in the canon of English poetry. However, the speaker's articulation of 'Season of mists and so on and so forth' is problematic: it seems unlikely that the speaker would continue her inept reference to Keats' poem to the extent of 'and so forth'. This seems attributable to the writer herself rather than her speaking character, and is a diversion from the characterisation of the teacher to Duffy's perspective; it suggests her own somewhat dismissive opinion of repeated and inept citation of Keats' line as a seasonal indicator and as the exemplar of 'great poetry'.

The final two lines of the stanza are located in a different time from the speaker's main articulation in front of the class: 'I've written quite a bit of poetry myself...'. These are remarks possibly made earlier to the intradiegetic visiting poet who is not 'voiced' in the monologue, and therefore cannot relate them inside the speaker's narration for readers to overhear. This indicates a hyperdiegetic voice that interrupts the teacher's narration to report the earlier remarks she had made to the poet. This disjunction is part of Duffy's ironising strategy. I shall discuss the use of more than one 'voice' in the monologue in my analysis of ironising strategies after this initial reading.

The teacher's citation of Kipling exemplifies the Victorian, imperialist, jingoistic, end-rhymed poetry that was traditionally taught in schools until the inclusion of twentieth-century and contemporary poetry into school curricula.

There is another ironising intrusion of a second voice in the fourth stanza:

Right. That's enough from me. On with the Muse.
 Open a window at the back. We don't
 want winds of change about the place.
 Take notes, but don't write reams. Just an essay
 on the poet's themes. Fine. Off we go.
 Convince us that there's something we don't know.

The intrusion, 'We don't/want winds of change about the place' ironises through its juxtaposition with the teacher's instruction to her class 'Open a window at the back', and implies Duffy's comment on the reactionary teacher's attitude to contemporary poetry. It is a hyperdiegetic interruption in Duffy's 'voice' rather than an example of Duffy ventriloquising the speaker because the teacher would be unlikely to make the remark about 'winds of change' to her pupils.

'Convince us that there is something we don't know' powerfully depicts the supercilious, authoritarian attitude of the speaker: her comment implies that she knows all there is to know about poetry, more than the practising, published poet, and at the same time implies that the visiting poet does not have the language skills and power of argument to overcome the challenge. If this is read in the context of Duffy's degree in Philosophy and the recognition of her already critically acclaimed status as an important new poet, this is a rewarding opportunity for readers to ironise the speaker.

The opening of the final stanza suggests that time has elapsed, the poetry session has completed, and the teacher is dismissing her pupils; the poet is still present:

Well. Really. Run along now girls. I'm sure
 that gave an insight to an outside view.
 Applause will do. Thank you
 very much for coming here today. Lunch
 in the hall? Do hang about. Unfortunately
 I have to dash. Tracy will show you out.

The two single words that begin the stanza suggest that the teacher feels affronted by what she has heard in the poetry session but cannot find the words to express this. The proximity of the two opposites, 'insight' and 'outside view', calls attention to Duffy's ironising construction of the line. The use of 'outside' marginalises the visiting poet and her work by suggesting that they are not part of the community of the teacher and her pupils who study mainstream poetry: in effect the speaker is 'othering' the poet and setting the class, and the poetry that they study, in opposition to the visiting poet.

Finally, the teacher responds to the unheard poet's enquiry about lunch facilities and dismisses her to the attention of a schoolgirl, with the implication that the speaker has more important matters to attend to.

Ironising Strategies in 'Head of English'

Duffy is present in two different ways in this dramatic monologue: firstly she is represented by the silent intradiegetic visiting poet whose presence creates the opportunity for an ironic reading of the speaker's narrative; and secondly, she is 'heard' as an ironising hyperdiegetic voice that is constructed with reported remarks that the teacher made outside the classroom scenario, and remarks that are more convincingly attributed to Duffy herself, for example, 'We don't/want winds of change about the place'.

The silenced visiting poet who is part of the speaker's intradiegetic audience functions as a victimised 'stooge' whose presence facilitates the reactionary, patronising characteristics of the speaker. In my discussion of the production of 'Sympathy' in dramatic monologues (Chapter One), I argued that the presence of a demonised 'other' produces a more sympathetic response from readers for the protagonist of the

monologue. There is a similar mechanism working here: the presence of an unempowered visitor is the first indicator for an ironic reading of the speaker; the totality of the visitor's lack of power further deepens the irony that is potentially generated by the poem.

While acknowledging that all irony is an indirect mode of criticism, I suggest that Duffy's second ironising strategy, the intrusive hyperdiegetic 'voice', is a more subtle method of creating opportunities for an ironic reading of the speaker's narrative than the strategy of the 'unvoiced' visitor. Once the hyperdiegetic function is recognised, it is possible to physically abstract sections of the text itself that are more convincingly read as Duffy's intrusions into the speaker's narration.

This more subtle mode of generating irony, the hyperdiegetic 'voice', functions to empower Duffy to respond as/for the silent poet by creating a voiceover effect to the speaker's narration. This constructs a complex narrative for 'Head of English'.

In this statement that Duffy responds 'as/for the silent poet' I intend to argue for an autobiographical link between Duffy herself and the silent victim of the Head of English. Duffy has avoided outright self-identification with the poet by the distancing strategy of referring to the visiting poet as 'this person' in the protagonist's ironic praise of the poet (third stanza). However, the ironising strategies that target the protagonist's reactionary attitude, and the identification of the 'victimised' silent visitor as a contemporary published poet strongly indicate that Duffy speaks for herself and for all poets that have found themselves in a similar situation.

Address

Duffy's protagonist identifies her audience as the unvoiced poet and the 'girls' in the class. This direct, gendered intradiegetic address also has the potential to function as a direct, gendered extradiegetic address to female readers. The speaker cites two male poets in her reference to canonic poetry; this may suggest to some readers that gender issues concerning the production and distribution of poetry are under interrogation in 'Head of English' but Duffy does not gender the victimised visiting poet. An extract from Duffy's *Bete Noire* interview indicates that it is reactionary opinion rather than gender issues that is the target of her poem. Duffy was questioned 'What were your influences? Who did you read and enjoy and learn from? Her answer included the following:

I mean at school the first conscious thing I remember writing was from Keats, and I remember learning the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. And there had been a lot of more obvious people before that. You see I did at that age actually write 'thou' and 'but soft' and all those. But when I got past that I think it was Jacques Prevert. I had a hairdressing job at the weekends as a teenager and at that time Penguin published books at half a crown almost by the day, for there was the modern poets series for British writers and the Penguin modern European series. I would just go and buy one. I wouldn't even look who'd written it, because it was modern. And in that way I had quite a good grounding in all the good late-greats.⁴

Duffy's statement identifies her own alignment with the praxis of contemporary poetics. There is a suggestion of antipathy towards the poetics of eighteenth and nineteenth century Romanticism in 'You see I did at that age actually write "thou" and "but soft" and all those. But when I got past that...', although, Duffy's own practise includes elements of Romantic individualism alongside her depiction of the power of socio-economics in the formation of social subjectivity.

This alignment with contemporary poetics is exemplified in the same interview in her response to a question on which poetic techniques and ways of working/playing with language appealed to her:

I like rhyme a lot. I probably instinctively want to rhyme more than I actually do. In rewrites, I'll quite often take rhymes out, if I think they are heavy or laden. I like echoes and assonance, and that part of you that is watching what you are doing when you are writing poems is on the look-out for that. I was more conscious of what I did with rhyme in *Selling Manhattan*. I was aware that the poetry was becoming more flexible. I was trying not to repeat myself too much, to take more risks than my early writing. I had a good year at home in that time, and I would experiment and throw away. I was trying more new things. What I wanted was a freer form.⁵

Her statement suggests that she enjoys rhyme in the way that many do, especially children, but that she recognises the importance and rewards of innovative 'play' with language and form. In the context of Duffy's remarks, 'Head of English' appears to encapsulate a critique of reactionary opinion and a valorisation of the continuing development and publication of contemporary poetry.

Kipling and Keats are probably identified because they are widely-quoted representative examples of the canon, and likely to be cited by reactionary critics of poetry. Although 'girls' does potentially function as a direct, gendered extradiegetic address, this is not strongly exclusive of male readers because the indirect address of the 'message' of the content of the poem is likely to produce a dominant reading of ironisation of the teacher, and sympathy towards the young ungendered poet. The address is, however, exclusive of readers with reactionary attitudes to contemporary poets such as Duffy, who are represented by the ungendered Head of English.

'POET FOR OUR TIMES' (*TOC 1990*)

Duffy's comment that she liked rhyme but usually expunged it from her poems, preferring to work towards a freer form, is relevant to this ironic dramatic monologue where she uses rhyme throughout the poem and a conventional six-line stanza with regular line-length. She uses both effectively and wittily as an ironising strategy in the characterisation of the speaker. The poem also interrogates a literary issue, in this case one concerning the domain and poetics of Poetry. It does not carry the autobiographical inflection of the previous poem.

The scenario for this dramatic monologue is that of a journalist drinking with a casual acquaintance in a public house. The journalist describes his job to his companion, as casual acquaintances often do. He is a headline writer for a tabloid newspaper and he explains the purpose of his occupation and his method of working.

Duffy herself described this as 'a sort of knockabout poem' during an evening of readings of her own work.⁶ The poem is even more 'knockabout' when seen on the page because the tabloid headlines quoted by the speaker are printed in upper-case which adds visual satiric and ironic drama to the text.

Duffy confirmed at her reading that much of her poetry is inspired by events and reportage in the mass media. The tabloid headlines will be familiar to many readers; they are probably close to the originals that inspired the monologue. However, there is an important literary debate behind the 'knockabout' that can be identified from the final line of the poem; I shall discuss this in my later analysis.

There are several markers for an ironic reading of this speaker, one of which is the upper case satirised headlines; another is the use of an a-b-a-b-a-b rhyming scheme for each stanza. Duffy's work seldom uses end-rhyme for the basic construction of a poem, although she often uses a rhymed couplet to conclude unrhymed sonnets, and sometimes instances of end- and internal rhyme in her dramatic monologues. The speaker's narration is dominated by iambic pentameter rhythm that suggests the poet's mocking consciousness and her intention of a 'knockabout' effect. A further significant marker for irony is that Duffy has constructed her speaker as a familiar stereotype, a male, tabloid journalist, hard-drinking, hail-fellow-well-met character whose occupation is to boost the circulation figures of his employer's newspapers with sensationalist headlines.

The monologue opens with the protagonist boasting of his ability to devise effective front-page headlines for the tabloids: 'I write the headlines for a Daily Paper./It's just a knack one's born with all-right-Squire.' This hyphenated address to his unvoiced companion whilst they drink together suggests a glib, superficial familiarity with casual acquaintances.

The speaker explains the details of his job and argues that the skill in his type of journalism is not the ability to deliver factual news and explain events to readers but the ability to construct sensationalist headlines aimed at increasing circulation figures:

You do not have to be an educator,
just bang the words down like they're screaming *Fire!*
CECIL-KEAYS ROW SHOCK TELLS EYETIE WAITER.
ENGLAND FAN CALLS WHINGEING FROG A LIAR

The use of italicised '*Fire!*' represents his intention to elicit an extreme response from his readers. This works as an opportunity to ironise both the journalist and his readers; his

attitude is excessively sensationalist and the inferred response of his readers, one of instant alarm, is naïve and irrational. Here, political scandal exposing the sexual affair of a prominent, conspicuously-married, Conservative government minister, Cecil Parkinson, and his personal assistant, Sarah Keays, his mistress, is allied with the xenophobia of 'EYETIE WAITER'.⁷ Readers of the paper are encouraged to turn to the inside pages by the mystification and titillation of 'ROW SHOCK'. The second headline suggests an alliance between the paper and xenophobic readers that are football fans in shared hatred of the French with 'WHINGEING FROG A LIAR'.

The rationale for his 'art' of sensationalist headlines enlarged to fill the front page is that it will compel passers-by to satisfy prurient curiosity by buying the paper:

Cheers. Thing is, you've got to grab attention
with just one phrase as punters rush on by.
I've made mistakes too numerous to mention,
so now we print the buggers inches high.
TOP MP PANTIE ROMP INCREASES TENSION
RENT BOY; ROCK STAR PAID ME WELL TO LIE.

He illustrates this with punning illustrations of sexual scandal that are similar to headlines often seen on the front page of tabloids. He clearly believes that his readers are most strongly attracted by recourse to sexist innuendo, homophobia, and gossip concerning the private (and often reprehensible) lives of politicians

This is followed by his claim for status as a creative, contemporary practitioner of poetics:

I like to think that I'm a sort of poet
for our times. My shout. Know what I mean?
I've got a special talent and I show it

in punchy haikus featuring the Queen.
 DIPLOMAT IN BED WITH SERBO-CROAT.
 EASTENDERS'BONKING SHOCK IS WELL-OBSECENE.

His terse offer of a drink to his companion, 'My shout', creates a pun with the visual impact of the upper case headlines featured throughout the monologue. His headline examples of his poetic talent combine allusions to homophobia, xenophobia, and spurious moral indignation at the content of a top-of-the-ratings TV soap opera. The poetics of the headlines mark the opportunity to ironise his claim of a special talent for poetry. Their juxtaposition, the first offering readers the homophobic and xenophobic titillation of implied bizarre homosexual congress between a high status member of the international community and an anonymous member of an obscure Baltic state, and the second implying that readers should be shocked by the sexual content of a television soap opera, exemplifies the speaker's use of double standards of censorship.

The journalist implies regret at the loss of the power of newspaper headlines to produce a strong public response but blames this on competition from other mass media such as television:

Of course, these days, there's not the sense of panic
 you got a few years back. What with the box
 et cet. I wish I'd been around when the Titanic
 sank. To headline that, mate, would've been the tops.
 SEE PAGE 3 TODAY GENTS THEY'RE GIGANTIC.
 KINNOCK-BASHER MAGGIE PULLS OUT STOPS.

He refers to the tragedy of the Titanic as a lost opportunity to demonstrate his professional skills but this is potentially ironised by the following headlines. The newspaper that employs the speaker is encoded in the example of vulgarity and sexist aggression in the reference to 'PAGE 3'.⁸ Parliamentary debate between the heads of

government and opposition is trivialised by the language and the juxtaposition with the 'Page 3' reference.

The final stanza of the monologue has a different format from the preceding stanzas.

This suggests that the two final lines may be Duffy's verdict on the speaker's attitude to the use of language, and her allusion to the literary issue dramatised by this poem:

And, yes, I have a dream - make that a scotch, ta-
 that kids will know my headlines off by heart.
 IMMIGRANTS FLOOD IN CLAIMS HEATHROW WATCHER.
 GREEN PARTY WOMAN IS A NIGHTCLUB TART.
 The poems of the decade...*Stuff'em! Gotcha!*
 The instant tits and bottom line of art.

The speaker reveals his ambition for his work and implies a potential continuum between his own creative use of language and the tradition of Poetry where schoolchildren learn to quote examples from the canon of Poetry. These two lines describing his 'dream' seem even more overblown than the characterisation established in the previous stanzas and are more convincingly read as Duffy ventriloquising her speaker. This ambition and the implied poetic value of his work is potentially ironised by the xenophobia, sexism and sensationalism of his final headlines. '*Stuff'em! Gotcha!*' were actual headlines used by the tabloids on the occasion of the controversial sinking of the Argentine battle cruiser the General Belgrano in 1982 during the Falklands war.

The final lines can be read as Duffy's ironisation of the attitudes that underlie the production and reception of the journalist's texts, that is, antagonism towards all forms of authority, artistic or otherwise, and intense voyeuristic interest in the personal lives of prominent figures in society, inflected with xenophobia, homophobia and sexual objectification of women.

The last line ironically defines the journalist's 'poetry', 'The instant tits and bottom line of art'; it also evokes his earlier reference to 'Page 3'. At the same time the line covertly addresses the literary issue encoded in the poem, that is, what are the parameters for defining poetic art, and are the journalist's headlines the bottom line of the art?

Analysis of the textual features and the literary context of the poem

'Poet for Our Times' has a more complex structure than appears at first reading. This arises from objectification of the use of language and its power to manipulate listeners/readers. As the journalist describes his 'art' to his listener in the pub there is another listener, better described perhaps as another level of listening, in the scenario of the monologue, that is, the purchaser/reader to whom his 'art' is directed. The narrative has an intradiegetic listener but also the hypodiegetic listeners/readers that are manipulated into reading his headlines (and possibly buying the newspaper). It is clear from his comments about the 'punters' that he has a dismissive opinion of their aesthetic taste and intelligence 'just bang the words down like they're screaming *Fire!*' His 'poetry' is not motivated by the desire to communicate the complexities of his own understanding of the world to others, but to manipulate his readers to buy whichever tabloid newspaper employs him.

It is generally acknowledged that strategies for irony carry the risk of being misread. Because of this, throughout my readings I argue for 'potential' for ironic response from readers, and 'markers for irony' constructed by the poet. 'Poet For Our Times' is somewhat different and does not suffer from this vulnerability of potential misreading.

Duffy has depicted her speaker as an ironised over-the-top stereotype that cannot be misread.

Irony works in and around the narrative in different ways. The speaker himself is unmistakably ironised for extradiegetic listeners/readers. Within the narrative his attitude to his hypodiegetic readers is ironic in the sense that he consciously uses language in a sensationalist way to manipulate these readers. It is arguable that his hypodiegetic readers are not victims of his manipulation, and that they may represent people who read the headlines tongue-in-cheek, as a bit of fun, but the successful journalist manipulates many into buying tabloid newspapers, thus reducing the potential readership of quality broadsheets. His ironised theory of poetic art and its purpose is related to a casual acquaintance during a drinking session. Placed in this scenario, his listener, who tacitly accepts his theory of literary 'Art' is also ironized.

Readers of Duffy's poem are addressed by the ironised extreme sensationalism of the headlines and the unmistakable ironisation of the stereotyped journalist. This extradiegetic address is intended to stimulate them to consider the literary issues embodied in both the speaker's claim to the status of contemporary poet and in the examples of his work.

The 'bottom line of art' debate has become a political issue in literary criticism since the development of postmodernism and the increasing problematic of defending 'absolute' aesthetic standards. Postmodernist critics question whether, in our multicultural society where many different texts are produced on a massive scale and interact with one

another, an 'aesthetic' determination of the nature of Literature, Poetry and Art is still valid.

Duffy's poem interrogates the issue of the value of traditional poetics. Her over-the-top depiction of the journalist indicates her own critical response to the use/abuse of language that has developed in late twentieth century tabloids. Hutcheon has argued that there is always an 'evaluative edge' to irony.¹⁰ This evaluative edge is established in Duffy's poem through her ironisation of her speaker's claim to the status of contemporary poet, and indicates her own commitment to traditional poetic values. It is significant to note the contrast between Duffy's position here, where she ironises the speaker's claim for innovatory use/abuse of language for commercial gain, and her position in 'Head Of English' where she ironises the reactionary traditionalist who victimises the visiting contemporary poet. This suggests that, as many critics recognise, Duffy positions herself between these two extremes, and her work reflects adherence to the poetic tradition combined with the innovatory intention that she revealed in the *Bete Noire* interview.

It might be argued, obtusely, that Duffy has exposed herself to charges of postmodernist practice with the interplay of actual sensationalist headlines in the construction of her poem, but her disclaimer of its 'knockabout' status pre-empts any criticism of a double standard of poetics.

Despite this disclaimer, the relevance of Duffy's poem to literary debate was indicated by its publication as the signature poem for *Poetry Review's* leader article 'Poetry in the 80s' in 1989.¹¹ In the article several poets defined and criticised developments in poetry during that decade. Carol Rumens, deploring the impossibility of earning a living as a poet after many years of developing the art and craft of her profession insisted that:

Poetry is sick... When poetry dies, Auberon Waugh will write its epitaph and Prince Charles will design the tomb. Then we shall have *real poetry*, the equivalent of mock tudor on the page. Poetry will be popular again. It will sell and attract business sponsorship. It will of course rhyme.

Other poets praised or deplored the state of poetry. Anne Stevenson cited postmodernism for 'originality, sometimes at the expense of intelligibility, sometimes at the cost of generosity'. Duffy's dramatic monologue had its place as part of the debate.

Duffy's achievement in the dramatised scenario of 'Poet for Our Times' is a seamless ironisation of the journalist who debases the language, his acquaintance who tacitly supports this self-acclaimed 'modern poet', and the (absent) passer-by who consumes the texts offered to him. Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue form facilitates a scenario depicting 'the bottom line of art' where her characters represent the producers and consumers of this 'art'. This ongoing debate, which is of public significance, is disguised entertainingly as the idiosyncratic occupation of a private individual.

'TRANSLATING THE ENGLISH, 1989' (*TOC 1990*)

Both 'Head Of English' and 'Poet For Our Times' function to interrogate specific literary issues with the potential to address extradiegetic readers and stimulate them to consider the debate dramatised by the poem. 'Translating The English, 1989' extends Duffy's interrogation to the entire politico-cultural structure of Britain in the 1980's. In choosing this comprehensive target Duffy achieves an increased didactic effect with her use of dramatic monologue form. As with 'Poet For Our Time' Duffy uses a stereotyped protagonist but he is satirised rather than ironised by her strategies for characterisation.

'Translating The English, 1989' is untypically in the form of a satiric list, twenty-eight lines long: it is not the narrative of a specific event but does have a speaker who addresses an intradiegetic audience. The speaker is a naturalised Briton. He appears to address an audience 'Welcome to my country'. A possible scenario for the monologue might be that of a counsellor or guide leading a tour or familiarisation session on life in Britain for a group of visitors or immigrants.

The subtitle of the poem cites a comment familiar from reviews of poetry translated into English '...and much of the poetry, alas, is lost in translation...' which refers to the difficulty of transmitting cultural significance in the semantic interchange between one language and another.¹² The speaker's ineptitude with language demonstrates his lack of understanding of the political and cultural meanings embodied in the language.

The speaker is voiced in stereotypical 'Asian-speak' which will be familiar from mass-media entertainment to many readers. The idiolect is constructed by inappropriate use of the participle, for example; 'Also we can be talking crack', 'We are liking /a smashing good time', 'Plenty culture you will be/agreeing.' The use of this idiolect characterises the speaker as an Asian immigrant to Britain and facilitates a monologue where misuse of the language causes inappropriate connections and ludicrous comparisons.

The resultant satiric representation of the speaker infuses a problematic tension in the poem. My reading will argue that, although the poem can be read superficially as a satiric representation of the pitfalls of the English language and culture for immigrants adjusting to life in Britain, Duffy's project in this poem is an ironic deconstruction of Thatcherite Britain in the 1980s, rather than a racist satire. The use of both satire and

markers for an ironic reading of the monologue brings the potential for misreading the speaker that I shall discuss in my later analysis.

The satire opens with the citation of Edwina Currie, a junior minister in the Department of Health who was repeatedly and vociferously attacked by the *Sun* newspaper when her inept remarks on the high incidence of salmonella in chickens' eggs produced an economic crisis in the egg-producing industry. The speaker does not perceive the economic significance behind the drama of the public battle between the elitist, self-promoting politician fighting to save her career and the sensationalist tabloid, and trivialises this as popular entertainment.¹³ His lack of perception offers the opportunity for an ironic reading of his commentary:

Welcome to my country! We have here Edwina Currie
and The Sun newspaper. Much excitement.
Also the weather has been most improving
even in February

Thatcher's guiding principle for organising Britain's economy was the theory of the freemarket, claiming that unfettered competition would reduce consumer costs throughout the economy. This made no allowance for the reality that scarce commodities would increase disproportionately in price. The speaker has no perception of economics and valorises the Black Market, the economic playground for profiteers, as the means of buying overpriced access to cultural events:

If you like
Shakespeare or even Opera we have too the Black Market.
For two hundred quids we are talking Les Miserables,
nods being as good as winks.

The speaker is indicated as male and addresses a male audience:

The Fergie,
The Princess Di and the football hooligan, truly you will
like it here, Squire.

The 'Squire' form of address is gender-specific, and the list of attractions is perhaps more relevant to male interests than female ones. In citing 'The Fergie, The Princess Di and the football hooligan', the speaker makes no distinction between the social status of the new generation of British Monarchy, and the drunken football fans that parade the streets around football stadia, attacking supporters of the opposition team and the police force sent to control the situation. This satiric pairing of the 'Royals' with the proletariat 'hooligans' facilitates an ironic perception of the false distinction between the 'high spirited escapades' of the elite (widely depicted by the tabloid press) and the antisocial behaviour of their social 'inferiors'.

The speaker offers availability of illegal drugs and alcohol, 'also we can be talking crack, smack/and Carling Black Label if we are so inclined'. The citation of these toxic drugs is followed by his admonition 'Don't drink the H₂O' which facilitates an ironic inference that the water is more toxic than the drugs.

Public awareness of the increase of global pollution caused by industrialisation led to the development of the Green Party and the phenomenon of 'Green' parliamentary candidates. This political movement is trivialized by being denied its significance in global politics:

All very proud we now have
a green Prime Minister. What colour yours?

The nationwide pollution in the egg-producing and water industries is potentially ironised by the speaker passing these off as barely-remarked inconveniences with 'Don't eat the eggs' and 'Don't drink the H₂O' (water). A witty reminder of the poet's consciousness here is the citation of the standardised warning about water for Britons travelling abroad.

The satiric juxtaposition in 'Fish and Chips and the Official Secrets Act/second to none' is another marker for an ironic reading of the commentary. This will be evident for readers familiar with the public debate in the media on the repressive and undemocratic use of the Official Secrets Act by Thatcher's government.¹⁴ The conditions and powers of The Official Secrets Act were upheld by Margaret Thatcher and her government as necessary for the preservation of national security. This act was seen by many at the time as an undemocratic instrument whose regulatory powers served to camouflage government shortcomings and questionable international manoeuvrings. The ubiquitous and cheap takeaway meal 'Fish and Chips' has long been a staple item in the British diet. To pair it with the controversial Official Secrets Act, an institution acquiring infamy in the 1980s, is ludicrous and satirises the politico-cultural ineptitude of the speaker but, more significantly, it creates the potential for an ironic reading which decodes into an in-depth political de-construction of the speaker's naïve vision of British life.

The single stanza monologue forms a satiric list of the good and bad aspects of British society in '1989' where no moral distinction is made between social practices such as the consumption of illegal drugs, house-market profiteering, and popular television soaps like 'Neighbours'. If read ironically, the speaker's commentary on life in Britain carries the implications that political corruption and materialism govern all aspects of social life,

and that there is no social agenda for the common good under Thatcher's government.

This social and commercial corruption of society is implied by 'All this can be arranged for cash no questions' which is installed, almost inconsequentially, in the centre of this satiric accumulation.

Duffy's critique is more overt and easier to decode in the final lines of the monologue where the speaker's satirised commentary condenses to a cryptic list of features of Thatcherite Britain:

Also history and buildings. The House of Lords. Docklands.
 Many thrills and high interest rates for own good. Muggers.
 Much lead in petrol. Filth. Rule Britannia and child abuse.
 Electronic tagging, Boss, ten pints and plenty rape. Queen
 Mum.
 Channel Tunnel. You get here fast no problem to my country my country
 my country welcome welcome welcome.

The reiterations of the final line exceed realistic speech and mark the potential for irony by emphasising the speaker's optimistic and naïve perception of the accumulation of corrupt social and political practices that constitute his 'country'

The last six lines of his commentary can be expanded from their condensed form and decoded as a satirised ironic critique of Britain citing the archaic privileges of the aristocracy, exemplified by 'The House of Lords'; allusion to the scandalous inflation of property prices seen in the development of the site of the former London dockyards; the pollution resulting from leaded petrol; and the filthy urban environment resulting from the government's restrictions on funding and provision of social services; the valorisation of Britain's imperialist past disguised as national patriotism by the slogan and national song 'Rule Britannia'; Britain's reputation of the worst incidence of child abuse among

western nations; the overcrowded prisons, and the newly instituted practice of releasing certain types of criminal offenders back into society with electronic tags on their ankles; the public perception that the incidence of drunkenness and rape had increased in urban areas; the sentimental idealisation of the Queen's mother; and the huge costs of the Channel Tunnel, borne partly by the taxpayer.

Analysis of the Speaker and his Commentary

I shall begin my revisionary analysis of 'Translating the English, 1989' with consideration of the status of the speaker. Duffy's anatomy of Thatcherite Britain, ironically encoded into a satirised commentary in the form of a jumble of inappropriate misconnections, is articulated by a satirised character who perceives Britain as a land of opportunity, and London as a 'wonderful capital city', despite the presence of wheel-clamps, dogs' faeces, vagrants, muggers, leaded petrol, imperialism, child abuse and rape, and the developing sub-culture of 'yobism'. He explains his pride in his adopted country, 'Welcome to my country', but his ignorance of British culture and politics is revealed by his inept and irrational juxtapositions. His lack of discrimination in connecting random cultural features, such as the English Victorian novelist Charles Dickens, the Irish television personality Terry Wogan, and Scotland (which was seeking devolution at the time) suggest his attempts to promote Britain as all things to all people.

His characteristic of ineptitude facilitates a satiric juxtaposition of British institutions that has the potential to expose their failings or ignominious status. This satiric juxtaposition of good and bad aspects of 1980s Britain contains markers indicating that Duffy intends the monologue to be read ironically. The speaker's ignorance is not the target of her attack, it is the mechanism to establish a deconstruction of contemporary British society

under Thatcher's Conservative government. The title and its date refer to both the semantic intricacies of English language, and to the socio-economic state of Britain in the economic climate of increasing globalisation of capitalism of the 1980s. Readers are positioned to assess Duffy's speaker as a satirised inept user of the language, and also perceive him as a rhetorical strategy for Duffy's analysis of Britain in the 1980's, but there is some uncertainty in this positioning.

I return now to my earlier comment on the problematic tension caused by the use of both satire and markers for irony in this dramatic monologue. If 'Translating the English, 1989' is considered in the context of Duffy's other collected work, it is most unlikely that she would intend a racist ironisation of the immigrant Asian speaker himself. Her poetry characteristically demonstrates a critical stance to the inequalities arising from social discrimination of gender, race and religion. I suspect that her intention was that the satirised speaker should be read with a degree of sympathy for the difficulties of mastering both the English language and the difficulties of adjusting to the social and political culture of Britain. However, Duffy's use of both satire and ironic markers allows the potential for readers to assess the immigrant speaker ironically for his ineptitude and/or his tacit acceptance of the culture he delineates.

Intradiegetic Listeners and Extradiegetic Readers

Duffy's speaker addresses an intradiegetic audience overtly as 'truly you will/like it here, Squire'. This may be one individual in a group but 'Squire' was also used in the 1980s as a familiar form of general address to an audience. This function of general address creates the opportunity for an additional, extradiegetic address to readers to prompt them to interrogate the content of his commentary.

The intradiegetic audience does not seem to challenge or disturb the speaker as he extols the merits of the commercial and cultural opportunities. Mermin's concept usefully augments my reading of Duffy's listener in this poem: passive or otherwise, the presence of the auditor contributes to the meaning of the monologue.¹⁵ Because there is no discernible reaction from the listener/s, I envisage him/them as accepting the satirical content of the monologue as a sensible summary of the social structure of his adopted country. In other words, the speaker's audience is as deluded as he is. Duffy has constructed a satirised scenario of the shared ignorance and gullibility of the political realities of 1980s Britain.

However, reading the unvoiced audience in this way suggests that the irony potentially generated by the poem may have partially escaped Duffy's intended target to work on two levels: a mildly ironic reading of the naivety and political ineptitude of the speaker and his acquiescent intradiegetic audience, and a Swiftian ironic condemnation of the state of Britain in the 1980s.

This scenario has more players than the speaker and his listener. The speaker's use of the first-person plural pronoun 'we' indicates his self-identification with his adopted country but readers objectifying the scenario through irony can read this as a representation of the muddled and politically naïve understanding of a whole stratum of society rather than of an individual.

My initial assessment of 'Translating The English, 1989' was that its function is to offer readers the pleasure of decoding the political subtext and enjoying their superiority over

the two politically naïve characters, the speaker and his audience, and the section of society that they represent. However, the reinforcement of my own political awareness, as I connected events remembered from the 1980s to the features and events cited in Duffy's text leads me to acknowledge that the monologue may increase political awareness in some readers.

This didactic reading effect suggests a mechanism that parallels Langbaum's theory that an 'empathic' reading of Browning's ironised speakers subsequently 'refreshes and renews moral judgment' because readers recognise how far they have put aside moral censure in order to empathise with (understand) the speaker. In this case a decoding of the ironised content of the speaker's commentary, and the subsequent reinforcement of political awareness may seem initially to bear some similarity to the reading effect postulated by Langbaum's theory. But Duffy's use of both satire and irony creates a reading effect of gently-amused detachment, that is, objectification of her speaker. He is characterized as someone to be mocked, somewhat sympathetically; readers who register this subtle response to the speaker's muddled attitudes and values may find it a stimulus to unravel the political analysis which underwrites the constructed satire.

Duffy's construction of this political scenario has injected a new dynamic into the triadic relation of speaker-listener-reader in the dramatic monologue. Decoding the irony of the speaker's utterance constructs an alternative text with the potential to dialogue with readers that concerns governmental policies rather personal issues confined to the individual. As my reading shows this 'dialogue' with extradiegetic readers/listeners can develop the cryptic satirised commentary with social and political events and concepts of the 1980s to reveal a deconstructive critique of Thatcherite Britain. This politically

focused exposition is balanced with an entertaining illustration of linguistic and semantic ineptitude.

The dramatic monologue form, particularly in ironic mode, has the effect of strongly objectifying ways of seeing, and, of constructing a critique of those specific perspectives. Browning's ironic characterisation of speakers is the model here but Duffy's dramatic monologue also owes something to Swift in the political purpose of 'Translating The English 1989'. Her dramatic monologue functions in a similar way to Swift's 'Modest Proposal' inasmuch as what seems to be the utterance of a private enthusiasm is really an ironic political statement condemning government policies: with Swift, the target was Britain's oppressive colonisation of Ireland; with Duffy, the target is Thatcher's government and the resulting social decay in the 1980s.

Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue form as a vehicle for interrogation of governmental politics exemplifies her mastery of the form and the concern with social issues that inflects much of her work. She is not the first to construct texts that are both literary and political, but her ability to do this so effectively brings an increased dimension to the dynamic relation between speaker and reader.

The comprehensive critique of 'Translating The English, 1989' is not a common strategy for Duffy's work. Her poems are more usually concerned with single social phenomena and events. The next two dramatic monologues also contain a wider critique, that of the values of the Thatcherite era, but this critique is realised through the depiction of a specific social event and a prominent figure of the 1980s. Both poems express the

interrelated themes of money, corruption and power, which feature in much of Duffy's work.

'WHAT PRICE?' (*SFN 1985*)

The scenario is that of a speaker and a companion/s spending a convivial evening and enjoying the opportunity to preview some recently discovered diaries of an important historical figure. As part of my analysis I shall contextualise the narrative with similar events of the 1980's.

The dramatic monologue has five stanzas, each with five lines of approximately even lengths. Read aloud, this gives an evenness of rhythm and pace, and the suggestion of a speaker who carefully paces his statements in measured tones. This depicts the speaker with the characteristic of a professional educational speaker, such as a teacher or university tutor, in this case an historian.

These were his diaries. Through the writing we may find
the man and whether he has been misjudged.
Admit it, even now, most people secretly resent
the Jews. We have all evening to peruse
the truth. Outside the window summer blossom falls.

The characteristic of a professional speaker, accustomed to addressing formal groups is supported by his adoption of a universalist stance using the first-person plural pronoun. There is a striking feature of the construction of the second, fourth and fifth lines because the preceding lines are broken to position 'the man', 'the Jews' and 'the truth' at the beginning of these lines. The interrelation of these subsequently emerges as the potentially ironised subject of the poem.

The speaker is depicted with a developed aesthetic response to nature 'Outside the window summer blossom falls' that fits uneasily with his reference to resentment of the Jews, and may be a subtle marker for an ironic reading of the speaker.

In the second stanza the speaker alludes to the past, and the diarist's activities. He is circumspect in suggesting his own sympathy with the diarist's beliefs:

It takes me back. I always saw some sense
in what he tried to do. This country should be strong.
I'll put some Wagner on the gramophone
then we can settle down. On nights like this
it makes one glad to be alive. *My own Lili Marlene.*

During World War II, Wagner's music was adopted by the Nazi Party as an expression of their political agenda, and the German song 'Lilli Marlene' was popular in both Germany and Britain. The close conjunction of the nationalist statement 'This country should be strong' with the reference to Wagner and the wartime song, and the suggestion of a life-affirming evening 'it makes one glad to be alive' suggest that the speaker is a fascist with sympathy for Hitler's ambitions during World War II, and is excited at the possibility of justifying his own political theory/philosophy.

In the third stanza the speaker cryptically refers to his own history and suggests that the diarist would have had political affinities with him:

Of course, one had to fight. I had a wife.
But somewhere here I think you'll find
that he'd have joined with us. More wine?
I know the Sons of David died, some say atrociously,
but that's all past. The roses are in bloom.

There is a suggestion that the speaker fought against Germany not from conviction that he was defending his country against an aggressor but rather to avoid the financial and/or

social pressure that would result from being a pacifist, with the possible consequence of internment. There is also the possibility that the speaker belongs to a political party, such as the British National Party, that has a manifesto with similarities to that of Germany's Nazi Party during the last war, and can envisage collaboration with Germany had Britain succumbed to invasion: 'I think you'll find/that he'd have joined with us'. There is an incongruous juxtaposition between the convivial offer of 'More wine?', the reference to doubt about the atrocities of the Holocaust, and his aesthetic appreciation of the garden flowers outside. This incongruity constructs the opportunity for an ironic reading of the speaker.

In the fourth stanza the speaker alludes to the British government's reaction to Argentina's invasion of the Falkland Islands, 'Look at the way we claimed the islands back'. He follows this with the subtly hidden racist statement 'My grandchildren are young and pink/and make me proud', where his use of 'pink' suggests colour prejudice. 'She has the right idea' can be read as an allusion to Margaret Thatcher's decision to send in British troops to reclaim the Falklands and, perhaps, her subsequent controversial decision to sink the Argentine ship, the General Belgrano. The stanza concludes with the speaker's reference back to the diaries and the events of World War II:

These journals will be his chance to explain,
I'm certainly convinced that they are real.

The speaker's statements in this fourth stanza do not convey a continuous thread of narrative, they seem more like a collection of statements that functions to define a right-wing political consciousness, as the speaker's narration jumps from the Falklands invasion, to colour prejudice, back to Thatcher's imperialist reaction to the invasion, and finally to the diaries from the last war which might reveal the motivation behind the

diarist's policies. The insertion of the racist remark about the 'pink' grandchildren between the allusion to the Falklands invasion and Thatcher's response 'she has the right idea' deflects attention from the protagonist's narration to the poet's construction of her speaker and functions as a marker for irony.

The final stanza brings together a reiteration of the speaker's characteristics and a revelation of the phenomenon that instigated Duffy's poem:

Not that he didn't make mistakes, but we can learn
from him. See by the larch tree how the sun goes down.
And notice all the interest from newspapers, so soon!
I admit that it was hell to be a Jew, but how much
do you think they'll fetch? One million? Two?

The speaker reaffirms both his affinities with Hitler's political agenda, and his cultivated aesthetic response to Nature. His momentary recognition of the inhumanity of the Holocaust 'I admit that it was hell to be a Jew' is diminished by his greater interest in the market value of the personal records of the originator of that genocide. The final words of his narration exemplify the title of the poem 'What Price?'. His greed, 'One million? Two?', reveals him as a hypocrite more interested in money than the ideological commitment and aesthetic sensibility that he proclaims.

'What Price?' is almost certainly Duffy's response to a remarkable event of the early 1980's in which the eminent historian Hugh Trevor-Roper certified that some recently discovered volumes of 'Hitler's diaries' were authentic. There was fierce competition between national newspapers and various institutions to purchase the diaries but this came to nothing when they were proved to be fake, despite Trevor-Roper's professional assessment.

Duffy's imagined scenario relates to the event of 'Hitler's diaries' although I do not suggest that the speaker is a representation of Trevor-Roper. My reading defines the speaker as the embodiment of a rightwing/fascist, apologist attitude to German imperialism of World War II and the Jewish Holocaust, and racial discrimination which is inferred by his colour prejudice. The potential to ironise the speaker is constructed by the incongruity of combining the speaker's socially destructive political attitudes and his developed aesthetic sensibility exemplified in his response to Nature and music. This opportunity to ironise is compounded by the final revelation of his overriding interest in money.

I commented earlier that the speaker adopted a universalist stance in his narration with the use of 'we'. This use of the plural first-person pronoun can also be read as an inclusionary gesture to a non-gendered intradiegetic audience. In many of my readings I argue for a poem's construction of gendered address: I find that few human activities, when closely interrogated, do not reveal the effect of gender difference/inequality in some aspect of their enactment. However, in the case of the Jewish Holocaust gender difference seems irrelevant because of the totality of the racial/cultural discrimination that provoked the phenomenon. During his narration the speaker ameliorates his anti-semitic remarks: 'most people secretly resent/the Jews'; 'I know the Sons of David died, some say atrociously,/but that's all past'; and 'I admit it was hell to be a Jew, but how much/do you think they'll fetch'. This suggests that his unheard intradiegetic audience responds in a critical way that causes him to rephrase the attack of his argument by reducing the level of anti-semitism. An alternative is to read the audience as a mixed group that requires different styles of address to include them all.

However, his final recognition of the atrocity 'it was hell to be a Jew' suggests that he has encountered stiff opposition to his anti-semitism from his unvoiced intradiegetic listener/s. Seen in retrospect, his expectations of an acquiescent audience, 'Admit it, even now, most people secretly resent/the Jews', that will 'settle down' for a shared evening of Wagner and fascist ideology are potentially ironised by this inference of a critical reaction to his discourse: it suggests that he has misjudged his audiences sympathies.

Duffy's construction of opportunities for irony identifies the poem as an ironic interrogation of social events contemporaneous with her own life. 'What Price?' targets rightwing politics and apologists for Germany's political agenda for World War II. Although Duffy uses the phenomenon of the 'Hitler diaries' as the scenario for her critique, I do not think it is her intention to construct the opportunity for readers to identify specific participants in that notorious event.

A common theme in 'What Price?' and the next poem, 'Fraud', is the speaker's greed and interest in excessive wealth. But whereas the speaker of 'What Price?' was a hypocrite whose allegiance to right-wing ideology had the potential for social destruction, the protagonist of 'Fraud' is characterised as a criminal whose corrupt activities lead to actual 'immeasurable harm'. Both dramatic monologues are depicted with a tone of menace rather than the wit and humour of the previous poems in this chapter.

'FRAUD' (*MT 1993*)

This is a remarkable dramatic monologue that has particular significance in the genre of dramatic monologue because it precisely identifies Robert Maxwell without citing his name. There is some resonance between Duffy's depiction of this crude, powerful

speaker and Browning's Duke. Maxwell was a wealthy, politically-powerful figure in the mass media in the second half of the twentieth century. Newspaper archives will confirm his notoriety and the attempts to control his influence and power in British politics and international commerce. He is commonly acknowledged as a criminal since the public debate on his illegal use of his employees' pension funds. The protracted legal proceedings that resulted from the disclosure of his fraud also investigated the disputed involvement of his two sons in the misuse and dispersal of many millions of pounds from Maxwell's company pension fund.

The monologue has four stanzas of irregular line length and opens with an unnamed speaker relating his life story to an audience:

Firstly, I changed my name
to that of a youth I knew for sure had bought it in 1940,
Rotterdam.
Private M.
I was my own poem,
pseudonym,
rule of thumb.

The speaker is indicated as male by his identity switch with a youth. 'I was my own poem' infers that he constructed a new persona for himself that was advantageous in some way and fitted together convincingly as a 'life'. 'Rule of thumb' suggests that the new persona was in some respect roughly equivalent to his previous social identity but ambiguous enough to allow for further deception.

The second half of this stanza explains the reason for his camouflage:

What was my aim?
To change from a bum
to a billionaire. I spoke the English. Mine was a scam

involving pensions, papers, politicians in-and-out of their
 pram.
 And I was to blame.

The question 'What was my aim?' is effective as a rhetorical device that achieves a fluent connection to the explanation that follows, however, it also functions to construct a potential intradiegetic audience to whom the speaker is relating his life.

The meaning of the lines is explicit except for the phrase 'I spoke the English'. The presence of the definite article suggests that, rather than just understanding the language, the speaker also understood the customs and, more importantly, the social codes of English society. This would enable him to advance his own interests in various strata of society that police their 'boundaries' against imposters by adherence to esoteric modes of speech and behaviour. The speaker uses the contemporary euphemism 'scam' for fraudulent illegal activities. The final line 'And I was to blame' implies that the corrupt politicians and financiers that dealt with the speaker were not closely identified, and that he was publicly attacked while his equally corrupt colleagues attracted less attention from the investigating authorities and the mass media.

In the second stanza the speaker hints at the identity of some of his accomplices and the activities he shared with them:

For what? There's a gnome
 in Zurich knows more than people assume.
 There's a military man, Jerusalem
 way, keeping schtum.
 Then there's Him -
 for whom
 I paid for a butch and femme
 to make him come.
 And all of the crème
 de la crème
 considered me scum.

As in the previous stanza the question 'For what?' can be read as either rhetorical or as address to an intradiegetic audience. 'Gnome' is a contemporary term that signifies financiers in the Swiss banking system that are able to conduct global commercial transactions beyond the scrutiny, and therefore jurisprudence, of national governments. The speaker's reference to a 'gnome' suggests that he had an accomplice and that his 'scam' was more than his own personal project.

His enigmatic reference to the military man keeping 'schtum' suggests an allusion to the speaker's covert activities in Israeli military politics. This is doubly enigmatic because 'Jerusalem/way' alludes to territory vigorously contested by both the Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews. This could, therefore, suggest that the speaker acted as a double agent in contact with both sides in the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

The speaker cites an anonymous 'Him' for whom he did a sexual favour by hiring two lesbians who performed sexually to enable the unnamed voyeur to achieve orgasm. The initial capital of 'Him' suggests that the reference is to a prominent figure in the circles that the speaker frequented whose identity may be known to the speaker's audience. The list of his covert activities among the powerful figures of several countries ends with his acknowledgement of his exclusion from the upper strata of those societies 'all of the crème/de la crème' and suggests his derision towards their condemnation.

The third stanza substantiates the presence of an audience:

Poverty's dumb.
 Take it from me, Sonny Jim,
 learn to lie in the mother-tongue of the motherfucker you
 want to charm.
 They're all the same,
 turning their wide blind eyes to crime.

His use of 'Sonny Jim' suggests that he is addressing a little-known acquaintance of no consequence to him: it was a derisory common-place form of address to inferiors in the twentieth century. His remark 'Poverty's dumb' is ambiguous and can denote that to be poor is a form of stupidity, or that to be poor is to be unheard and therefore powerless in society. He suggests that the people he wishes to influence adopt the deceptive appearance of innocence.

The rest of the third stanza exemplifies the types of corruption that the speaker used to gain power over his accomplices or adversaries:

And who gives a damn
when the keys to a second home
are pressed in his palm,
or polaroids of a Night of Shame
with a Boy on the Game
are passed his way at the A.G.M.?

In the final decades of the twentieth century it became possible for tabloid newspapers to risk publishing the sexual peccadillos of leading figures of society. Although in many instances the papers' publishers were prosecuted by their victims, the notoriety of the event ensured that the newspapers circulation figures were increased to such an extent that the publishers were able to cover their legal expenses. This situation meant that many leading figures became vulnerable to exposure because of their unconventional private lives. The invention of the polaroid camera was also influential in this development of exposing scandal in the public press because photographic prints for evidence could be produced covertly within seconds from the camera itself without the need for a separate, lengthy darkroom process. The speaker suggests that he used bribery to gain influence over some, and blackmail over others that might thwart his plans to gain control at a company's Annual General Meeting.

In the final stanza the speaker addresses his audience with a phrase coined by George Bush, one-time President of the United States of America. Bush used the phrase 'Read my lips' during a national address as a presidential candidate when he wished to emphasize his policy to restrict taxation. Bush silently mouthed to his audience (which was global because his address was televised) 'NO MORE TAXES'. During subsequent presidency George Bush reneged on his promise. Since then the term 'Read my lips' has been used to signify the intention of deviousness in a public figure, particularly politicians.

Contextualised with this development, the opening line of the stanza suggests that the speaker is a devious character, and is silently mouthing to his audience the motivation behind his career:

So read my lips. Mon-ey. Pow-er. Fame.
 And had I been asked, in my time,
 in my puce and prosperous prime,
 if I recalled the crumbling slum
 of my Daddy's home,
 if I was a shit, a sham,
 if I'd done immeasurable harm,
 I could have replied with a dream.

His conjecture 'And had I been asked in my time,' suggests that he is no longer alive, and speaks from the grave. The sequence of conjectured allegations suggests that these never were put to him during his lifetime. His response that he 'could have replied with a dream' is ambiguous and facilitates several interpretations. If 'dream' is read as a utopian opposite to reality, this line could signify the speaker's confidence that he would be able to invent a self-advantageous version of his falsified background and illegal financial

operations to counter the allegations. However, the line is linked by a colon to the final statement of the monologue in which the speaker describes his death:

I could have replied with a dream:
 the water that night was calm
 and with my enormous mouth, in bubbles and blood
 and phlegm,
 I gargled my name

This ending is enigmatic until the conundrum of the speaker's status as the 'voice' of this dramatic monologue is clarified.

From the evidence of his own narrative the speaker is a cynical opportunist: 'learn to lie in the mother-tongue of the motherfucker you want to charm'. The claims he makes of international scams, bribery and corruption are not excused by his effort at self-justification: 'Poverty's Dumb', and his address to his intradiegetic listener as 'Sonny Jim' suggests that he has an arrogant attitude to the conventional man-in-the-street.

The speaker is ironised inasmuch as he is revealing his criminal career and probably expecting his intradiegetic listener to agree that 'Poverty's dumb', that access to money and power is sufficient excuse for his behaviour, and that he is no more immoral than the leaders of our society who were 'turning their wide blind eyes to crime'. Readers, are unlikely to accept the speaker's values and will read him ironically. The rhyming couplet 'And had I been asked, in my time,/in my puce and prosperous prime' of the final stanza, with its humorous alliteration, is also a marker for an ironic reading of the speaker.

However, this dramatic monologue exceeds the conventional opportunities to ironise the amoral, self-justifying speaker. Duffy creates an almost unmistakable marker for irony by her construction of an unusual phonetic effect. The speaker cannot be read as a

convention monologue character, partly because of the nature of his revelations but chiefly because, if readers articulate the monologue, it becomes apparent that every line of the narration has the identical terminal consonant sound of 'm'. If this effect is registered by the reader and contextualised with sufficient knowledge of Maxwell's life to decode the allusions that I identified in my reading, it is clear that 'Fraud' is Duffy's attack on Maxwell. The 'speaker' is a dummy that Duffy ventriloquises, rather than a naturalistic 'character'. The narration is a coded delineation of Maxwell's criminal career that avoids overt (and probably libellous) condemnation but can be decoded with precision because of Duffy's poetic device. The key to unlock the coded text is the repeated sound of 'm' which is the initial letter of her target's name.

Several of the events narrated in the monologue relate directly to publicly known facts of Maxwell's history: he changed his name at some time during World War II; he was due to face charges of stealing millions of pounds from his employees' pension fund, (his sons were subsequently tried for complicity); he was given the equivalent of a state funeral in Israel which suggests influential connections with the power hierarchy of that nation; the circumstances of his death were never publicly explained, his corpse was found in the water by his yacht with no sign of violence or heart failure to explain his death.

Once Duffy's text has been decoded the enigmatic final lines become less opaque. The speaker, ventriloquised by Duffy, relates the bare facts of his death and concludes his narration with the phrase 'I gargled my name' which reflects back to the beginning of his 'life' narration, 'Firstly, I changed my name'. The narrative is contained within the two phrases that identify the importance of 'my name' This mechanism foregrounds both the

avoidance of overtly naming the speaker and the poetic device of recuperating that omission.

'Fraud' has considerable social and literary significance. As I discussed above, the speaker directly addresses an intradiegetic listener as 'Sonny Jim'. This derisory direct address has the potential to extend to extradiegetic readers who, once they have decoded the dramatic monologue, can identify themselves as the general public despised by Maxwell. Although the intradiegetic address is gendered, the extradiegetic extrapolation of this does not exclude female readers because the powerful indirect address of the content of the poem and its relevance to contemporaneous society overrides any exclusionary effect of 'Sonny Jim'.

Duffy's dramatic monologue is a significant social document because of its expose of Maxwell and should be included in any bibliography claiming to cover comment on Maxwell and public reaction to his activities. Her poem is equally significant in its use of ironic dramatic monologue form together with the unusual device of a repeated terminal consonant sound that precisely identifies the real-life anonymous subject of the narrative.

I suggested in my opening paragraph for 'Fraud' that there was some resonance between the protagonist and Browning's murderous Duke. There is a strong connection with Browning for the speaker of the following poem 'Psychopath'. 'Porphyria's Lover' is an antecedent for Duffy's killer but she has depicted her protagonist more bleakly than Browning's speaker who seems softened by Romanticist yearnings when read as a companion piece to Duffy's disturbing monster.

'PSYCHOPATH' (*SM 1987*)

Duffy's collections contain several ironic dramatic monologues in which speakers are characterised as killers: 'Too Bad' (*TOC 1990*) depicts an IRA gunman; 'Educated For Leisure' (*SFN 1985*) depicts a bored, unemployed adolescent male; the jealous, possessive husband of 'Human Interest' (*SFN 1985*) murders his wife; and this poem, 'Psychopath', which I have chosen to represent the group because it is the most substantial of the four. It has eight stanzas, each with eight regular-length lines.

The scenario of this poem begins with the speaker combing his hair using a shop window as a mirror. He elicits a chiaroscuro image of dark streets lit by pools of light beneath the lamp posts, and infers a comparison between himself and the American film-star James Dean who was the icon of rebellious adolescence in the 1950's. His affectation of a D.A. hairstyle suggests a time scheme of the same era: ¹⁶

I run my metal comb through the D.A. and pose
my reflection between dummies in the window at Burton's.
Lamp light. Jimmy Dean. All over town ducking and diving,
my shoes scud sparks against the night. She is in the canal.
Let me make myself crystal...

His shoes have metal studs which strike sparks on the pavement as he experiences various social encounters in the town, looking for opportunities, avoiding certain situations, that are suggested by 'ducking and diving'. The enigmatic and somewhat aggressive statement 'She is in the canal./Let me make myself crystal.' suggests that the speaker has an audience and has something to explain, to make crystal-clear.

The stanza continues with his description of an exciting encounter with a girl who was riding on the fairground roundabout on which he is the attendant:

Let me make myself crystal. With a good-looking girl crackling

in four petticoats, you feel like a king. She rode past me
 on a wooden horse, laughing, and the air sang *Johnny
 Remember Me*. I turned the world faster, flash.

The world 'crackling' can be read as an allusion to the 1950's fashion for crisp, stiffly gathered petticoats beneath circular skirts, and also as part of the metaphor for something to savour sexually or gastronomically: a 'nice bit of crackling' was a metaphor at that time for a sexually attractive female. His comment 'you feel like a king' describes his feeling of empowerment when he meets an attractive young female. Roundabouts usually have popular music playing while they are working: the song is a popular sentimental ballad from the 1950's. 'I turned the world faster' indicates that he increased the speed of the roundabout to increase the excitement and sense of danger for the customers.

In the second stanza the speaker describes his technique for seducing the girls he meets at the fairground:

I don't talk much. I swing up beside them and do it
 with my eyes. Brando. She was clean. I could smell her.
 I thought, Here we go, old son. The fairground spun around us
 and she blushed like candyfloss. You can woo them
 with goldfish and coconuts, whispers in the Tunnel of Love.

He has clearly done this many times before and is confident of success 'Here we go, old son'. His reference to the American film-star, Marlon Brando, implies that he likens his seduction technique to that portrayed by Brando in several of his films. His vanity and predatory attitude towards the girls function as markers for an ironic reading by positioning readers to judge him critically and assess his claims as boastful self-delusion.

The stanza continues with his description of his routine before going to work, and his regular expectation of a new seduction:

When I zip up the leather, I'm in a new skin, I touch it
and love myself, sighing Some little lady's going to get lucky
tonight. My breath wipes me from the looking-glass.

His description implies that he wears skin-tight leather trousers and that these stimulate his sensuality and convince him of his own desirability. His reference to girls as 'Some little lady' is derogatory and supports the inference that an as-yet-unknown girl will be fortunate to attract his sexual attentions.

In these first two stanzas the speaker's language suggests a streetwise young man who self-identifies with personalities from imported American film culture, for example 'Jimmy Dean' and 'Brando' and uses language derived from contemporaneous popular culture, such as 'do it/with my eyes'. It seems uncharacteristic for him to use the somewhat archaic term 'looking-glass' for a mirror. This anomaly diverts attention away from the character's consciousness to that of the writer.

The third stanza begins with his description of the peripatetic life of the young fairground men:

We move from place to place. We leave on the last morning
with the scent of local girls on our fingers, they wear
our lovebites on their necks. I know what women want,
a handrail to Venus...

He claims that he knows how to seduce women, 'I know what women want'. He knows how to lead them to sexual experience, 'a handrail to Venus': this also suggests that his conquests are inexperienced.

The second half of the stanza changes to a past tense description of one of his encounters:

...She said *Please* and *Thank you*
to the toffee-apple, teddy-bear. I thought I was on, no error.
She squealed on the dodgems, clinging to my leather sleeve.
I took a swig of whisky from the flask and frenched it
down her throat. *No*, she said, *Don't*, like they always do.

The gifts of a toffee-apple and a teddy-bear characterise the girl as very young. His derisory attitude to her childlike excitement is inferred by 'she squealed'. Her reported reaction to his attempt to share whisky with an open-mouthed kiss suggests that she is naïve and out of her depth already at the beginning of the seduction. There is an intimation of menace in his final comment 'like they always do' because it reveals that this forced intimacy with an inexperienced girl has been refused many times before.

The speaker switches the thread of his narrative to an episode in his childhood in the fourth stanza. He describes his first sexual relationship. There is an inference that this episode explains his attitude to women, and is a form of self-justification:

Dirty Alice flicked my dick out when I was twelve.
She jeered. I nicked a quid and took her to the spinney.
I remember the wasps, the sun blazing as I pulled
her knickers down, I touched her and went hard,
but she grabbed my hand and used that, moaning...

The familiar name 'Dirty Alice' indicates that the female was a promiscuous, local acquaintance, and his reaction to the female's mockery can be read as one of resistance to her ridicule and a precocious acceptance that sex could be bought, 'I nicked a quid'. There is an inference that this cold mercenary initiation into sexual relations has conditioned his adult response to women.

In the remainder of the stanza his narrative switches back to his more recent encounter with the young girl at the fair:

She told me her name on the towpath, holding the fish
in a small sack of water. We walked away from the lights.
She'd come too far with me now. She looked back, once.

There is a disturbing contrast of the description of the speaker's first sexual experience with the description of the young girl's unsuspecting walk on the towpath where she is carrying her gifts and the fish in the polythene bag. The speaker's early sexual experience was mercenary with no expectations of emotional warmth from either participant; whereas the inexperienced girl can hardly have the expectations of 'Dirty Alice' and would be expected to have a romanticised understanding of relations between the sexes. 'She looked back, once' suggests that although she may have been nervous of venturing into the dark with the speaker, she would not want to betray the extent of her innocence, and was not aware of what was likely to ensue. The disturbing contrast is constructed by the conjunction of the two episodes in the stanza and also by the significant opposition between the 'sun blazing' in the scenario of the speaker's childhood seduction and 'We walked away from the lights' in the scenario of his entrapment of the young girl. In the former, the encounter was fully understood by both parties, in a sense there was an equality of power in the relationship, all was visible; in the latter, the speaker is in control of the situation, the girl is disadvantaged because she does not suspect his intentions, she is in the dark.

The fifth stanza articulates the speaker's self-aggrandisement:

A town like this would kill me. A gypsy read my palm.
She saw fame. I could be anything with my looks,
my luck, my brains. I bought a guitar and blew a smoke ring
at the moon. Elvis nothing

He claims that the town has insufficient opportunities for the realisation of his many talents with 'this would kill me' and 'I could be anything'. He reveals the extent of his self-delusion in his credence of a fortune-teller's flattery and his claim that the American musician/actor Elvis Presley is less talented than he is, 'Elvis nothing'.

The narrative then switches back to his description of his seduction of the young girl:

I'm not that type, she said.
 Too late. I eased her down by the dull canal
 and talked sexy. Useless. She stared at the goldfish, silent.
 I grabbed the plastic bag. She cried as it gasped and wriggled
 on the grass and here we are. A dog craps by a lamp post.

He describes his coercion of the girl when she refuses to co-operate with his demands, and his sadistic killing of the helpless goldfish when she unresponsively turns away from him to signal her refusal. 'She cried and gasped as it wriggled on the grass' functions as an omen of her own future actions when overpowered by the speaker. The narrative switches back to present time with 'and here we are' and suggests his glib, and perhaps self-congratulatory, acceptance of the whole episode. The detached objectivity of 'A dog craps by a lamp post' seems an unlikely comment for the speaker to make at the end of his disclosure. It reads more convincingly as a hyperdiegetic comment, possibly from the poet, addressed to extradiegetic listeners/readers. As such it functions as a metaphor for his character, his treatment of the young girl, and his narration of his abhorrent behaviour.

The sixth stanza brings together four different threads of narrative:

Mama, straight up, I hope you rot in hell. The old man
 sloped off, sharpish. I saw her through the kitchen window.
 The sky slammed down on my school cap, chicken licken.
Lady, Sweetheart, Princess I say now, but I never stay.
 My sandwiches were near her thigh, then the Rent Man

lit her cigarette and I ran, ran... She is in the canal.
 These streets are quiet, as if the town has held its breath
 to watch the Wheel go round above the dreary homes.

The rebuke to his absent mother is in the present tense and is followed by a second thread of narrative, his remembrance of the event that causes his present hatred of her. This memory is of a day in his childhood when after his father, 'the old man', left the house to avoid paying the rent, he saw his mother copulating with the Rent Man, then sharing a post-coital cigarette. There is a suggestion here that Duffy intends ironisation of her speaker when he blames his parents for his character traits. The mini-scenario of this childhood event reads as a stereotype. (Duffy uses a similar device in the dramatic monologue 'The Cliché Kid' (*MT 1993*) in which the speaker blames everyone but himself for his predicament, 'I need help, Doc, and bad; I can't forget/the rustle of my father's ballgown'; the narrative is constructed throughout with clichés and stereotypes familiar from mass entertainment). 'Psychopath's protagonist describes his severe shock at the sight 'The sky slammed down on my school cap', and his subsequent derision of this vulnerability as weakness, 'chicken licken'. This memory is interrupted with a present-tense revelation of how he flatters his intended victims, '*Lady, Sweetheart, Princess*'. This romanticisation of his disposition towards his victims is self-ironised by his comment 'but I never stay'. After the narration of his traumatic memory of his mother the speaker reverts to the present tense and his narrative of the fairground encounter with the girl 'She is in the canal'. The last two lines of the stanza re-establish the setting of the speaker's present tense narrative although the figurative language is inconsistent with the depicted sensibility of the protagonist and evokes the consciousness of the poet.

The opening of the seventh stanza cryptically relates the girl's resistance and the resultant violent rape:

*No, don't. Imagine. One thump did it, then I was on her,
giving her everything I had. Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man.*

The italicised, reported plea of the girl is followed by the speaker's address to an intradiegetic audience, 'Imagine', which potentially functions as an address to extradiegetic listeners, the readers. If Duffy were to explicitly detail the rape this would construct a potentially pornographic function for the poem. Duffy avoids this, but counteracts an effect of understating the physical reality and violence of rape by prompting her readers to 'imagine' the details of the assault and murder of the girl. This potential extradiegetic address identifies a feminist political issue relating to male violence towards women that I shall discuss later in my analytical assessment of this first reading. Read here as an intradiegetic address, the word 'Imagine' conveys the sense of the speaker's chagrin at having to relate that his seduction failed because the innocent girl refused his sexual demands. It can also be read as another way of saying 'would you believe it!', which suggests that he expects his intradiegetic listener to share his values and to register incredulity at the girl's refusal. This implies that the intradiegetic listener is male and therefore able to empathise with the speaker's reaction to the girl's resistance.

It seems out of character for the protagonist to objectify himself boastfully with the conventional term 'Jack the Lad. Ladies' Man' when he has already self-identified as James Dean and Marlon Brando. In this narrative the objectification reads as an inappropriate euphemism for the sadistic rapist and reflects an intrusion of the poet's consciousness. 'Jack the Lad' is a marker for a bleakly ironic reading of the speaker and is relevant to the issue of male violence on women that I identified above.

The narration continues with his cryptic, casual dismissal of the rape. This is linked by the repetition of 'easier' to an allusion to his own childhood disillusionment:

Easier to say Yes. Easier to stay a child, wide-eyed
at the top of the helter-skelter. You get one chance in this life
and if you screw it you're done for, uncle, no mistake.

He cynically reproaches the girl for her fate: she would have suffered less if she had relinquished her sense of what was right and agreed to intercourse with him. He claims that his own life would have been 'easier' if he had been able to stay innocently unaware of the brutalities of the 'helter-skelter' of life. He follows this with the self-justification that life is haphazard and destructive, with no hope of recovery from a wrong decision. 'Uncle' denotes address of casual familiarity to a male listener, rather than kinship.

The narrative then switches back to his description of the rape that is now revealed as the precursor to murder:

She lost a tooth. I picked her up, dead slim, and slid her in.
A girl like that should have a paid-up solitaire and high hopes,
but she asked for it. A right-well knackered outrage.

The ferocity of his attack is suggested by her loss of a tooth. His description of the girl's corpse as 'dead slim' is ambiguous: 'dead' can signify the extremity of her slimness while at the same time signifying that she was slim and dead. This ambiguity marks the potential for an extradiegetic reading of 'dead slim' that brings pathos to the description of the victim. The speaker recognises the life chances that the girl should have had but claims that she violated a code of behaviour that he valued, that is, her behaviour was a gross offence to his sense of what was right. His phrase 'a right-well knackered outrage' refers to the girl's refusal and subverts her response to a category of

misconduct, an 'outragement' , which has been appropriately punished by physical destruction, 'right-well knackered'.

In the final stanza the speaker is in a public house and toasts his reflection in a mirror. His narrative reads as an internal monologue that delineates his self-obsession and sadism:

My reflection sucks a sour Woodbine and buys me a drink.
 Here's
 looking at you. Deep down I'm talented. She found out. Don't
 mess
 with me, angel, I'm no nutter. Over in the corner, a dead ringer
 for Ruth Ellis smears a farewell kiss on the lip of a gin-and-lime.
 The barman calls Time. Bang in the centre of my skull,
 there's a strange coolness. I could almost fly. Tomorrow
 will find me elsewhere, with a loss of memory. Drink up son,
 the world's your fucking oyster. Awopbopaloobop alopimbam.

He salutes himself in the mirror 'Here's/looking at you' and again at the end of the monologue 'Drink up son,/the world's your fucking oyster. He claims that his sexual propensity, in reality a predisposition to rape and murder, is a hidden talent, 'Deep down I'm talented. She found out.' There is a suggestion here of some resentment that his 'talent' is not publicly acknowledged. 'Don't mess with me, angel, I'm no nutter' articulates his sense of power over his victim, and some notion of validation for his actions. The monologue is historically placed in the era of Ruth Ellis' hanging for the murder of her lover, and ends with a reference to a phoneticised rhythm that was often used in the background of rock-and-roll songs of the fifties. It may function here as a metaphor for energy and high spirits, and can be read as a self-expression of the killer's happy and energised state of mind.

His self-assessment of rationality 'I'm no nutter' is challenged by 'Bang in the centre of my skull,/there's a strange coolness, I could almost fly' which suggests an abnormal mental state of emotional neutrality balanced with a feeling of empowerment. If his reference to 'loss of memory' is linked to his comment about his conquests 'like they always do' (third stanza), it appears that he may have raped and murdered many times, to the extent that he no longer clearly remembers details of all his victims. Read in this way, 'Psychopath' is the depiction of a serial killer.

'Psychopath's ironised protagonist is depicted somewhat stereotypically as a violent, sexual predator whose response to women has been brutalised by his adverse social conditioning. He justifies his actions by explaining the feel-good factor of choosing his victims (first stanza); the harsh reality of his own sexual initiation; the gypsy's promise of 'fame'; the trauma of seeing his mother's copulation with the Rent Man; and his own perverted sense of propriety, 'she asked for it'. His monologue begins and ends with depictions of his vanity and self-delusion as he compares his image to James Dean the American filmstar, and toasts the implied limitless depths of his talents with 'the world's your fucking oyster'.

Extradiegetic Address and Feminist Discourse

I have described the character as 'somewhat stereotypical' because the realistic effect of the period details and the evocative power of specific sensory images mitigate against stereotyping the character as a cliched James Dean 'wannabe' who murders because of a traumatic childhood. One interpretation of this apparent tension between evocative realistic imagery and stereotypical depiction is to read it as Duffy's strategy to prompt (position) readers to recognise the physical and social realities of rape and murder, while

at the same time ensuring that the depicted killer produces a dominant reading of ironic condemnation rather than sympathetic response.

There is uncertainty about the presence of an intradiegetic audience. The scenario begins in the dark street of the town; during the evening the speaker travels to the brightly lit public house where he salutes his own reflection. In the first, third and seventh stanza the speaker appears to address an intradiegetic listener. In other stanzas an intradiegetic listener may be assumed to be present because the speaker is relating the details of the rape and murder and justifying his actions. This is problematic: it is difficult to imagine another person keeping company with the speaker and listening to the details of his violent killing(s). These instabilities in the nature and location of a listening presence in the poem indicate that the listener is a mechanism for Duffy's depiction of the speaker, rather than another, unvoiced character whose apparent lack of response is significant for the meaning of the dramatic monologue.

As I discussed in my reading above there is also uncertainty in attributing the comment about the dog and the euphemism 'Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man' to the speaker. These read more convincingly as an ironising commentary by a hyperdiegetic listener, articulated as the speaker's narrates, rather than at a later time. If these comments are read as hyperdiegetic, the speaker cannot hear them; they have the potential to address extradiegetic listeners/readers and position them to ironise the speaker. They can be read as Duffy's hyperdiegetic comments: an additional ironising strategy to those already established by the content of the narrative.

I shall turn now to the feminist issue that I identified earlier of male violence against women. The feminist issue dramatised by the killer and his attitude, 'she asked for it', results from the recognition that there is a covert assumption in society that males have an undefined right of access to females, and also authority in the determination of female sexual behaviour. My comment that the term 'Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man' was euphemistic and potentially ironic refers to its significance as the convention of grudging admiration for young males that indulge in irresponsible behaviour and sexual promiscuity. It is euphemistic in its reference to the killer's attack on the girl, and it offers the opportunity for irony if read as hyperdiegetic.

The hyperdiegetic citation of 'Jack the Lad, Ladies' Man' establishes a feminist perspective within the poem because Duffy places this conventional euphemism for male sexual behaviour inside the killer's narration of his victim's rape and murder. This construction implies a disturbing progression from societal acceptance and trivialisation of male sexual aggression to the frequent occurrence of extreme sexual violence against women that is the reality of our society. Duffy's construction of this stanza positions readers to interrogate this feminist issue because as I argued above, the hyperdiegetic status of the euphemism functions as a method of address to extradiegetic readers.

The dominant reading constructed by her part-stereotypical, part-realist depiction of the rape and murder implies her own feminist concern at the sexual politics that underlie the event. My assessment of her concern is supported by the concept of 'the evaluative edge of irony': Duffy positions her readers to evaluate the behaviour and attitudes of the serial killer. At the same time, readers who participate in the 'discursive community' of

feminist writers/ readers will recognise Duffy's invocation of feminist discourse and the invitation to read the protagonist in the way that I have demonstrated.¹⁷

Duffy's protagonist is constructed using the conventions of many of Browning's ironised speakers; he is depicted as self-obsessed and intent on justifying thoughts and actions that will be critically judged by readers with the result that the dominant reading of the character will be ironic. The speaker of 'Porphyria's Lover' can be considered as the antecedent for Duffy's killer in the respect that both dramatic monologues are spoken by men who kill women. Browning's speaker is depicted as an individual motivated by possessiveness and insecurity in his relation with his lover. Because of this he murders Porphyria in a deluded attempt to preserve their loving relationship unchanged. Browning's depiction functions as an enquiry into the psyche of an abnormal consciousness and an exploration of how such a man would explain his actions to another individual.

Duffy's depiction differs from Browning's because the killer articulates social conditioning as an element of his characterisation: he blames his parents for a traumatic childhood that explains his subsequent behaviour. His description of these formative events is recognisably stereotyped which suggests that Duffy intends an ironic reading of this aspect of the killer's self-justification.

Duffy has made an interesting statement about 'Psychopath' in her interview with McAllister:

I think if you write a poem honestly you have got to do it as you are moved to do...I'm not seeking bizarre subjects. In the case of 'Psychopath' it came out of a friend of mine who'd been involved in a very notorious murder. And I

deliberately set that in the fifties in point of fact, so that it wasn't now. So that it didn't come over as exploiting something that you would read in the newspapers.¹⁸

Duffy is clearly indicating that this monologue was initiated by an emotional rather than intellectual response. As she confirms, social pressure, the need to address the issue, rather than the intellectual challenge of a 'bizarre' consciousness, lies behind the narrative. Her determination to avoid exploitation implies the feminist political intention that I argue for this poem.

The feminist perspective spliced into the narrative of 'Psychopath' by the hyperdiegetic comments extends the function of this dramatic monologue to that of public political statement identifying the feminist issue of male violence towards women; whereas Browning's poem, 'Porphyria's Lover', does not fulfil the same function, although it can be read as the dramatisation of an issue of nineteenth-century literary politics revealing the poet's critical gesture against Romanticism, rather than read solely as a case-study of an aberrant mind.

Summary of the Chapter

My claim in Chapter One, *Sympathetic Dramatic Monologues*, that Duffy uses the dramatic monologue form to interrogate social issues is also substantiated in the poems that I have analysed here. I remarked that Duffy tended to construct sympathetic monologues with a female speaker; the reverse is the case here. A survey of the speakers of Duffy's dramatic monologues in her first four collections will reveal that her ironic poems are usually spoken by a male protagonist. This perhaps is understandable because Duffy's ironic poems often thematise the abuse of wealth and power (in many forms), and the corruption of our male-oriented society.

The inflection of a direct autobiographical connection is not as strong in these ironic poems. This is because readers are unlikely to conflate speaker and poet in these monologues. 'Head Of English' is the exception, where I argued for a dominant reading that recognised the silent victimised contemporary poet as possibly a representation of Duffy herself. However, the poems are autobiographical in the sense that they are Duffy's response to the society in which she lives and works.

In the previous chapter I argued that 'Sympathy' was generated strongly where a demonised 'other' was implied in the monologue. There is a reciprocal effect in these ironic monologues where the ironisation of the protagonist is intensified by the presence of an unheard sympathetic victim in the scenario: Duffy is the victim in 'Head Of English'; the poetic tradition is attacked in 'Poet For Our Time'; the 'Sons of David' are obliquely victimised in 'What Price?'; the 'immeasurable harm to society is cited in 'Fraud'; and the female victims of male violence help to construct the strongly ironic depiction of 'Psychopath's serial killer. The exception to this is 'Translating The English, 1989' where the satire brings a somewhat unstable alliance of ironic critique of Thatcherite Britain and humorous depiction of linguistic and cultural intricacies for immigrants adjusting to life in British society.

Intra- and extradiegetic address function differently for the ironic poems because readers are addressed by what is not said rather than what is. It is generally acknowledged that ironic texts position readers to reject the values expressed by the speaker and search for another meaning, the hidden 'unsaid' of the monologue. In these ironic poems where direct address by the speaker can be extended extradiegetically, the dominant reader

response is one of rejection of that address and ironisation of the speaker. Concrete ironising strategies, for example the end-rhyme of 'Poet For Our Times' and the end-phoneme of 'Fraud', are a special form of address from poet to reader to ironise the speaker. Indirect address is effected through the ironic 'decoded' reading of the content.

Despite the address of these special textual effects and the various ironising strategies discussed in the readings, it is unsafe to insist that readers are extradiegetically addressed by the irony itself because irony can be a shifting, unreliable effect, hence my comment on the 'opportunity' or 'potential' for ironic readings, as I argued earlier. However, Duffy counteracts this uncertainty in 'Poet For Our Time' and 'Psychopath' with the additional strategy of stereotyping her speakers. 'Translating The English, 1989' is an atypical use of stereotyping because of the incorporation of the satire.

It is interesting to note that in many of her depictions of sympathetic speaker's Duffy incorporates socio-economical factors as an aspect of the speakers' 'character' but does not extend this explanatory device to her ironised speakers. In 'Psychopath', the speaker's articulation of social conditioning as the cause of his behaviour is ironised by a form of ventriloquism through the use of stereotyping and cliches; this pre-empts any mitigation of the ironic depiction of the speaker.

Duffy's ironic dramatic monologues change the tradition inherited from Browning in two aspects. Firstly, Duffy adapts the form to incorporate a hyperdiegetic voice: this is illustrated in three of these representative poems, 'Head Of English (*SFN 1985*), 'Poet For Our Times' (*TOC 1990*) and 'Psychopath' (*SM 1987*). In these poems the hyperdiegetic voice is not given the substantial narrative that can be extracted from the

main body of text as in 'Shooting Stars' (see Chapter One), but is inserted as fragments into the protagonist's narrative or added as a final comment, as in 'Poet For Our Times'. This hyperdiegetic device constructs an additional subtle way of ironising the speaker and can be read as Duffy's own voice, humorously so in 'Head Of English'. This is not a characteristic of Browning's poems: he was most insistent that his dramatic monologues were studies of 'character' and had no autobiographical connection (having suffered critical opprobrium for his earlier allegiance to the Romanticist lyrical tradition). An extraordinary example of Duffy's ability to experiment with the form is her covert indictment of Robert Maxwell in 'Fraud' where she ends every line with the phoneme of 'm'. Secondly, in contrast to Browning's work, the contents of Duffy's poems articulate ironic interrogations and critiques of social issues, specific events, and prominent figures in contemporary society. As is the case for her sympathetic monologues, this articulation extends the function of the dramatic monologue form to that of an effective socio-political instrument. In a further development of this function, her depiction of the 'serial killer' of 'Psychopath' engages with feminist discourse where the narrative covertly articulates the feminist issue of male violence towards women.

In the following chapter I consider Duffy's use of a multi-voiced form which brings together the double-stranded inheritance that I argue for Duffy's dramatic monologues. Duffy's multi-voiced poems use both sympathetic and ironised speakers, sometimes within the same poem.

NOTES

¹ Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

² Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994).

³ Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

⁴ *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 69-77. 'Carol Ann Duffy: An Interview with Andrew McAllister'. (p.73).

⁵ *Bête Noire*. p.76.

⁶ Duffy gave an evening of readings and commentary on her own work at St Martin's College, Lancaster, on 1 May 1997.

⁷ Duffy is using the details of a real political scandal here. Cecil Parkinson was forced to resign his post of Head of the Conservative Central Office when details of his long-standing affair with Sarah Keays, and her pregnancy, became public news.

⁸ 'Page 3', which always features sexually explicit photographs and captions of very buxom young women, usually accompanied by blatantly sexist innuendo, is widely known as a staple item of the *Sun* tabloid newspaper.

⁹ 'Instant tits and bottom' is unmistakable as 'Page 3' of the *Sun*, although that tabloid is not explicitly cited.

¹⁰ Hutcheon (1994).

¹¹ 'Poetry in the 80's', *Poetry Review*, 79 no.4 (Winter 1989/90).

¹² The quotation is recognisable as Arthur Clough's from 'Amours de Voyage'.

¹³ Edwina Currie was persecuted by the tabloids for her remark on record that salmonella was endemic in the British egg-producing industry. This caused the near-collapse of the industry and the end of Currie's ministerial career.

¹⁴ I am thinking here of incidents such as Thatcher's determination to prohibit publication of *Spycatcher* by Peter Wright, onetime British MI5 agent. His book had already been published and circulated in Australia. In a subsequent trial, when cross-examined, Sir Robert Armstrong, defending the government's action, confessed to being 'economical with the truth'.

¹⁵ Mermin (1983).

¹⁶ This hairstyle was adopted by men and, in a more elegant form, by women. 1950's film-stars James Dean and Doris Day used the D.A. It was politely referred to as a District Attorney but in reality the acronym is an abbreviation of Duck's Arse.

¹⁷ Hutcheon (1994), 'Discursive Communities'.

¹⁸ *Bête Noire*, p.70.

CHAPTER THREE: MULTI-VOICED DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

In Duffy's first two collections *Standing Female Nude* and *Selling Manhattan* there are four dramatic monologues that are constructed with the 'voices' of several different characters. A forerunner of this use of many different voices in one poem is Browning's *The Ring and The Book*. In Browning's long multi-voiced poem the characters narrate their differing versions of a single event. Duffy's poems do not replicate this use of the form. Her four dramatic monologues are short in comparison, and the characters function to dramatise contemporary social issues, philosophical debate on the nature of 'human reality', a feminist account of the way that women write their 'life', and the interrelation of language and consciousness.

This chapter of readings will pay close attention to the linking devices that connect the different speakers in each poem and include a detailed comparison of the four multi-voiced dramatic monologues before the chapter summary. The four poems in order of analysis are; 'Comprehensive' (*SFN1985*), 'Model Village' (*SM1987*), 'A Clear Note' (*SFN 1985*), and 'Dies Natalis' (*SM1987*).

'COMPREHENSIVE' (*SFN 1985*)

There is a specific difficulty in discussing this poem that is not relevant to the other three poems of this chapter. 'Comprehensive' explores issues surrounding discrimination that ensue from racial and cultural difference. The difficulty that arises in discussing the poem is that of inadvertently perpetuating both subtle and overt racial/cultural discrimination and its associated stereotypes. My immediate response to the poem was to visualise difference of 'colour' between the characters: in effect I enacted the same 'colour' discrimination as that illustrated by two of the speakers in the poem. In order to

avoid perpetuating the inherent colour- prejudice of the categories 'white' and 'non-white' but to preserve the differences of culture represented by Duffy's speakers I have categorised the children as 'indigenous' and 'immigrant'. I realise that these two terms can function as euphemisms, 'immigrant' has become a perjorative term in sections of our society, but they do avoid reproduction of white/non-white colour stereotyping.

In this multi-voiced dramatic monologue, seven characters of different ethnic background speak in sequence. Although they are in the same comprehensive school, they do not interact as if they were together but speak in single words or short sentences and relate facts as if they were responding separately to a questioner in their individual presence, who is listening to their responses.

The questioner/intradiegetic listener is not developed as a character. In my reading below I speculate on the type of questions that must have been addressed to the children but little emerges in the poem concerning the unheard interviewer. The questions asked could be those of a survey, seemingly formal and not complex. The children appear to respond without guile. This seems unlikely, particularly for the older children who would be influenced by factors such as the status and age of the questioner, and indicates that 'the questioner' is a convention to validate answers from the children. As such it is a textual device that underpins the structure of this multi-voiced dramatic monologue.

'Comprehensive' begins with a sympathetic monologue from a young African immigrant looking back with nostalgia to her homeland, and finishes with a similarly non-ironic monologue of hope from a young Sikh, ambitious for success in his adopted country.

The first speaker is probably female because of the hopscotch and sharing a bed with a sister. Her monologue implies that a listener of different ethnicity is present because she explains her mother-tongue equivalent for English childhood games: 'Tutumantu is like hopscotch, Kwami-kwami is like hide-and-seek'. She describes the tension caused by her sister's loss of their shared language after living in England: 'Sometimes we fought in bed because she didn't know/what I was saying'. She is a recent immigrant to England and is housed with her family in a refugee detention centre or lodgings. She self-identifies through her family and country of origin:

...I like Africa better than England.
My mother says You will like it when we get our own house.
We talk a lot about the things we used to do
in Africa and then we are happy.

Her preoccupations suggest that she is probably very young and that she has not yet developed consciousness of racial difference. Her interest in children's street games is a shared characteristic of all children regardless of ethnic background. Her depiction represents the beginning of immigrant life in Britain.

The second speaker is male and also appears to be replying to a questioner: 'Wayne. Fourteen'. He is dismissive of childhood activities and adopts a spurious maturity by articulating racist and sexist attitudes:

...I support
the National Front. Paki-bashing and pulling girls'
knickers down.

'National Front' is the title of an extreme, right-wing, racist, political party. The juxtaposition of 'National Front' and 'Paki-bashing' serves as an ironical definition of the party. The euphemism 'pulling girls'/knickers down' suggests sexist abuse of his female

schoolmates but the use of 'knickers' seems out of character and suggests the consciousness of the poet which functions as a marker for irony. Duffy has already ironised the speaker: 'pulling girls'/knickers down' suggests a different type of manipulation of her speaker that is more like ventriloquism. Readers will know what the speaker means but it appears that Duffy has put her own mocking words into his mouth, rather than those that would characterise this speaker, and adds a further layer of irony to the representation.

In several instances the questions that elicit his replies can be surmised: 'Dad's got his own mini-cab' could be the response to a question about his father's occupation; 'Arsenal' would correlate to 'Which football team do you support?' His response to an implied question of 'What do you want to do when you leave school' is 'I don't suppose I'll get a job./It's all them coming over here to work'. This suggests that his violent racism, 'Paki-bashing', is the result of his misconception of the relation between immigration, socio-economics, and his own employment prospects.¹

Duffy's representation of Wayne approaches ridicule as he self-identifies through racist politics, joblessness, violent video entertainment, implied by 'I spit on your grave', and allegiance to a football team. This caricatured representation of character constructs a stereotype familiar from the popular press, commonly described with the cliché 'mindless violence'. The lack of development of this character throws the phenomenon of racist aggression into sharp relief.

The third speaker appears to be from a Muslim family 'Families face Mecca'. Her/his family has immigrated to London where the speaker regrets the change from rural to

urban life: 'There was much more room to play than here in London./We played in an old village. It is empty now'. This family would be categorized as 'economic immigrants' by the immigration authorities: they have come to Britain in the expectation of an improved quality of life, 'People wrote to us/that everything was easy here'. The speaker self-identifies through family and religion but does not reveal consciousness of racist attitudes to colour and cultural difference. He appears to see emigration to Britain as a loss of quality of life. A particular feature of this 'character' is the use of diction that excludes me as a reader. I cannot interpret 'Masjid at 6 o'clock' but I suspect it may be a religious ritual. I shall discuss this effect of reader exclusion in my detailed analysis after this initial reading of the characters.

The fourth speaker, a white female appears to respond to questions concerning life at school and employment thereafter. She doesn't enjoy school-life and anticipates early marriage and an uninteresting job in the local supermarket: 'It's boring. Get engaged. Probably work in Safeways worst luck'. She is chiefly pre-occupied with a romantic vision of both heterosexual relations and the 'popstar' industry:

I haven't lost it yet because I want
respect. Marlon Frederic's nice but he's a bit dark.
I like Madness. The lead singer's dead good.

Although not as aggressively racist as 'Wayne', she indicates that skin colour is an issue; 'but he's a bit dark'. She reveals that her mother is anxious about her sexual precocity: 'My mum is bad with her nerves. She won't/let me do nothing', and resents this parental control 'It's just boring'. 'I haven't lost it yet because I want respect' appears to be a reply to a question about her sexual status, such as 'Are you still a virgin?', or a less overt paraphrase. Initially this seemed an unlikely question for an adult interviewer to ask a teenage girl, certainly I would find it awkward, but presumably in the formality of a

survey these questions are asked, and provide the statistics that are currently available.

My own disquietude would not be shared by professional interviewers familiar with the attitudes of a more sexually- precocious generation than my own. Her narrative depicts apathy and a lack of ambition from poverty of life choices, and covert colour prejudice.

Ejaz, the fifth child that is questioned, self-identifies through his Moslem religion. He narrates an incident from his first day at school when a fellow pupil saved him from violating a fundamental principal of Moslem life by snatching away the pork sausages that he was unwittingly going to eat for his school lunch:

Ejaz. They put some sausages on my plate.
As I was going to put one in my mouth
a Moslem boy jumped on me and pulled.
The plate dropped on the floor and broke. He asked me in Urdu
if I was a Moslem. I said Yes. You shouldn't be eating this.
It's pig's meat. So we became friends.

It is significant that his friend spoke in Urdu. This would not be understood by many pupils around them and would pre-empt disapproval of their unconventional religious practice, that is, unconventional in the sense of not being part of the dominant culture. Clearly his friend is not such a recent immigrant and is conscious of their position as a cultural minority: it seems that he has already learned to avoid provoking racial discrimination by hiding cultural difference.

The sixth speaker is male, more mature than the earlier speakers, and responds as if he is being questioned about racial difference: 'My sister went out with one. There was murder./I'd like to be mates, but they're different from us.' He is more tolerant than Wayne but recognises the influence of racist attitudes amongst his peer group: 'Some of them wear turbans in class. You can't help/taking the piss'.

Like Wayne and Michelle, he has low expectation of an interesting job but unlike Wayne he does not directly attribute this to the presence of other races and cultures in contemporary society. He acknowledges cultural difference 'but they're different from us', but this recognition is not the decisive factor in his assessment of his life opportunities, whereas for Wayne it is. Ironically, he does not perceive that if he emigrates to Australia he will be an immigrant himself and will need to adapt to a different culture (although skin colour will not be an issue):

When I get married
I might emigrate. A girl who can cook
with long legs. Australia sounds all right.

His objectification of women resonates with that of Wayne whose sexist behaviour can be read as an indicator of an underlying aggression towards females, although this speaker shows a more sexually mature attitude.

The final speaker articulates pride of family and culture: 'Some of my family are named after the Moghul emperors./Aurangzeb, Jehangir, Batur, Humayun'. S/he describes the difficulties of integrating into a different culture: 'At first I felt as if I was dreaming, but I wasn't./Everything I saw was true.' As with the first speaker, difficulties with a new language are a serious problem:

This is a hard school.
A man came in with a milk crate. The teacher told us
to drink our milk. I didn't understand what she was saying,
so I didn't go to get any milk.

The speaker is thirteen years old and is more likely to be male than female because of the pre-occupation with male role models, the Moghul emperors, and the overt ambition to succeed in what is still a predominantly male culture. In contrast to Wayne and Michelle

his attitude is intelligent and positive: 'I have hope and am ambitious.' He sees difficulties but intends to overcome them. His comment 'this is a hard school' suggests difficulties with the curriculum or antagonism from racist pupils or teachers.

I shall now consider the questions raised in this initial reading of the seven different characters of 'Comprehensive'; the positioning of readers to respond ironically or sympathetically to the characters; the reader exclusion caused by the non-English diction; and the status and function of the questioner.

In its entirety, the poem is neither an ironic dramatic monologue, in which all the speakers unwittingly reveal the self-delusion and moral weakness of their self-definition, nor is it totally in the 'sympathetic' mode derived from Webster, in which the speakers reveal the undeserved disadvantages and miseries of their existence and consequently attract the sympathy of readers.

There is an alternation between ironised and sympathetic characters. There is a further complexity because several of the characters are depicted somewhat ambiguously with both irony and sympathy and may produce both ironic and sympathetic responses from readers. The balance of these opposite modes varies from character to character.

It would be perverse to read the first speaker, the young African girl, as other than sympathetic. She still self-identifies through her family, specifically her mother and sister and is concerned wholly with family life and playtime. The dominant reading of the final speaker, the Sikh boy, is also likely to be sympathetic, although his implied claim for his family's reflected glory through their imperial names is masculinist and

may appear elitist. However, he shows the virtue of determination to succeed against considerable adversity. The two Muslim characters are likely to be read with more sympathy than disapproval. Some readers will identify the economic opportunism of the third speaker and the lack of cultural openness of 'Ejaz' but neither speaker appears to be old enough to begin to separate himself from his family's values. Overall the immigrant characters are depicted in such a way as to elicit a dominant reading of sympathy. This is not the case with the indigenous speakers.

Wayne is depicted as a stereotype: he is an ironised representation of racist, teenage thuggery. As I have discussed elsewhere, the effect of socio-economic forces on 'character' is a fundamental theme throughout much of Duffy's work. This theme is evident in the depiction of Wayne: 'I don't suppose I'll get a job. It's all them/coming over here to work'. However, in this ironised character, it is Wayne's misconceptions of his socio-economic plight that characterise him. His stereotyped racism and aggression to females positions readers for an ironic response.

Michelle is also depicted stereotypically as a feckless 'boy-mad' teenager whose romantic obsession with glamorous male 'popstars' bodes ill for her planned early marriage. The concept of a dominant, ironic reading is less viable here because the difference of gender may separate out readers into disparate male and female groups. Readers conscious of gender solidarity may have some sympathy with this character's lack of aspiration, and recognise the restricted horizon that can apply to young females whose social situation deprives them of realistic, aspirational role models. This gender solidarity, arising from empathic imagination or a similar experience of adolescence, weakens the detachment required for a dispassionate, ironic reading of the speaker. Male readers might not

empathise with Michelle because their different social positioning deprives them of shared social experience. This suggests that male readers may read 'Michelle' with a stronger degree of irony than female readers.

The reading effect of gender difference is also pertinent to the reception of the speaker who would 'like to be mates' with the immigrant members of his school class. An overall response to him is likely to be one of sympathy. He is depicted as cheerful and friendly, and almost free of the racist attitudes of his family and peer group. It is pleasing to speculate that, with a more liberal education, he might be tolerant and eventually 'colour-blind' in his choice of friends. Sympathetic response will be qualified by awareness of his objectifying attitude to women. This introduces an inflection of irony in reading his character traits that may be specific to gender. A male reader may not register this 'non-sympathetic' response.

The monologues of the indigenous speakers reveal differing shades of racism; those of the immigrants, reveal their sense of otherness through cultural difference. The title indicates the type of school that the children attend but also functions as an ironic reference to the many different attitudes towards racial/cultural difference that are expressed in the monologues, from shades of racism such as Wayne's 'paki-bashing' mentality to one of 'I'd like to be mates, but they're different from us', and responses from the immigrant pupils which range from 'I like Africa better than England.' to 'I have hope and am ambitious'. The pupils with racist attitudes are likely to be read ironically by most readers whereas the immigrant pupils are represented sympathetically.

The total effect of the swings from sympathy to irony, and vice versa, produces a dramatic monologue poem where the many voices provide a mixture of ironised and sympathetic characters, and where, within the depiction of each character, there is an unequal weight of both irony and sympathy. I am confident that it was Duffy's intention that readers should respond to these representations with a mixture of sympathy and irony. What she could not determine, however, was the degree of irony/sympathy that readers would develop in their readings of the characters.

Extradiegetic Address

The phenomenon of reader exclusion arose in my initial reading of the third character. 'Masjid at 6 o'clock' is opaque to me: perhaps it is a religious ritual shared by his family. This raises the question of reader address or reader exclusion. The speakers' address throughout the poem is to one or more intradiegetic questioner/s. The address to extradiegetic readers is indirect through the content of the narratives. As my reading above indicates, much of my cultural knowledge, including my own life experience, is pulled into my reading of 'Comprehensive': I dialogue with the poem. This dialogue is barred at 'Masjid': the term obstructs me as a reader at this particular point in the text. Although the effect is temporary and minuscule, at this point the apparent indirect address is to extradiegetic listeners/readers who use the term 'Masjid' or are familiar with its cultural significance. The specificity of this indirect address would suggest that the poem may address readers of different ethnicities. However, there are not enough esoteric references to substantiate that this is the case, and to argue that 'Comprehensive' incorporates the additional textual phenomenon of sustained indirect address to readers of different ethnicities.

The body of Duffy's work in her five collections addresses the concerns of women, although a proportion of her work can be categorised as non-gender specific in its address, for instance, dramatic monologues such as 'Selling Manhattan' (*SM1987*) and 'Fraud' (*MT1993*). Accumulated inferences from my knowledge of her first four collections suggest that the readers addressed by Duffy's poem are white, liberally-educated European women who would be disposed to read Duffy's portrayal of disadvantaged immigrant children with sympathy, and that of their racist fellow pupils with censure.² These readers are likely to have an interest in, and tolerance of, cultural difference. In addition they may well perceive Duffy's ironic representation of male objectification of women as sexual objects. My work on her latest collection *The World's Wife* (1999) indicates that she is aware of, and uses, the reading effect of gender difference but I cannot be certain that this is deliberately employed in 'Comprehensive' (1985).

The Intradiegetic Questioner

I commented in my early reading of the character 'Michelle' that I found it difficult to imagine how I might question a female teenager about her sexual activity. It seemed grossly intrusive to ask Are you still a virgin? This hermeneutic conundrum foregrounded the presence of the unvoiced, intradiegetic questioner whose enquiries 'produce' the speeches that we read on the page. These unheard questions function to delineate the characters.³ It is part of the hermeneutic fun of the poem to imagine what the questions might have been but a more important aspect is the larger function of the questioner which I have categorised as a structural device earlier in this chapter.

In this poem with several speakers, the use of an unidentified questioner, one whose sex, age, race and culture are 'transparent', permits the characters to reveal aspects of their social life and personal attitudes in a direct, and seemingly guileless mode. This facilitates concision and clarity in the presentation of their point-of-view.

The use of a questioner also constructs a scenario where each speaker, who also incorporates a different aspect of the 'racism' debate, reacts to the questioner but not to the other speakers. This separation pre-empts the necessity to represent the diffusion and circularity that often results in open debates on racism and its social consequences. Were the speakers to respond to one another in a realistic representation, there would be communication difficulties because of ignorance and racial prejudice. The vital functions of the questioner in this multi-voiced dramatic monologue are a clear separation of different aspects of racism and cultural difference, and avoidance of diffusion into the complex interaction of race, unemployment, and cultural assimilation or separatism.

Summary of 'Comprehensive'

Duffy's use of the dramatic monologue form incorporating several speakers enables her to construct a scenario where different aspects of cultural difference, and various racist attitudes are displayed as 'character'. This scenario functions to illustrate different stages of assimilation or exclusion in a new culture for the immigrant speakers, and to isolate different racist attitudes with clarity as character traits in the indigenous speakers. Using this form permits Duffy to dramatise, on the page, aspects of cultural difference and the racist attitudes that can result, without incorporating a representation of the physical drama that would arise in real life. Duffy's textual (rather than theatrical) drama permits

readers to perceive how racist attitudes arise while at the same time revealing some of the racist misconceptions of socio-economic disadvantage in our society. The poem illustrates the debate by depicting the different speakers' perceptions and misconceptions of their enhanced or diminished life chances in British society.

Overall, there is an argument structured into the poem. As I have discussed above, the indigenous speakers articulate different racist attitudes: the stereotypical 'Paki-bashing' Wayne is the most obnoxious. In contrast, the immigrant speakers are constructed as sympathetic characters. It is significant that they outnumber the 'opponents' and are privileged to begin and end the poem: their 'voices' are the first and last to be heard. The first speaker is a young African immigrant, soon to discover the reality of racial intolerance. Duffy gives her an opening line that demonstrates the shared characteristic, that is lack of difference, in children of all cultures: their interest in playing games with each other. The last character is the young Sikh with a positive attitude to the difficulties of his new life: albeit with some ambiguity in his comment 'This is a hard school'. The other two immigrant speakers articulate the difficulties of making a life where two different cultures must be reconciled.

In a sense, the poem is a narrative illustrating the developing life of a young immigrant: the immigrant children represent different stages in adjusting to life in contemporary Britain. The narrative unfolds with a depiction of initial homesickness and social exclusion, followed by negotiation of cultural opposition, and finally a degree of assimilation into British life: 'I have hope and am ambitious'. This sympathetic narrative is fragmented by the insertion of the three indigenous speakers with fundamentally destructive attitudes, which vary from Michelle's insidious racism to Wayne's violent

street politics. There is an 'argument' in Duffy's poem in favour of cultural/racial tolerance in our multi-cultural society.

I have mentioned the ambiguity of the final speakers' comment on his 'hard' school that must be reconciled with his 'hope and ambition'. There is further ambiguity in the two final lines of the poem:

At first I felt as if I was dreaming, but I wasn't.
Everything I saw was true.

This suggests that Duffy perceives the social realities of cultural assimilation for immigrant children with more complexity than the necessarily simpler argument of her poem, and does not intend a utopian ending for the narrative of 'Comprehensive'.

The structuring principle of the poem is one in which several non-interactive 'voices' are linked by their individual responses to an intradiegetic questioner. This device holds the separate monologues together into the structure of a single poem. Without the linking device of the questioner the poem would tend to fragment into seven short dramatic monologues connected by the theme of 'racial difference'. These separate dramatic monologues would not be so effective in conveying the complexity of 'shades' of racism and the role of cultural identity that readers are positioned to consider in 'Comprehensive'. Duffy's title encapsulates both the scenario of a late twentieth century urban school, and the complexities and subtleties of racial issues where the children's different responses are brought into the proximity of a single poem. The single structure brings the different attitudes firmly into a 'compare and contrast' format.

'MODEL VILLAGE' (*SM1987*)

A somewhat similar structuring principle but with a different linking device is used for 'Model Village' where four non-interactive speakers are connected in sequence by a narrator who sets a scene of utopian village life and introduces each character/monologue in sequence. The four different village characters 'speak' in a scenario familiar from children's picture books but their monologues subvert the conventions of peace and order. The form is tightly constructed with alternating eight- and nine- line stanzas: each eight-line stanza depicts a specific part of the idyllic scene; each nine-line stanza contains the italicised monologue of a different character. There is a degree of lyricism in some of the monologues, for instance, the vicar's 'speech' does not overtly address a listener, but overall the poem can be identified as a multi-voiced dramatic monologue.

'Model Village' is in a sense the most complex of the four poems. Ostensibly it appears to illustrate the folk aphorism 'There's naught so queer as folk' but Duffy's use of ironic allusions to the fictional status of human 'reality' suggest a reading that argues for the poet's familiarity with the concept that the 'reality' about us is constructed by the conventions of westernised society's inadequate narratives of human existence and the physical world.⁴ The alternating stanzaic form of even and odd numbered lines parallels the variation between two accounts of 'reality' within the poem: the subtly ironized depiction of a rural idyll, and the more obviously ironic stereotypical representations of aberrant human behaviour.

The opening stanza depicts a utopian rural scene:

See the cows placed just so on the green hill.
Cows say *Moo*. The sheep look like little clouds,

don't they? Sheep say *Baa*. Grass is green
and the pillar-box is red.

The intradiegetic narrator, not self-identified as 'I' and possibly a teacher, describes the scene as if to an audience of one or more children and questions them about the people and the domestic animals in the scene in an interactive teaching session. The narrative provides an opportunity for irony with the precision of 'just so' in the opening line that is stylistically discordant with the bland, comfortable imagery conventionally used in a child's book. 'Just so' acts as the first marker for an ironic reading of the utopian vision described throughout the poem.

The opening stanza continues with a question for its young audience 'Wouldn't it be strange/if grass were red?'. This type of question is a teaching convention to stimulate children to respond and discuss the scene. In effect they are being taught the conventions of 'reality', and questions such as this reinforce that normalising process. But the question can also be read ironically to take it out of the context of the classroom scene. The question then functions to destabilize this 'normality' and suggest that things may not be what they seem. There is a further suggestion of hidden significance prompted by both the convention that 'red' is used as a signifier for danger and blood, and the internal rhyme of 'red' and 'dead' that links it to the graveyard:

...Wouldn't it be strange
if grass were red? This is the graveyard
where the villagers bury their dead. Miss Maiden
lives opposite in her cottage. She has a cat.
The cat says *Miaow*. What does Miss Maiden say?

The movement from the graveyard to 'Miss Maiden/lives opposite in her cottage' creates an opportunity for ironising the idyllic scene by linking her to the graveyard and the buried dead.

This first inhabitant of the idyllic village is the conventional spinster, living alone with her cat. However, Miss Maiden's monologue defies the convention of a happy life in rural England that would correspond with the expected stereotype of the 'model' villager. In ironic contrast to the contented spinster typical of books for children, she has poisoned her mother through her resentment of lost opportunities, having spent her marriageable years in looking after her:

*I poisoned her, but no one knows. Mother, I said,
drink your tea. Arsenic. Four sugars. He waited
years for me, but she had more patience. One day,
he didn't come back...*

Duffy subverts the conventional 'happy' stereotype with another stereotype, one familiar from fiction and drama, the embittered spinster who sees herself ageing into a replica of the mother she grew to hate: *'I looked in the mirror,/saw her grey hair, her lips of reproach.'* There is a subtle element of satire in *'Mother, I said/drink your tea. Arsenic. Four sugars'*

'The Farmer' is introduced after a picture- book description of a farmyard with a fence that 'looks as though it's smiling'. His animals are productive and contented; his home is enviable: 'The farmhouse/is yellow and shines brightly in the sun'. The ironising, denaturalising questioning of the first stanza is repeated here and again hints at an alternative reality. The bizarre idea that hens might lay sausages instead of eggs can be read as a hint that despite outward appearances, something is odd in the farmer's world:

Hens say *Cluck* and give us eggs. Pigs
are pink and give us sausages. *Grunt*, they say.
Wouldn't it be strange if hens laid sausages?

This proves to be the case in the farmer's monologue: his 'reality' is not that of the expected contented stereotype. In conventional fiction and drama farmers are down-to-earth types whose lives are governed by routines geared to seasonal change. Here, the character follows this convention: *'A fistful of soil tells me plainly/what I need to know. You plant, you grow, you reap'*, but this is also subverted by his vision of something paranormal in daylight in his field:

*To tell the truth, it haunts me. I'm a simple man,
not given to fancy. The flock was ahead of me,
the dog doing his job like a good'un. Then
I saw it. Even the animals stiffened in fright...*

His terror and haunted imagination are also stereotypical, the type can be recognised, many readers will be familiar with a forerunner in Stella Gibbon's *Cold Comfort Farm*. As in the portrait of the spinster, there is subtle satire in this stereotype in the depiction of the farmer's psychological trauma:

*But since then, sleep has been difficult. When I shovel
deep down. I'm searching for something. Digging, desperately.*

The cause of his terror is not revealed. This literary device of the 'un-named horror' should leave the farmer's intradiegetic listener to use her/his imagination and is more effective in generating alarm than delineating the apparition. This omission of naming the terror also works to intrigue extradiegetic listeners/readers and has the potential to increase their awareness of an ironizing consciousness constructing the farmer's monologue. There is a dialectic behind this device of subverting one stereotype with another that is constructed by these two stanzas concerning the farmer that I shall discuss at the end of this reading.

The character of the vicar is introduced through the description of his village church where pigeons coo in the roof, bells chime, and 'the faithful' can be confident that 'What God says/ can be read in the Bible'. This stanza begins by citing the finger game from childhood 'There's the church and there's the steeple' but ends with a juxtaposition that potentially ironises the worship of the congregation by an implied comparison with the response of a dog:

See the postman's dog
waiting patiently outside church. *Woof*, he says.
Amen, say the congregation. What does Vicar say?

The vicar is constructed as a stereotype of sexual aberration against the expected stereotype of a clergyman who will foster the spiritual needs of his flock in a 'model village'. Trapped in the sexuality of childhood, he shaves his legs to look like a schoolboy, dresses in a choirboy's smock, and fantasises that the choirmistress is a dominatrix who will spank him for his 'naughtiness', that is, his sexual arousal:

*I am naughty. I can feel
the naughtiness under my smock. Smooth, pink naughtiness.
The choirmistress shall wear boots and put me
over her lap. I tremble and dissolve into childhood.*

Satire is established by Duffy's use of the euphemism 'naughtiness' and the depiction of the vicar's infantile sexuality.

The penultimate stanza summarises the antithesis between the rural idyll of the utopian model village, and the chaotic lives of the inhabitants, the dystopia that lives beneath the surface. Nursery rhymes are invoked with quacking ducks, croaking frogs, and 'the

butcher's, the baker's, the candlestickmaker's'. The inhabitants' fears are satirised and ironised by their juxtaposition:

The Grocer has a parrot. Parrots say *Pretty Polly*
and *Who's a pretty boy then?* The Vicar is nervous
of parrots, isn't he? Miss Maiden is nervous
of Vicar and the Farmer is nervous of everything.

In ironic sequence with the conventional peace of the nursery-book village there is the tension of the vicar's dread that the parrot's mimicry will expose his aberrant sexuality; the 'harmless' spinster's anxiety that her matricide will be revealed; and the farmer's impending nervous breakdown.

Previously, the narrator of the idyllic scene has not acknowledged the revelations of the villagers. This has facilitated the construction of the two separate antithetical visions of village life: the utopian description versus the dystopic revelations. Here, the narrator acknowledges and ridicules the villagers' preoccupations, bringing together in ironising sequence the two separate strands of 'Model Village'. This functions to consolidate the ironising consciousness, behind the two separate modes of narration, that perceives the antithesis and fallibility of the two models of 'reality'. The poem then reverts to the dystopic narrative with the last villager, the librarian.

The librarian is also a stereotype, her mental state is calmer than that of her neighbours but she is definitely eccentric. Although there is an implication that she is privileged above the other villagers because of her position as final speaker, she is satirised as a character that only knows safety in the company of books, anthropomorphising them as calm living entities. Her own 'reality' is as bizarre as that of her neighbours:

*This place
is a refuge, the volumes breathing calmly*

*on their still shelves. I glide between them
like a doctor on his rounds, know their cases...*

She appears to be endowed with a degree of insight into the other realities that lies beneath the utopian surface of the village:

*Outside is chaos,
lives with no sense of plot. Behind each front door
lurks truth, danger.*

However, the melodrama of '*lurks*' infuses satire into her seemingly privileged understanding of village life, and her verdict of '*lives with no sense of plot*' conflicts with the monologues of the villagers whose inner lives may defy convention but do have plots. It appears that unlike the narrator she is not conscious of the other inhabitants narratives, and has merely speculated about their mental state. Her status is no different from theirs: she too is ironised.

She is not a reliable witness to the life of the model village yet despite this she does articulate a widely acknowledged judgement on the nature of human consciousness:

*I peddle fiction. Believe
you me, the books in everyone's head are stranger...*

This truthful cliché is part of the stereotyped representation of the librarian but the concluding ellipsis moves the address away from the intradiegetic audience of her monologue to function as a direct address to extradiegetic readers, outside the consciousness of this character. Seen on the page, the ellipsis might be (mis)read as the librarian's indication that her narrative continues with further revelations but in dramatic monologue form the text represents speech. In 'listening' to the speaker of a dramatic monologue the convention is that the punctuation becomes invisible, because it is not

heard and merely functions to make meaning intelligible. The use of ellipsis has a different reading effect: because it is a more specialised mark it functions to move out of context of the speech act and draw attention away from the consciousness of the character to that of the writer. In this way, it effects an extradiegetic address to the readership.

Extradiegetic Address and Diegetic Levels

Extradiegetic address to listeners/readers can be substantiated by an overview of the different levels of narration/consciousness in both the narrator's description of the utopian villagers and the dystopic narratives of the villagers themselves. The idyllic scene of the country community is ironised, that is, a superior 'unsaid' narrative that things are not what they seem is implied by the opportunities for irony that I discussed earlier in my reading, so that, in effect, there are two levels of narration for this utopian version of reality. The dystopic narratives of the villagers are also ironised because the characters are constructed as satirised stereotypes. The penultimate stanza which brings the two different forms of narrative together establishes a single ironising consciousness behind both the 'picture book' story-telling and the individual monologues. This hyperdiegetic consciousness is the poet's device that ironises both accounts of 'reality' and sets them in opposition to each other.

I shall now discuss these different modes of narration, the use of irony, and the ironising narrator in terms of the speaker, the listener, and intra/extradiegetic address. Throughout the poem the strategies of satire and opportunities for irony construct the mode of address and the target audience: these vary from one stanza to the next.

The opening stanza sets up the scenario of an interactive teaching situation where a speaker addresses an intradiegetic audience of children and questions them. However, the irony of 'just so' creates the potential to displace the question out of the depicted context to address extradiegetic readers rather than the implied intradiegetic audience of children. As I argued earlier, the question 'Wouldn't it be strange if' functions to normalise the 'reality' that grass is green for the intradiegetic listeners (children) but if decontextualised by the irony, the question denaturalises this 'normality' for extradiegetic listeners/readers and suggests a different narrative.

Miss Maiden's monologue is not a continuation of the narrative of the first stanza where a teacher reads to her pupils. Her italicised narrative starts the dystopic vision that underlies the 'model village'. Although the direct address of her monologue is indeterminate, it may be a confession to a listener '*I loved him, you see*' or may be her silent recapitulation of events, it is clearly not addressed to the same audience as the picture-book scene. The content, a stereotypical(ironised) vision of the discontented spinster driven to matricide, forms an indirect address to an adult audience, the extradiegetic listeners/readers of the poem. It is also an address that cannot be heard by the intradiegetic audience of the opening stanza, the children.

Much of my discussion of address in Duffy's dramatic monologues concentrates on argument for an extension of the intradiegetic address to extradiegetic readers. For this stanza and those relating to the other inhabitants of the village, because of the content, the predominant address is indirect and focused on the extradiegetic listeners/readers of the poem. The farmer's speech contains direct address to an intradiegetic listener with '*To tell the truth.*' but in the context of the depiction of the dystopia and its evident

address to extradiegetic readers, this intradiegetic address has a subordinate function and is overwritten.

In the penultimate stanza a level of 'unsaid' (ironic) narrative above that of the classroom scenario and above that of the inhabitants' narratives is firmly established by the bringing together of the ironised innocence of the 'model village' and the satirised, ironised psychological aberrations of the inhabitants. The speaker appears to directly address the intradiegetic child listeners with 'Did you/see the frog?' but this is followed by satiric and ironic comments on the aberrant villagers. Overall in this stanza, the privileged address is indirect to an extradiegetic adult readership, because the content ironizes both the utopian and the dystopic accounts of the village.

In my discussion of the final stanza, I argued that the ellipsis at the end of the librarian's monologue had an extradiegetic function: it continues the extradiegetic address of the privileged hyperdiegetic consciousness I identified in my argument above.

Summary of 'Model Village'

I shall reiterate the diegetic scheme for this multi-voiced dramatic monologue. There are two levels of narrative (diegesis) present in the text. The depiction of the 'Model Village' is visible on the page, as is the second, different narrative, the italicized speech of the inhabitants. They occupy the same level of diegesis but above this narrative level is a second 'unsaid' diegesis created by the ironising strategies identified in my reading which problematises the two opposing account of village life.

The hyperdiegetic consciousness, implied by the 'unsaid' narrative of the irony, is detectable from the opening stanza where the narrative has the potential for an ironic reading. The presence of this hyperdiegetic consciousness becomes fully established as strategies for satire and irony are woven into the full text. This hyperdiegetic consciousness can be attributed to Duffy herself.

In 'Model Village' the stereotyped inhabitants are not substantial personae or masks to voice the writer's concerns; they barely conform to the category of 'character' and are perhaps best understood as a mechanism which allows the writer to playfully ventriloquise a dramatisation of two opposing accounts of human existence. The covert subject of 'Model Village' is the problem of human 'reality'.

The resulting poem is a humorous, multi-voiced palimpsest of irony, with imagery and text from children's books, nursery rhymes and mass media entertainment, that functions as a vehicle for covert philosophical interrogation of the nature of human 'reality'. 'Model Village' is in ironic dramatic monologue form and does not offer a resolution to the tension between the two representations of 'reality'. Duffy's use of stereotypes of normality and strangeness sets up the dialectic concisely and with minimal ambiguity. They are 'characters' that are familiar to many readers, and the antithesis between the two alternative versions of village life is clear. A full development of the significance of this antithesis depends on individual reader's knowledge of contemporary accounts relevant to the problem of human 'reality'.

In contrast to this ironic multi-voiced poem where the lack of interaction between the characters facilitates a clear depiction of the 'argument' of the content, the following

sympathetic dramatic monologue depicts the intense interrelatedness of three female characters that illustrates contemporaneous feminist theory of women's autobiographical writings.

'A CLEAR NOTE' (*SFN 1985*)

There are three female speakers in this sympathetic dramatic monologue which is divided into three, twelve-stanza sections; 1 Agatha, 2 Moll and 3 Bernadette. The three women form the relationship of grandmother-mother-daughter. At a first reading, it becomes apparent that there are complexities in establishing time and place during the three monologues of the poem. Because of this complexity, I shall initially read the poem with more paraphrasis than in the preceding poems in order to identify these discontinuities of time and place. For clarity of reference I shall designate the stanzas 1-12 in each of the three sections.

The first speaker, Agatha the grandmother, narrates events from her youth. Her monologue is in effect an autobiography, although not in conventional form. There is some ambiguity of address in the opening stanza. Agatha seems to address an intradiegetic listener/s unacquainted with her history because she describes her family details and her appearance:

Eight children to feed, I worked as a nurse
tending the dying. Four kids to each breast.
You can see from the photographs
my long auburn hair.

In contrast to the formality of this opening, her next stanza reveals details of her intimate life with her husband and their emotionally-barren relationship. These intimate details

are less likely to be narrated to someone outside the family but the address is not clearly delineated:

Kiss me goodnight - me weeping in our bed.
The scunner would turn away cold, back rigid,
but come home from work and take me on the floor
with his boots on and his blue eyes shut.

The address in her third stanza is to her daughter Moll. This is a change of address rather than a resolution of the ambiguity of address in the first two stanzas. She tells her daughter of her youthful dream of country life and a loving husband:

Moll, all my life I wanted the fields of Ireland only
and a man to delight in me
who'd never be finished with kisses and say
Look at the moon. My darling. The moon.

In the fourth stanza she describes emigration to Glasgow, and defines the loveless reality of her marriage by an allusion to the fairytale 'The Snowqueen': 'I felt love freeze/to a fine splinter in my heart'. In the original tale the Snowqueen enchants her victims and implants an ice splinter in their eye that will eventually cause their death. Duffy uses the ice splinter image but significantly recasts the tale here, and subsequently in the eighth stanza, where Agatha calls herself the Snowqueen but is the victim of the spell, rather than the malevolent enchantress.

Duffy's ability to construct fresh, vivid metaphors is exemplified throughout the poem.

The next stanza illustrates this in the depiction of Agatha's vulnerability to her own fertility. She is imprisoned by unwanted pregnancies like a spider caught in its own web:

Again and again throwing life from my loins
like a spider with enough rope
spinning and wringing it own neck. And he
wouldn't so much as hold me after the act.

The sixth stanza forms a time dislocation with the previous narrative. Later sections, related by her daughter and grand-daughter, establish Agatha as a voice from the past, still alive in the memories of the two women, but in this sixth stanza she speaks as if physically alive and in the presence of a listener, possibly her daughter Moll. Her speech relates to the future. She assumes she will die before her husband and is talking about her own physical death but metaphorically portrays her husband's lack of emotional warmth as death. She pleads to be released in death from the physical domination she endured in life:

It won't be over till one of us is dead.
Out there in the streets there's a corpse
walking round in a good suit and a trilby.
Don't bury him on top of me. Please.

The seventh stanza tells of the lack of communication between herself and her husband and appears to re-establish the initial time-frame which locates Agatha as a ghost narrating her past:

I had a voice once, but it's broken
and cannot recall the unspoken words
I tried to whisper in his closed ear.
Look at the moon. My darling. The moon.

It also gives a covert allusion to the significance of the title where she refers to her 'broken' voice. Her voice may be 'broken' but, as the poem subsequently discloses, her daughter and granddaughter hear it clearly in their memories articulating the desire 'to swim in impossible seas'.

The eighth stanza, in which Agatha relates her death, offers the possibility of many different readings because of the metaphor at its centre which also relates to the 'fine splinter' of the fourth stanza: 'The snowqueen's heart/stopping forever and melting as it

stopped'. I read Agatha as a woman who had to hide her emotions. She personifies herself as the Snowqueen of the fairytale because her emotions were frozen. Agatha's frozen heart 'melts' at her death and restores her memories of her youthful desires.

In the following stanza she narrates her death from cancer: 'the starved body began eating itself.' and obliquely asks if it was it beyond reason to have expected marriage to fulfill her youthful desire for 'the fields of Ireland only/and a man to delight in me'. The 'price' of her attempt to realise her dream of a happy marriage was the emigration to Glasgow and the 'long years of loathing/with the devil I'd married.'

Agatha directly addresses her daughter Moll in the next stanza with a trope that is repeated by each woman in each section of the poem: 'What laughs, Moll, for you and me/to swim in impossible seas.' Here, and in her penultimate stanza, she asks to be remembered as her youthful self with her hats, her fine hair and her pride in her children: 'and my smart stride/in the park with the eight of you spruced'.

Her final stanza re-establishes Agatha as a voice from beyond the grave, 'behind silence', a ghostly presence in her daughter's memories. Her plea to be remembered as the young woman who wanted the moon alludes to her youthful dream of a husband 'who'd never be finished with kisses ' and who would say '*Look at the moon. My darling. The moon.*' She does not wish to be remembered by the reality of her social identity, the unhappy, oppressed wife of the fourth stanza who 'felt love freeze/to a fine splinter in my heart' but as the young woman with her youthful aspirations. This suggests that Agatha's sense of self-identity, what she might call her 'real' self, does not conform to the reality of her visible social identity. The final lines of Agatha's monologue are her plea, projected from

the past to the future, to her granddaughter, and her grand-daughter's italicised reply: 'one day/you must tell them I wanted the moon. *Yes.*' The subtext of which is: tell them about the 'real' me and Bernadette's reply '*Yes*'. The final word '*Yes*', implies that sometime in the future the little grand-daughter will counteract the negative image of Agatha as an embittered, victimized wife and tell the world of her youthful beauty and her aspirations.

The next section of twelve stanzas, 2 Moll, is the autobiographical monologue of Agatha's daughter who addresses her own daughter, Bernadette. Agatha began her monologue by appealing to an unidentified listener, possibly her daughter Moll, to look at a photograph of her younger self as concrete evidence of the woman she once was before the destructive effects of her marriage. Moll's opening stanza, addressed to her daughter, 'pet', also cites photographs but as a simile for recurrent painful memories:

Some hurts pass, pet, but others
lurk on. They turn up
like old photos and catch at the throat
somehow. I'm forty-nine in May.

Moll establishes the central thread of this triptych of women's memories when she describes the memory of her mother's death as a constant presence in her life, and refers to the biological bond between grandmother, mother and daughter as an ever-present physiological 'memory'. Her question moves her notion of this maternal bond out of the particular circumstances of her own life into that of all women:

Her death haunts me, almost
as I haunted her womb and you mine.
A presence inside me which will neither grow
nor diminish. What can a woman do?

Moll confides in her daughter that she enjoys the freedom of her job outside the family home and hints at her husband's possessive resentment of this freedom outside his control: 'Your father's against it'. There is an implication that her husband's continuing love validates this possessive attitude: 'He loves me as much now as he did/twenty-five years ago. More'.

She partly defines herself through the character of her daughter Bernadette and the strength of the bond between them:

You were a wild wain, with an answer
for everything. Near killed me containing you.
Boys are different. I can read you
like a book, like the back of my hand.

Moll continues with her self-definition but the address to Bernadette in the previous stanza is less certain here:

They call me Madcap Moll, I'd love to leap
on a bike and ride to the seaside
alone. There's something out there
that's passing me by. Are you following me?

There seems to be a distancing, a loss of intimacy, between the speaker and her intradiegetic listener. Bernadette is likely to know that her mother is called 'Madcap Moll' by those around her, unless 'They' are Moll's workmates and unknown to her daughter. In support of this 'Are you following me?' seems too formal an address to a closely-bonded daughter. This loss of intradiegetic intimacy and the prominent placing of this question at the end of the stanza, creates an element of potential extradiegetic address to readers. Moll's 'something [...] that's passing me by' suggests Moll's awareness of unknown opportunities beyond her horizon of expectations.

This distancing between speaker and intradiegetic listener is continued in the next stanza where the address appears to move out of the mother- daughter scenario to address a less familiar audience:

I've been drained since twenty, but not empty
yet. I roam inside myself, have
such visions you'd not credit. The best times
are daydreams with a cigarette.

There is an objectivity about 'I've been drained since twenty' that conflicts with the intimacy of a confidence between mother and daughter. However, without the direct address using the second-person pronoun as in the previous stanza, 'Are you following me?', there is not the clear potential for extradiegetic address': the address is to an undefined intradiegetic audience. Moll's life although restricted is not as oppressed as her mother's. Her remark 'but not empty/yet' suggests that although her marriage has limited her expectations in life she still has the ability to daydream of something better, unlike Agatha, who lost her hope of a loving marriage and 'felt love freeze/to a fine splinter in my heart'.

In the next stanza, however, Moll clearly addresses her daughter when she retells a family incident where her husband had reacted with anger and resentment because she had voiced her disappointment at the limitations on her own development that motherhood had caused. She reveals to Bernadette the true nature of her feelings at the time: not laughter at the comedy of her husband's discomfiture, but sorrow at the truth of her uninhibited, drunken revelation:

There was that night, drunk, I told you
Never have kids. Give birth to yourself,
I wish I had. And your Dad, looking daggers
stormed off to bed. Laugh? I cried.

The next stanza re-articulates her husband's sexual jealousy and determination to control his wife's life:

I can't fly out to stay with you alone,
 there'd be fights for a month.
 He broods on what I'd get up to
 given half the chance. Men!

Moll appears to be responding to a request from her daughter to visit her. Bernadette apparently lives far enough away to require the expense of a journey by air. This suggests that she and her daughter are not actually in each other's presence. If this is so, her comments are part of a telephone conversation or a letter. Because of the ambiguity of address in parts of Moll's monologue it is not possible to determine when and where the two women are in each other's presence.

The generalisation of 'Men!' converts Moll's perception of her husband's attitude into one that applies to all men. The expression of her perception moves from the private to the public with this generalisation and as such becomes a feminist analysis of male behaviour.

This inflection of feminist consciousness continues in the following stanza where Moll cites self-recognition of her own abilities, and condemns the attitude of the men in her family that infantilises her and nullifies her potential to act as an authentic adult, thus reducing her to passive dependence:

Hardest to bear is knowing my own strength.
 Does that sound strange? Yet four daft sons
 and a husband handle me like gold leaf.
 Me, with a black hole of resources.

Here, as in the sixth stanza, there appears to be a move away from specific address to her daughter towards address to a less familiar audience, which potentially includes extradiegetic readers, because of Moll's question 'Does that sound strange?' This question can function extradiegetically to construct an ambiguous direct intra/extradiegetic address.

There is a shift back to clearly defined intradiegetic address in the penultimate stanza where Moll reminds her daughter of the song they shared:

Over and over again as a child
 You'd be at me to sing
'The stars at night are big and bright'.
 Aye. So still they are.

This song symbolises a wider world than the one she lives in, and the unknown opportunities she will never experience.

In her final stanza Moll trivialises her spoken acknowledgement of her lack of freedom and the denial of her potential: 'Here's me blethering on', and passes on to her daughter the aspiration that her own mother shared with her:

What laughs,
 Bernadette, for us to swim in impossible seas
 under the moon.

The two women, Agatha and Moll, have oppressed lives in which their dreams are unfulfilled, but their aspirations are different: Moll's dream is freedom away from the house to a world of wider opportunity, where she can see *'The stars at night'*: Agatha's dream was the opposite, the enclosed world of a loving marriage to a man who would say *'Look at the moon. My darling. Look at the moon'*.

There is a problem with this dream passed on through the three generations with the trope 'to swim in impossible seas': it clearly functions as a metaphor for Moll's desire for freedom, and for Bernadette's. But it is more difficult to reconcile with Agatha's aspiration in her third stanza, 'Moll, all my life I wanted the fields of Ireland only/and a man to delight in me' unless it is read as symbolic of Agatha's desire for the affection and sensuality missing from her marriage.

This final stanza of Moll's monologue includes an invitation to her daughter with the chance of a private conversation and a sharing of confidences, as if they were in each other's physical presence: 'Let's away, my darling,/for a good long walk. And I'll tell you a secret'. This exemplifies the instability in time and location that I foregrounded at the beginning of this reading. In this instance Moll and Bernadette are together, yet in the earlier ninth stanza they clearly are not: 'I can't fly out to stay with you alone'.

The scenario that explains these discontinuities in time and place is that Moll's monologue is Bernadette's recollection of fragments of her mother's conversations in the past. These discontinuities prevent rationalisation of time and location in Moll's and Agatha's monologues which I shall discuss more fully in my subsequent analysis of this first reading. Another level of instability is added to this scenario by the passages, exemplified above, where the intimacy of intradiegetic address to the daughter is weakened, and the address appears to shift to a less familiar intradiegetic audience where the daughter may not be present. In places, the lack of definition of the intradiegetic audience also functions to create opportunities for extradiegetic address to readers. This potential of extradiegetic address functions as another cause of uncertainty in time and location for all three monologues.

In the third section 3 Bernadette, the daughter/grandchild, narrates the scenario of the shared life and memories of the three women to a listener unfamiliar with their family history:

The day her mother died, my mother
was on holiday. I travelled to the seaside
with bad news. She slumped over the table,
spilling wine across the telegram.

She reveals the truth of her grandmother's emotional life and the resulting social taboo against voicing the reality of such a marriage:

Someone burnt the diary she wrote. It was
a catalogue of hatred and it was all
she had to leave. Extracts were whispered
at the wake and then it was forgotten.

These first two stanzas are narrated as bald facts but the subsequent stanzas resume the more intimate tone of the previous monologues. The third stanza constructs a vivid scene with a blackly humorous metaphor for the bitter reality of Agatha's marriage:

Her mouth was set as though she was angry.
Kiss me goodnight. My mother went in.
She saw him bend over the coffin to kiss her
and half-thought the corpse had flinched.

The intimate style of narration of the three women's relationship is consolidated with female imagery in the fourth stanza where Bernadette remembers the three generations of women together:

I can't remember much. Perhaps the smell
of my granny mingling with hers
in a gossipy bed. Them giggling. One sang
Hang down your head Tom Dooley in the dark.

The three women are depicted in physical proximity in the 'safe space' of a women's bedroom where the domination of the grandmother's oppressive marriage can be

temporarily marginalised. The strong, physical bond between the three women is evoked by the sensual imagery of warm female bodies in the 'gossipy bed'.

In the following stanza, as Bernadette describes her childhood ploy to stay up late in their company she alludes to the difficulty of voicing women's experience in androcentric language:

Or assuming a virtuous expression
so they'd let you stay up late. Listening
as language barely stretched to cover
what remained unsaid.

The bitterness of her grandmother's resentment at her physical and emotional subordination in her marriage, and the lack of consequence of this female resentment in a patriarchal society is symbolised in:

They buried him on top within the month.
I don't want that bastard
Rotting above me for all eternity.
What does it matter, they said, now she's dead?

The following stanza begins and ends with Bernadette's memories of words spoken by her grandmother and mother in intimate conversation. In effect, the voices of all three women are heard. However, the central lines of the stanza address a plural audience. This is most likely to be a female audience because it alludes to the shared aspirations of generations of women. The time is established as the present with 'sing':

Can't see the moon now, Moll.
Listen. The hopes of your thousand mothers
sing with a clear note inside you.
Away, while you can, and travel the world.

Bernadette's exhortation 'Listen' is clearly addressed to an audience of thousands. This suggests a direct extradiegetic address to a substantial female readership, rather than an

intradiegetic, intimate gathering of family and friends. This overt direct address is prefigured in the opportunities for extradiegetic address that I indicated above. The significance of the poem's title becomes apparent: the 'clear note' is the message from mothers to daughters through generations of women to widen their horizon of expectation and fulfill their potential as individuals in defiance of debilitating conventions.

The eighth stanza sums up the misery of her grandmother's life, and places it in an historical context of women's emancipation when Bernadette identifies the difference between Agatha's poverty of opportunity and the increased life choices for her own generation of women:

I can almost hear her saying it now.
Who will remember me? Bleak decades of silence
 and lovelessness placing her years away
 from the things that seem natural to us.

This stanza marks the beginning of a mood of optimism in place of the predominantly sad, often bitter, recollections of the preceding monologues.

Bernadette then celebrates the opportunity 'to swim in impossible seas' for her generation of women, whilst not forgetting the lack of freedom of their female ancestors. At the same time she celebrates the continuum of 'female' memories from one familial generation of women to another that is recognised by many feminists:

For we swim with ease in all
 possible seas and do not forget them.
 It's spring again and just about now
 my Granny would be buying a new hat.

This female continuum is extended to a sense of connexion across space as well as time in the next stanza:

And I have hair like hers. My mother
is setting off for work. An aeroplane
climbs up above her house. She imagines me
seeing it from my window later on.

This establishes that Bernadette is far from her mother but tied by a strong bond that merges the two living women and the dead grandmother in memory and imagination, if not in physical proximity.

The depiction of the mother, Moll, hearing the aeroplane and imagining it flying over her daughter connects with Bernadette imagining 'the simplest thing' in the following stanza. This connection of imagining/imagination between mother and daughter also links back to Agatha's final plea in her monologue: 'Let some imagine'. The sight and sound of the verb 'imagine' is used as a link between the three women but close reading suggests that its meaning is not fixed.

Agatha's use of 'Let some imagine' suggests that the truth of her inner life cannot be known by the women of future generations, hers is a voice unheard/ unrecorded in the public domain: future women seeking to establish a social history of women's lives and the lived experience of their social identity will have to 'imagine' a convincing account for women like Agatha whose lives and opinions are unrecorded.

Moll's imagining is the more concrete visualisation of seeing the aeroplane overhead, projecting it further into its journey, and visualising Bernadette seeing it fly over her

distant home. It invokes her longing to see her daughter expressed in her own monologue as 'I can't fly out to stay with you alone' (2 Moll, stanza 9).

Bernadette's imagining is that of a poet. She ponders the lives and continuing aspirations of women 'which will harm no one', and metaphorises these into the imagery of April flowers blooming in the graveyard where generations of women lie. The continuum of 'imagining' between the three women is extended to include the aspirations of all women's lives with the image of regeneration and hope for the future:

As I imagine the simplest thing. The dreams
of women which will harm no one.
April in the graveyard sees new flowers
pushing out from the old earth.

Bernadette's final stanza causes ambiguity in the identity of the speaker:

The daylight disappears. Against the night
a plane's lights come back from somewhere else. For Moll
the life goes streaming back in tune.
For Agatha, from Bernadette, the moon.

Previously the narrator's identity has been determined in each section as the woman of the title, articulating her life history and memories, but in these final lines the three women are objectified as if by a fourth speaker who has seen or read their narratives: 'For Agatha, from Bernadette, the moon'. If the poem is read with a biographical perspective where the Bernadette persona is identified as aspects of Duffy herself, it appears that the poet has separated out from the 'Bernadette' persona in order to testify to the purpose of the poem.

Agatha's request for an 'epitaph of light', 'the moon', can be read as her desire to be remembered for the spirit of her aspirations, rather than the loveless marriage and defeat

of hope that were the reality of her life. The poem itself is the 'epitaph of light' because it has publicly articulated Agatha's private aspirations. Moll's desire for her daughter:

'Give birth to yourself, I wish I had.' is fulfilled as Bernadette confirms 'we swim with ease in all/possible seas'. If 'Bernadette' is Duffy's mask, as the final line suggests, then Duffy's self-development as a poet and her creation 'A Clear Note' have achieved the desires expressed by the other characters. Although 'Agatha' and 'Moll' may be Duffy's representatives of a certain pattern of women's lives drawn from observation, rather than the record of actual persons, the objectification in the final line suggests a degree of configuration between 'Bernadette' the daughter, and Duffy, the daughter and poet.

In suggesting this configuration between 'Bernadette' and Duffy, I am looking at the significance of Duffy's social background which is likely to have brought her into close proximity with women such as these, or narrated memories of them. The time of the poem probably corresponds approximately with Duffy's youth as Moll cites air travel for unaccompanied women and Bernadette celebrates increased opportunities of lifestyle. The poem suggests an empathetic identification between Duffy and a person she might have been, 'Bernadette'. Duffy was born in Liverpool to an Irish Catholic family. In interview, she stated 'My family were very Catholic: church every Sunday, communion every week. I could have gone to mass every day at school'.⁵ She must have mixed with Catholic families from various strata of society. Catholic conventions for social behaviour and observance of religious dogma are more rigidly enforced than in the Anglican Church: this is particularly marked in Irish Catholicism. The social and familial repression depicted in 'Agatha' and 'Moll' will have been tangential to Duffy's experience if not directly applicable.

The Poem as Autobiography

At this point I shall return to various stanzas in the three sections to discuss more fully the textual features, feminist issues, and critical theories that arose as I paraphrased the poem.

An outstanding aspect of 'A Clear Note' is that it functions as three, linked autobiographies. Unlike the two previous multi-voiced poems in this chapter, the three speakers do interact with one another and none is ironized by the poet: each woman is intended to be read sympathetically. I shall discuss this textual positioning of readers more closely in my comparison of all four dramatic monologues at the end of this chapter.

This poem is in effect a spoken triptych in which the salient feature is the method of self-definition. Feminist commentators on women's autobiographical writings have argued that women's 'autobiographies' differ in form from the conventional male-authored narratives: women's sense of self is relational and they often self-identify through significant others, rather than as autonomous individuals.⁶ This phenomenon appears relevant to Duffy's characters here, and is observable in female-authored texts from the seventeenth to the twenty-first century.⁷ Support for this divergence from the male norm also comes from Chodorow's model for the psychological basis of this gender difference in self-definition.⁸

As my reading showed, each woman speaks of her 'self' in terms of her relationship with the other two women, although, in the case of Agatha and Moll, they also explain aspects of their life through their husbands. Nevertheless, as the three women discuss their most

treasured memories and their 'inner self', it is evident that the women are the most 'significant others' in each life, despite their recognition of the destructive influence of the men. The interlinking of the three lives and their pleasure in shared intimate memories also resonates with Chodorow's theory and suggests a concordance between Duffy's poem and contemporaneous feminist discourse. There is also an interesting resonance between Duffy's use of sea imagery in all three women's monologues and Chodorow's concept of the fluid psychic structures between mother and daughter.

'A Clear Note' is constructed with fragments of memory. There are many poems about memory in the 'popular' canon, for example, Thomas Hood's 'Past and Present'. A comparison with Hood's poem and others will reveal that a notable feature of 'A Clear Note' is its construction in memory mode (as memory itself) with shifts in time and location, fragmentation of story-line, circularity, and snatches of popular songs. Despite these discontinuities, the apparent authenticity of this representation of memory throughout the poem intrinsically conveys a sense of connectedness. This is enhanced by the representation of the interrelation of the speakers in the form of the poem, a triptych of the three women's lives.

I have discussed in my readings the extended address in sections of the poem where the lack of definition of the speaker's audience creates the opportunity for extradiegetic address. This does not disrupt the coherence of the intertwining of the three women's lives. Agatha and Moll are always talking to someone. It is clear when Agatha speaks to her daughter and Moll to Bernadette, but when the address extends to a less clearly-defined audience, which can include readers, the subtlety of this movement does not interrupt the narrative flow.

Feminist discourse

Bernadette's monologue differs from that of her mother and grandmother. Interrelation between them is established in the first half of her monologue, and their voices can be 'heard' as memory in the italicised lines of the stanzas. Although Bernadette is talking about Agatha and Moll, rather than to them, and her intradiegetic audience is undefined initially, the style of narration is similar to the two earlier monologues. In the seventh stanza the address switches to a defined extradiegetic audience, a female readership, with 'The hopes of your thousand mothers/sing with a clear note inside you', and the invocation of feminist discourse becomes overt. The narration is dramatically changed here where Bernadette is in effect making a public statement about women's lives: her monologue differs from that of the other two women in this move from private reminiscence to public statement. However, this change in the narration does not fracture the narrative of 'A Clear Note' but brings another layer of coherence to the poem because Bernadette's overt feminist discourse resolves and fulfils the implications of the two earlier monologues. These implications were exemplified by Agatha's perception of society's failure to acknowledge her destroyed aspirations and the oppression of her marriage, and Moll's generalisation of men's behaviour that I discussed above. The overall construction of the triptych can be perceived as being underwritten by a feminist consciousness.

In the last five stanzas Bernadette draws upon the experiences of Agatha and Moll and connects them to the experiences of woman in general. In effect she is articulating an unconscious construction of feminist theory by extrapolating her knowledge of the lives of the women in her family to those in society. A feminist consciousness inflected

Agatha's monologue where she identified her vulnerability to her own fertility and the silencing of her voice in society. Moll's speculations on the restrictions of male-domination and the inner strength and frustrated potential of women also substantiate a feminist consciousness. Bernadette's monologue consolidates this in a more overt way with her transposition of the repressions and inequalities of the two women's private lives into issues of the representation and agency of women in the public domain.

Bernadette's overt invocation of feminist discourse facilitates a re-reading of Agatha's final stanza and her plea 'From behind silence I ask'. Her 'silence' is that of the grave but also suggests the silencing of women in the public domain where many of their concerns remain 'unsaid' and/or unacknowledged. Bernadette's comment on her grandmother's diary also exemplifies this 'silencing': 'Someone burnt the diary she wrote....extracts were whispered /at the wake and then it was forgotten'.

An urgent concern for feminist literary critics in the 1970's and 1980's was how to theorise (and subsequently overcome) the silencing of women and their life experiences caused by their subordination in a society organised by patriarchal structures. The issues were; where female experience is in conflict with the dominant, male-oriented account of 'truth', how/where can women find a public audience to dispute this domination?; and how can women express, or even discover, their personal lives and concerns in a language formulated on androcentric principles? Duffy's poem can be contextualised within this development in feminist critical discourse: the female characters illustrate these issues, although the relation between character and feminist issue is depicted with subtlety: Agatha is 'silenced' in life and death because accounts of

her oppressed life are taboo; Bernadette recognises the inadequacy of language to convey female experience 'as language barely stretched to cover/what remained unsaid'.

Summary of 'A Clear Note'

'A Clear Note' has special claims as a 'sympathetic' dramatic monologue. It displays a convincing account of the lives of the three women in the relationship grandmother-mother-grandchild. Their lives meld almost seamlessly into one, despite Duffy's separation of the three speakers into three separate sections. Perversely it seems, this division into three, which functions to clarify that there are three different characters speaking, also helps to illustrate the indivisibility of the three females.

The narrative parallels progress from rags to (relative) riches with progress from oppression to increased autonomy for the women. The circumstances of the women's lives are finally overtly politicised by Bernadette and converted to a celebration of their shared aspirations and community. The poem is an example of Duffy's early use of feminist discourse which has culminated in her innovative, extensive use of many 'shades' of feminism in her latest collection *The World's Wife* (1999).

The women speak with voices that we commonly hear about us, occasionally coloured with vivid and apt metaphors that betray the consciousness of the poet, but Duffy's ability to imbue 'plain' speech with depths of meaning gives the poem gravitas and endows the reader with the pleasure of enriching the meaning of the poem with each rereading.

My reading and analysis has argued that 'A Clear Note', a sympathetic dramatic monologue in the tradition of Webster's materialist depiction of women's lives, is innovative in its threefold narration of three female inter-related 'autobiographies'. Each woman's account is inflected with a feminist consciousness which resolves in Bernadette's public statement to extradiegetic readers, identifying the defeat of women's aspirations in the past, and exhorting her own generation of women to fulfill their own desires *'Away while you can, and travel the world'*. The complex and subtle amalgamation of these features constructed in 'memory mode', that is, with shifts in time and location, fragments of recall and invocation of popular song, is a significant extension of the dramatic monologue form.

'DIES NATALIS' (SM1987)

This fourth multi-voiced dramatic monologue moves away from the concern with social issues addressed by the previous three poems to explore the relation between language and consciousness. It has the theme of Re-incarnation that is also a structuring principle. Each of the four sections of six regularly-lined stanzas depicts a different speaking character; a cat, a seagull, a man, and a newborn infant. These are linked to each other by a single re-incarnated consciousness.

The human characters are depicted in sympathetic or ironic tone but the cat and seagull 'characters' do not conform to either of these categories. Their narratives are centred on their own concerns and when they refer to humans they seem dispassionate and objective: this conveys a neutral tone to their narration. I shall discuss this neutrality of tone later in my reading but because the reading effect of this neutrality is pertinent to my initial reception of this poem, I shall address it here.

I shall divert from the main analytical method of my readings to comment subjectively on this first response. I found the poem bizarre, and experienced neither empathy nor alienation towards the anthropomorphized cat and seagull characters. I was puzzled by Duffy's interest in Re-incarnation which seemed antithetical to her concern with the material conditions of human existence that she conveys so effectively in much of her work. In interview with Andrew McAllister in 1988 Duffy said in response to his comment about ventriloquism and personae:

And if you have been writing for five years, as I have in both my books then themes arise; and I would say that the use of other voices and perhaps the love poetry are the two strands of it. Probably more the use of voices than the love poetry. I don't think that I'd be capable of writing a poem about a landscape. It's people and use that I'm interested in.⁹

The final statement above offers a rationale for Duffy's poem because the re-incarnation theme of 'Dies Natalis' facilitates the depiction of extreme differences of consciousness or modes of perception. This theme and the depiction of the four different 'beings' would allow Duffy a challenging opportunity to explore the possibilities or limits of dramatic monologue form and the 'use' of voices that is part of her motivation as a poet, as she indicated above.

What is more opaque to speculation is Duffy's specific choice of 'characters': a cat, seagull, man, and newborn child. It may be significant that this range of speakers allows Duffy to use both ventriloquism for the cat and seagull, and personae for the man and newborn child.

Duffy remarked to McAllister in the interview 'I like being an outsider'. This suggests that Duffy would be predisposed to the challenge of depicting 'otherness' and finding the language to express a different consciousness. In her first collection (*SFN 1985*) Duffy

ventriloquised a dolphin in the sympathetic dramatic monologue 'The Dolphins' in which the character speaks for itself and its companion dolphin from the imprisonment of their pool where they perform for the public. The opening stanza initiates the narration of an 'other' world perceived by the speaker:

World is what you swim in, or dance, it is simple.
 We are in our element but we are not free.
 Outside this world you cannot breathe for long.
 The other has my shape. The other's movement
 forms my thoughts. And also mine. There is a man
 and there are hoops. There is a constant flowing guilt.

Ventriloquising a dolphin is a depiction of extreme 'otherness'. Perhaps the challenge of depicting 'otherness' in 'the Dolphins' led to the more difficult, four-fold challenge of this later poem, 'Dies Natalis'.

There is a specific rationale for Duffy's use of ventriloquism in 'The Dolphins' which can be deduced from her explanation in the McAllister interview, where she defends her wide ranging collection of speakers:

What I am doing is living in the twentieth century in Britain and listening to the radio news every day and going out every day and reading the newspapers every day and meeting people who've had wonderful or horrifying experiences, and sometimes that will nudge me towards a poem.¹⁰

Her choice of a dolphin as a speaking subject in a sympathetic dramatic monologue allows her to indirectly voice concern at both the cruel practice of keeping these intelligent animals in captivity, and at the rapid reduction of the dolphin population caused by fishing methods in the late decades of the twentieth century. This rationale is unlikely to apply to Duffy's ventriloquism of the cat and seagull characters of 'Dies Natalis', and its theme of Re-incarnation. In the light of this, my initial suggestion seems

more convincing, that is, that the poem arose as a challenge for Duffy in the 'use' of voices, which she indicated as a major preoccupation in her work.

The concept of Re-incarnation came back into the public domain with the development of 'New Age' discourse in the later decades of the twentieth century. Various aspects of New Age religions had wide coverage in the mass media. This social phenomenon may lie behind Duffy's use of the Re-incarnation theme because, as she has indicated in her interview, mass media items will 'nudge me towards a poem'. I shall return now from this digression to consider the content and textual strategies of the four monologues comprising 'Dies Natalis'.

The theme of Re-incarnation is depicted through narration by four speakers; the time scheme used in the four sections conveys the sense of a singular consciousness re-embodied through time to inhabit four different characters. This is a challenging development of the form in respect of 'the speaker'. Fanthorpe's 'Not My Best Side' is a contemporaneous example of multi-voiced dramatic monologue in which not all the speakers are human: Saint George, the maiden, and the dragon all account for themselves in a scenario based on Ucello's painting. Duffy does not simply replicate Fanthorpe's formula: 'Dies Natalis' has the sense of a unitary time-travelling consciousness that becomes four different characters, each in their own specific scenario. This time-travelling consciousness is established in the opening lines of each section of the poem: 'When I was cat'; 'Then a breath of sea air'; 'But when I loved'; and finally 'Now hushed voices say I have my mother's look.'

The speaking subject describes his past life as the sacred cat of a female member of an ancient (Egyptian) dynasty:

When I was cat, my mistress tossed me sweetmeats
from her couch. Even the soldiers were deferential -
she thought me sacred - I saw my sleek ghost
arch in their breastplates and I purred

my one eternal note beneath the shadow of pyramids

There is more figurative language here than is customary in Duffy's work. This monologue contains a vivid metaphor in each stanza: the cat sees its reflection in the guards' armour, 'I saw my sleek ghost/arch in their breastplates; its whiskers are 'fine wires -/which had their roots in my cat brain'; it laps up milk, 'my vain, furred tongue erased a bowl of milk'. The figurative language of the narrated memories depicts an ancient culture and a consciousness centred on physical sensation.

The speaker is looking back at the past, 'The world then', from outside this former embodiment: 'Even now, at my spine's base,/the memory of a tail stirs idly'. The last stanza of this first section depicts the death of the cat's mistress 'she moaned into stillness, her ringed hand/with its pattern of death, palm up near my face' but does not reveal the fate of this first re-incarnation.

In this monologue, and subsequently the other three narrations, the speaker does not directly address an intradiegetic audience with the second-person pronoun. In much of my reading of Duffy's dramatic monologues my analysis argues for an extension of this intradiegetic address 'you' to extradiegetic listeners/readers. This textual mechanism is absent from 'Dies Natalis'. Address to extradiegetic readers can only be effected

indirectly through the content of the narratives, which I shall discuss as my reading proceeds.

In the next section of narrative the same metaphysical consciousness then speaks of its existence as a seabird. As in the first section, these six stanzas are unusual in the density of figurative language, for example in the opening stanza:

Then a breath of sea air after blank decades,
My wings applauding this new shape. Far below,
The waves envied the sky, straining for blueness,
Muttering in syllables of fish. I trod air, laughing

Duffy characterises the bird as a messenger of bad news, a bird of ill-omen:

Six days later founding me circling the ship. Men's voices
Came over the side in scraps, I warned patiently
In my private language, weighed down with loneliness.

The speaker concludes the narrative of this embodiment in the final stanza of this section with the bird, clearly female, remembering the weight of its egg 'in its gut' and 'the harsh sound my cry made then'. As in the first narrative, the 'character' is centred on its own sensations, the affairs of humans are peripheral. This conveys a neutrality of tone that I discussed in my introduction to the poem.

For the third section the characterisation changes from the embodiment of the female seabird remembering 'the harsh sound my cry made then' to that of an old man remembering his courtship and long marriage: 'But when I loved, I thought that was all I had done.' This suggests two interpretations: firstly, that once in its next stage of reincarnation, the speaking consciousness has no memories of previous lives, although

this is inconsistent with 'the memory of a tail stirs idly': or secondly, that human love, while it lasts, overwrites all other perceptions.

This third narrative does not contain the figurative language characteristic of the first two. The scenario of the old man's life is depicted in concrete imagery of impoverishment and squalor. The plot resembles that of Agatha's marriage ('A Clear Note, 1 Agatha', *SFN* 1985) but from the husband's perspective. The speaker mirrors Agatha's account. This repetition suggests a persistent view of marriage as oppressive in Duffy's first two collections. The male speaker tells the same sad story; the hopes of youthful love and marriage from his perspective:

But when I loved, I thought that was all I had done.
It was very ordinary, an ordinary place, the river
filthy, and with no sunset to speak of. She spoke
in a local accent, laughing at mine,

The lovers' encounter is initially sympathetically depicted in a place of urban pollution where their youthful ardour and optimism overcome their surroundings. However, readers conscious of the gender issue of the depiction of women in male-generated texts may read the third stanza ironically:

She promised herself
in exchange for a diamond ring. The sluggish water
shrugged past as we did it again. We whispered
false vows which would ruin our lives...

As in Browning's 'My Last Duchess', the wife is silenced. A gendered reading of the stanza will produce concern for the unspoken female version of the event, and the argument that the wife's vows may well have been a genuine commitment, in which case her husband, the speaker, is misrepresenting her. Readers unaware of this issue of textual silencing and misrepresentation may read the tone as sympathetic, rather than ironic.

The reading effect of the next stanza is predominantly one of sympathy as the husband narrates his distress at the loss of affection in their marriage:

I cannot recall more pain. There were things one could buy
to please her, but she kept herself apart, spitefully
guarding the password. My body repelled her. Sweat.
Sinew. All that had to be hunched away in nylon sheets.

However, there is an ambiguity that problematises a sympathetic reading of this stanza because gender-conscious readers may be unsure of the tone of 'spitefully/guarding the password', where the force of 'spitefully' implies that the husband blames his wife for their lack of communication, rather than acknowledging his shared responsibility.

Another layer of significance increases the ambiguity of tone in this narrative where Duffy depicts their environment as one of urban squalor, the 'filthy', 'sluggish' river', and depicts the discomfort of poverty in 'Sweat' in 'nylon sheets'. This element of social realism may function to elicit a overall sympathetic response from the generality of readers.

Implied sympathy for the speaker dominates the final lines as he takes his wife's cremated remains to bury them in his allotment, 'trying to remember the feel of her, but it was years,/years, and what blew back in my face was grey ash, dust'.

These shifts and uncertainties in tone indicate that a dominant, gendered reading of the husband's narrative is likely to recognise the misogyny of the husband, some sympathy for his sense of loss at his wife's death, and acknowledgement of the reality that social

deprivations influence human relationships. Readers that are gender-blind may not perceive the misogyny.

In the last section of the poem the time-travelling consciousness is situated in present time but recalls the 'same light' of the past :

Now hushed voices say I have my mother's look.
Once again, there is light. The same light. I talk
to myself in shapes, though something is constantly changing
the world, rearranging the face which stares at mine.

This opening stanza identifies the child as newborn, 'thinking' non-linguistically: 'I talk/to myself in shapes'. In the following stanzas the neonate describes the people and the world about it in a detached, analytical way.

The second stanza depicts the child learning about its environment through physical sensation, before the formation of human relationships: 'Most of the time I am hungry, sucking on dry air/till it gives in, turning milky and warm'. There is an element of Freudian discourse in Duffy's representation of neonatal consciousness; 'Sleep is dreamless'.

The third stanza focuses on sensory perception:

My small sounds
bring a bitter finger to my mouth, a taste
which cannot help or comfort me.

It ends with an ellipsis and the ambiguity of: 'I recall/and release in a sigh the journey here...' this both inscribes the theme of Re-incarnation, and metaphorises the ordeal of birth.

The fourth stanza describes the parents caring for the baby and talking to it through the baby's detached unsocialised perspective: 'These strangers own me,/pass me between them chanting my new name'. The child is possibly of mixed race: 'the man and woman are different colours and I/am both of them'.

This ambiguity is resolved in the next stanza by 'my smooth, dark flesh'. In the two final stanzas the narrative focuses on the theme of Re-incarnation, and the relation between identity and language. Duffy uses a figurative description of the fontanelle closing to depict the transition from one consciousness to another where the inherited memories of previous lives are lost:

New skin thickens
on my skull, to keep the moments I have lived before

locked in. I will lose my memory, learn words
which barely stretch to cover what remains unsaid.

There is an integration here of the concept of Re-incarnation with contemporary psycho-linguistic theory because Duffy appears to situate the child as a Lacanian subject with this reference to the inadequacy of language. This suggests that the 'time travelling' consciousness has to adapt to the predetermined social subjectivity and limited consciousness of Lacanian theory. A Lacanian notion of the 'mirror' stage is also suggested by:

Mantras
of consolation come from those who keep my portrait
in their eyes.

'Dies Natalis' was written at a time when Lacan's psycho-linguistic development of Freud's theories was becoming influential in mainstream literary criticism. It is arguable that Duffy consciously incorporates elements of 'Lacanian' subjectivity into the

monologue, but a substantial Lacanian deconstruction is defeated by the concept of a supernatural time-travelling consciousness that threatens to surface and disrupt the medium of language.

The phrase that implied a Lacanian reading of the neonate's consciousness, 'words/which barely stretch to cover what remains unsaid', almost replicates one from 'A Clear Note, 3 Bernadette' (*SFN 1985*). This repetition is unlikely to be Duffy's oversight as the two collections were published within two years. In 'A Clear Note' the sentence is in the past tense:

Listening
as language barely stretched to cover
what remained unsaid.

As I argued in my reading, this can be read as Bernadette's account of reading between the lines of her mother's and grandmother's conversation and implies that the child was aware of the presence of unspoken thoughts and feelings behind their words. The use of the phrase in 'A Clear Note' does not carry the Lacanian inflection that is present in the newborn child's articulation of an almost identical phrase. Duffy's repetition of the phrase in both her early collections suggests a concern with the inadequacy of language to convey consciousness that is noted by mainstream critics such as O'Driscoll, and Thomas, who has published an interesting and closely argued Lacanian analysis of several of Duffy's dramatic monologues.^{11 and 12}

The choice of the Latin title, which translates as 'Day of Birth' is enigmatic: it may be intended to signify the importance of the final re-incarnation, the human birth. An alternative reason for Duffy's choice of Latin, rather than English, is suggested by her

comment on the primacy of sound and rhythm of language, rather than signification, in the McAllister interview:

When I am writing a poem, when any poet is, what we are often trying to do is get the sound of a non-linguistic sort of music. I can have the rhythm of a whole poem in my head and no words. And it isn't music and it isn't language, it's something in between.¹³

Summary of 'Dies Natalis'

This four-part dramatic monologue with two ventriloquised speakers and two personae has a metaphysical theme which is unusual in Duffy's work, most of which demonstrates a concern for social issues and a materialist perspective of human life that can be traced back to the work of Webster. The theme of Re-incarnation is dramatised with a time-travelling consciousness that links all four speakers. This use of a singular consciousness, which is then physically embodied with four different characters, is an extension of the norm for the function of 'speaker' in dramatic monologue poems.

Duffy has used a higher density of metaphor in her first two, ventriloquial narrations than is usually present in her dramatic monologues: this functions to represent the non-human consciousnesses focused on the interaction of natural forms in the physical world rather than on human events, that is, beings that account for themselves and their environs in a different mode from human thought processes. This produces a neutral reading effect, that is, an effect of distancing objectivity rather than a sympathetic or ironic (judgmental) response to the characters' narratives. This neutrality of tone is also produced by the newborn child's narrative but to a lesser extent because the character is human. This distancing reading effect, which is different from irony, is a notable feature of 'Dies Natalis'. The effect is generated when readers are positioned by the text to focus

objectively on the use of the language rather than on the speaking presence of the character.

The third narrative, that of the man, differs from the other three because of its potential for a mixed reading-response of both irony and sympathy for the speaker that is caused by elements of misogyny, the sympathetic depiction of human loss, and the ameliorating factor of social deprivation. This narration raises the question of why Duffy has included what appears to be a conventional dramatic monologue 'speaker' in this sequence of more experimental depictions of consciousness. I argued in my opening commentary on the poem that I found the poem 'bizarre'. I followed this with a discussion of Duffy's interest in 'otherness' which I thought was relevant to some extent to this reading effect.

Certainly the ironised widower is depicted through the 'otherness' of misogyny and extreme social deprivation but this does not fully account for what I read as a misfit in the sequence of characterisations and the focus on language as consciousness. I remain puzzled by this aspect of the poem.

A Comparison of the four dramatic monologues

A distinguishing feature of Duffy's multi-voiced dramatic monologues is the use of different linking devices to connect the several narratives into one coherent poem. In 'Comprehensive' an unseen intradiegetic questioner links the responses from seven different characters; in 'Model village' an ironising, hyperdiegetic consciousness links the alternating utopian and dystopic versions of the village inhabitants; in 'Dies Natalis' the four different re-incarnations are linked by a time-travelling single consciousness; in 'A Clear Note' the three different generations of women are linked by their self-definition

through the others, that is, each woman narrates an 'autobiography' which is indivisible from the other two.

The potential for both ironic and/or sympathetic readings varies in all four poems. In 'Comprehensive' readers are positioned to respond to the narratives of the indigenous pupils ironically because of their racist attitudes and apathy to ambition and achievement. The degree of irony generated is likely to vary between a strong condemnation of the stereotypically racist, Wayne, and a more sympathetic response to Michelle and the boy who would 'like to be mates'. The immigrant pupils are depicted sympathetically as they relate their difficulties in adapting to a new culture without resorting to the racial prejudice revealed by the indigenous pupils. Readers are positioned to form a dominant reading where they sympathise with the immigrant speakers and their hopes for the future, while, on the whole, distancing themselves from the racist attitudes of the others.

'Model Village' is an ironic dramatic monologue in which irony is generated through the juxtaposition of two alternate versions of the reality of village life. Readers are positioned to recognise Duffy's scheme to ridicule, that is ironise, utopian accounts of reality. They are also positioned to recognise that, additionally, Duffy ironises a dystopian version of village life with stereotypical inhabitants. The presence of a privileged hyperdiegetic presence, that is, an ironising consciousness above the level of the two alternating and antithetical narratives, adds a further layer of irony and problematises the two conflicting versions of 'reality'. Readers are positioned to recognise this ironic strategy in the final two stanzas of the poem where the ironising narrator brings together the two versions of life in the model village and satirises them.

'A Clear Note' is a sympathetic dramatic monologue in the Webster tradition. The three women are constructed to elicit sympathy from readers. The content of their narratives, the oppression of their marriages and the strength of the loving bonds between them, are intended to be read with sympathy rather than irony. Readers are positioned to recognise the oppressive marriages and lost aspirations of the grandmother and mother, whereas the character, 'Bernadette', is depicted as liberated from the oppressions of the two older generations. This is likely to be read sympathetically but has the potential to alienate those readers who may not sympathise with her overt feminism. This potential for alienating conservative or anti-feminist readers is lessened by Bernadette's celebration of the shared aspirations and community of women.

'Dies Natalis' differs from the other three poems because it appears to generate a reading effect that is neither sympathetic nor ironic in two of the four narratives. As I argued in my reading, the cat, seagull and new-born child characters are depicted in a way that focuses on the use of language in their narrations. This conveys a neutrality of tone that is not ironic but does produce a distancing effect.

Browning has depicted extreme consciousnesses with his psychopaths and 'Caliban upon Setebos'. These characters are far removed from the norm, but they do have a consciousness that is recognisably human, albeit abnormal. Duffy's reincarnated characters, with the exception of the male speaker, produce an unexpected reading effect. Her poem is innovative in its use of the re-incarnation theme to explore the depiction of consciousness through language: but the focus on language negates one of the characteristics of the form, readers' perception of listening to a character 'speaking', and therefore reduces the effectiveness of the form rather than extending its possibilities.

There is a significant difference between 'A Clear Note' and the other three poems. In 'Comprehensive' there is a lack of interaction between the different speakers, they do not communicate with one another. As I have argued, this facilitates a simplified and clearcut dialectic between the ironised racist attitudes of the indigenous pupils and the sympathetically depicted non-prejudiced immigrant pupils. The device of non-interaction between voices is used in 'Dies Natalis', not to set up a concise dialectic but as part of Duffy's representation of re-incarnation where the single consciousness moves in time from one 'embodiment' to the next. There is no interaction between characters or with the hyperdiegetic narrator in 'Model Village'. In 'A Clear Note' interaction between the three characters is a structuring principle of the poem and produces an outstanding hybrid form of sympathetic dramatic monologue and female autobiography.

The function of extradiegetic address in the four poems is largely achieved, indirectly, through the contents of the narratives. I have argued for 'Comprehensive' that despite the subtext of the poem, an argument for racial tolerance, the implied readership of the poem is white, educated women rather than ungendered readers of diverse ethnicity. The indirect address of the poem is gendered by the ironic depiction of misogyny. The extradiegetic address of 'Model Village' is also indirect through the ironic tone of the hyperdiegetic narrator but there is also an element of extradiegetic address in the ellipsis that concludes the final narrative. 'Dies Natalis' differs from the other three poems. As I argued in my comparison of the four poems, the focus on language is likely to enforce a distancing (although not judgmental) objectivity upon readers: this can be seen as a form of indirect extradiegetic address to a readership familiar with the characteristics of the dramatic monologue form and the possibilities/limitations of language as a medium to depict consciousness. 'A Clear Note' is constructed with both intra- and extradiegetic

address. The content of the poem functions as an indirect address to women readers. The three women each address an intradiegetic audience which is at times undefined and offers the opportunity of direct extradiegetic address to readers. The three women directly address each other intradiegetically but in the final narrative Bernadette's exhortation using the second-person pronoun invokes a direct extradiegetic general female readership: 'Listen. The hopes of your thousand mothers/sing with a clear note inside you'.

Summary of the Chapter

Duffy's multi-voiced dramatic monologues demonstrate the double-stranded inheritance from Webster and Browning. Although Browning's long poem *The Ring and The Book* can be seen as the forerunner, Duffy's monologues extend the form, sometimes most effectively, as in 'A Clear Note', sometimes less so, as I commented for 'Dies Natalis'.

Duffy has remarked on her preoccupation with the 'use' of voices. This collection of four multi-voiced dramatic monologues reveals her experimentation with a range of linking devices, different strategies for positioning readers, and the interrogation of issues relating to contemporary social concerns and the more esoteric issue of the relation between language and identity.

The sum effect of this experimentation is an expansion of the form, and an increased range of subject matter and address to readers in multi-voiced dramatic monologue poems. 'A Clear Note' is an outstanding hybrid form of dramatic monologue and woman-centred autobiographical writing. Its overt inscription of feminist discourse has

culminated in Duffy's extensive adaptation and interrogation of feminist issues and theories in *The World's Wife* (1999), which is the subject of the next chapter.

NOTES

¹ This thesis is not the place to discuss the complexities of immigration and unemployment in rapidly de-industrialising western society but clearly 'Wayne' imagines that there is a socio-economic connection between his poor prospects of employment and the influx of immigrant workers into a shrinking job market.

² I have omitted the fifth collection, *The World's Wife*, from this generalised statement on readership because of the specifically 'feminist' inflection of the content.

³ Dorothy Mermin, *The Audience in the Poem: Five Victorian Poets* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

⁴ Duffy's degree in Philosophy is likely to have familiarised her with twentieth century accounts of the instability of the narrative of human 'reality'.

⁵ *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 68-77. 'Carol Ann Duffy: An Interview with Andrew McAllister', (p.71).

⁶ See Chapter One for my discussion of the 'decentred self' of women's autobiographical writing's and the tendency for women to narrate their sense of self through significant others. I cited Shari Benstock, ed., *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988) and the relevance of Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (London: University of California Press, 1978).

⁷ I am referring here to the course 'Women Writers of Britain and America from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century' which is offered to second and third year undergraduates at Lancaster University English Department. Diaries, journals, autobiographical writings, fiction and poetry written by women are studied alongside traditional and feminist critical approaches to literature.

⁸ Nancy Chodorow, (1978). Chodorow's psychoanalytical theory argues that the female psyche shows a more fluid ego boundary between mother and daughter in contrast to that of the male.

⁹ *Bête Noire*, p.70.

¹⁰ *Bête Noire*, p.70.

¹¹ Dennis O' Driscoll, 'The Day and Ever', *Poetry Review*, 80 no.3 (Autumn 1990), (pp.65-66). O'Driscoll's review of Duffy's third collection, *The Other Country*, comments that 'Duffy's poetry concerns itself, too, with the limits of language, with the

white spaces on which words leave no imprint. She is aware of how often words veil what they signify, how difficult it can be to match language to feeling'.

¹² Jane E. Thomas, 'The Intolerable Wrestle With Words', *Bête Noire*, Issue Six (Winter 1988), 78-88. Thomas offers interesting and clearly explained Lacanian readings of a small selection of Duffy's monologues and love poems including 'Model Village' (*SM* 1987), 'Standing Female Nude' (*SFN* 1985), 'Whoever She Was' (*SFN* 1985), 'Recognition' (*SM* 1987), 'The Dolphins' (*SFN* 1985).

CHAPTER FOUR: REVISIONARY MYTHOLOGY

Although Duffy is not the first monologist to 'voice' the silent women of myth and fable, her fifth collection, *The World's Wife*, is innovative in its overt marketing for a female readership and its focus on representation, in dramatic monologue form, of women as historic, contemporary, mythic, and fabular wives and lovers. The publisher's dust jacket seemingly dedicates the collection to women with the valediction to 'you, the wives of the past, the present, the future'.

The grand narrative of History has always concerned itself largely with the affairs of men. There is, however, a longstanding, literary tradition of alternative narratives from real or imaginary characters whose versions interrogate the official accounts of historical events and movements. The increasing presence of feminist literary criticism and its attendant theories in the critical mainstream has developed the literary device of articulating the 'silenced' women of history. This development in sexual/textual politics has already been extended to the narratives of literature, myth, and fable by Duffy's contemporaries, such as Fanthorpe and Carter.¹ Duffy consolidates this literary sub-genre with her revisionary and subversive women's accounts of the texts of our childhood, and, significantly, those of contemporary events with her latest collection, *The World's Wife*.

In the three previous chapters it has been part of my reconceptualisation of the form to argue that dramatic monologues can function as political texts that have the potential to stimulate readers to consider the social consequences of various social injustices, such as racial, cultural and gender inequalities. The overt dedication of this collection, quoted

above, suggests that in the context of Duffy's previous collections these new poems might substantiate the effectiveness of the dramatic monologue form to function as a political literary instrument, with the potential to disseminate feminist ideas in society. However, an intriguing political ambiguity arises in *The World's Wife* because the poems engage with feminist discourse in variable and at times contradictory ways: sometimes these inconsistencies are present within a single poem. Rees-Jones has argued that the collection as a whole returns to 1970's feminist ideas.² I, however, wish to argue for a variable and ambiguous engagement with feminist politics, the interpretation of which depends vary much on the expectations of readers.

The collection contains both sympathetic and ironic variants of the dramatic monologue form: in addition, Duffy has broadened her experimentation with the form to include an extensive use of both mild and corrosive satire. Satire is an important element of the collection, but, as my readings will show, although the incorporation of satirising techniques adds entertaining humour to the monologues, it may problematise formation of a dominant reading of the meaning of the content, and consequently offers a variety of interpretations with no consistent reading position. This inconsistency problematises argument for a feminist political function by the texts.

In my readings in this chapter I shall use the term 'split address' to denote points in the text where an intradiegetic direct address to the speaker's audience also functions as an address to extradiegetic listeners/readers. In the previous chapters of readings I have discussed this feature of the narration in terms of the *potential* to function as intra- and extradiegetic address. In *The World's Wife* there is a sense that the gendered intradiegetic address is overtly 'split' to intentionally include extradiegetic listeners. This

overt 'split address' is strongly suggested by the dedication to a female readership on the dust-jacket of the first imprint:

These poems have the pull of the past and the crack of the contemporary. Poems for a new century - vivid, funny, outrageous and entertaining - they will dazzle you, the wives of the past, the present, the future.

Duffy herself may have compiled the collection to accord with the publisher's projected readership/market. Conversely, it is possible that the poet wrote the publicity material for the 1999 hardback imprint herself.

In the argument and analyses below I consider the textual features that construct potential for a extradiegetic address to readers. In preceding chapters I have considered the positioning of readers by elements of the texts such as direct woman-to-woman address to an intradiegetic audience that has the potential to extend as an extradiegetic address to female readers; and indirect address to readers through the content/subject matter of the narrative. In my readings of poems in this chapter, I self-position as a feminist reader looking for Duffy's increased engagement with feminist ideas: consequently, I attempt to develop a feminist expansion of 'cues' in the text. Alongside this interpretation of the monologues I also analyse the different ways in which these texts address a variety of readers and acknowledge that there is no consistent positioning of specific readers: the address is variable and embraces many different categories of reader. In monologues with an overt female-gendered address, I cite the relevance of Hutcheon's concept of 'discursive communities'.³

Duffy's characters include the silenced and often discontented wives of patriarchy's myths re-visioned to tell their own story of the pain of loss or the triumph of revenge; others depict an alternative, woman-centred account for the emerging mythology of the

twentieth century, such as, the demonisation of Myra Hindley. I have chosen four poems for analysis and discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the collection as a whole, and to demonstrate the variety of form and range of literary, mythological and contemporary narratives with which the texts engage: 'Little Red-Cap' and 'Eurydice' interrogate gender issues relevant to the production and dissemination of poetry; 'Mrs Beast' exemplifies the problematic interpretation of satiric texts that applies to many of the dramatic monologues in this collection; 'The Devil's Wife' interrogates a notorious contemporary case of child-abuse and murder. At the end of the chapter I include general comments on other less innovative poems in the collection.

'LITTLE RED-CAP'

Duffy's collection opens with a triumphant heroine, 'Little Red-Cap', a subversion of the traditional folk tale, 'Little Red Riding Hood'. The plot is transposed to the twentieth century and the speaker is depicted as an adolescent female in contemporary urban surroundings:

At childhood's end, the houses petered out
 into playing fields, the factory, allotments
 kept like mistresses, by kneeling married men,
 the silent railway line, the hermit's caravan,
 till you came at last to the edge of the woods.
 It was there that I first clapped eyes on the wolf.

A satiric tone is conveyed with 'clapped eyes on the wolf'. The second stanza confirms the satire and emulates the folk tale in the heroine's encounter with the wolf, but Duffy's subversion uses the wolf as a metaphor for a poet working at the margins of the poetry establishment:

He stood in a clearing, reading his verse out loud
 in his wolfy drawl, a paperback in his hairy paw,
 red wine staining his bearded jaw. What big ears

he had! What big eyes he had! What teeth!

The mode of depiction moves from the metaphorical back into the realist as 'Little Red-Cap' reveals her strategy to be seduced by this fearsome creature because he offers access to the world of poetry:

In the interval I made quite sure he spotted me,
 sweet sixteen, never been, babe, waif, and bought me a drink,
 my first. You might ask why. Here's why. Poetry.

Satire is not used in the third stanza for the depiction of the heroine's struggles to follow the wolf 'deep into the woods,/away from home', tearing her clothes in the undergrowth and ripping her red school blazer.

In the fourth stanza Duffy subverts the original narrative to position her heroine as actively seeking a sexual liason with the wolf/poet: 'I clung till dawn to his thrashing fur, for/what little girl doesn't dearly love a wolf?'. This is followed enigmatically by:

Then I slid from between his heavy matted paws
 and went in search of a living bird - white dove -
 which flew, straight, from my hands to his open mouth.
 One bite, dead. How nice, breakfast in bed, he said,
 licking his chops...

If this is read as a metaphorical account representing a young female poet's encounter with a male poet it can be decoded as his insensitive dismissal of her poem, the 'white dove', or his plagiarism of her work. The satire of the rhyming and brusque concision of 'One bite, dead. How nice, breakfast in bed, he said ' contributes towards an ambiguity in decoding the metaphors that I shall discuss after this first reading.

The attraction for her is his lair, 'where a whole wall was crimson, gold, aglow with books', which can be decoded as the contemporary poetry 'scene' to which she desires access. She stays with the wolf for ten years for the sake of apprenticeship as a poet: 'Words, words were truly alive on the tongue, in the head, / warm, beating, frantic, winged; music and blood.'

The satiric tone of the narrative is stronger in the last two stanzas where, having served her apprenticeship as a poet, Little Red-Cap narrates the end of her liason using clunking rhyme and alliteration to vilify the wolf-poet and the moribund poetic tropes that he 'howls':

a greying wolf
 howls the same old song at the moon, year in, year out,
 season after season, same rhyme, same reason. I took an axe
 to a willow to see how it wept. I took an axe to a salmon
 to see how it leapt.

In the original tale the heroine is saved from the wolf by the intervention of a woodcutter. In Duffy's subverted account Little Red-Cap is her own rescuer and takes an axe to kill the wolf/poet and, implicitly, to escape from the domination of worn-out poetic conventions:

I took an axe to the wolf
 as he slept, one chop, scrotum to throat, and saw
 the glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones.
 I filled his old belly with stones, I stitched him up.

The 'grandmother's bones' that she discovers when she dispatches the wolf/poet can be read as the lost tradition of women's poetry remarked upon by critics such as Montefiore.⁴

Little Red-Cap emerges from the difficulties and strangeness of the woods and finally returns to her own village as a poet. She has a poetic voice of her own, having rejected the worn-out metaphors of the love poem and the pastoral tradition represented by the wolf-poet and his lacklustre conventions: 'Out of the forest I come with my flowers, singing, all alone.' There is some tension here between the heroine's invocation of 'flowers' to signify her poems and her previous dismissal of pastoral imagery implied by 'I took an axe/to a willow to see how it wept'. Duffy may be depicting her heroine as ironically playing with the metaphor of 'flowers' for her poems. This would characterise Little Red-Cap as feigning innocence when she re-emerges into the world from the forest: only the listeners/readers of her history know what went on in 'the forest'.

The satiric narrative of the first three stanzas parallels and subverts the original folktale until Little Red-Cap explores the wolf's lair; thereafter there is the potential to decode feminist polemic from the figurative language. Little Red-Cap's narrative of her struggle to become a poet, begins with her apprenticeship to the 'wolfy', wine-stained poet reading his verse 'at the edge of the woods': an allegory for the progress of a young, female poet starting from the margins of a male-dominated tradition. This satiric, autobiographical style of narrative concludes with her emergence from the forest 'singing, all alone': an allegorical representation of her critical recognition as a 'new voice' in the poetry establishment.

Extradiegetic Address and Feminist Discourse

There is an ungendered, unvoiced listener in the text to whom Little Red-Cap is re-telling the folk tale now refashioned into an explanation of the perils and pleasure of her search for validation as a poet. The use of the second-person pronoun in the rhetorical question

of the third stanza, 'you might ask why' potentially functions as a direct, split address to both the unvoiced, intradiegetic listener/s of the poem and extradiegetic listeners/readers. The intimate tone of the narration, contemporary diction and use of the currently fashionable phrase 'stitched him up' is specifically accessible to contemporary listeners/readers

The characters of the plot have the potential to function as markers for feminist polemic. The wolf, satirically delineated with animal imagery, is cast as the villain: and can represent the male traditions of the canon. Little Red-Cap, the novice female poet, is seduced by this tradition in adolescence until after her apprenticeship to poetry 'it took ten years/in the woods' she rejects this tradition by killing the wolf and finding a hidden tradition of women poets, 'the glistening, virgin white of my grandmother's bones'.

Readers directly addressed by 'you might ask why' are potentially positioned to unravel the allegorical meaning of Little Red-Cap's life and recognise a polemical significance. Duffy's re-visioned folktale appears to interrogate an issue that has been much discussed and theorised in contemporary feminist literary criticism, that is, the difficulty for women to write as poets when they have traditionally fulfilled the role of 'muse' for the male poet. Montefiore and others have theorized the problematic interaction of gender difference and poetic tradition.⁵ 'Little Red-Cap' appears to dialogue with this feminist issue.

However, the use of satire problematises argument for a dominant reading of the poem where readers will identify the poem as a positive feminist statement on the status of female poets. The status of the indirect address of the content is ambiguous because

readers are offered two opposing reading positions through the use of satire. Readers alert and sympathetic to the feminist potential of the narrative may read the protagonist sympathetically and ironise the wolf-poet: readers unsympathetic to, or ignorant of the encoded feminist issue may read both the female speaker and the wolf-poet ironically, particularly if the ending is read as feigned innocence (as I commented above).

Although 'Little Red-Cap' is based on a simple folktale, Duffy's re-vision can be read as a more complex, and potentially triple-layered narrative where a third layer of autobiographical meaning is possible by means of Duffy's use of metaphor. Even in the absence of biographic details of Duffy's life it would be obtuse to argue that this dramatic monologue is not connected to aspects of Duffy's own experience as a female poet. It is possible that a general readership will include elements of this interpretation into their reading.

If the notion of an 'informed reader' is used, one able to contextualise the narrative with the detailed factual information on Duffy's life and work that is now available, and perhaps witness (as I am) to Duffy's statements and political posture in her poetry readings, a closer biographical reading of the young 'imaginary' poet's narrative can be constructed.⁶ The plot of the dramatic monologue can be closely aligned to events in Duffy's own life, for example, her liason with the wolf/poet, her subsequent involvement with the Liverpool group of poets, and her final break with the group to pursue her career in London.

However, it is unlikely that 'Little Red-Cap' positions the generality of readers to form this interpretation of the content as feminist and/or autobiographical. As I argued above,

the satire inhibits a simple biographic reading of the narrative, and is likely to permit a variety of reading positions from which to read the narrator with sympathy or irony .

Summary of 'Little Red-Cap'.

There is a polemic force to the position of this text as the first in the collection if 'Little Red-Cap' is read as a sympathetic dramatic monologue in which Duffy uses the mask of a subversive folktale heroine to dramatise an issue of sexual/textual politics. However, the incorporation of satire may obscure the delineation between sympathy and irony and position some readers, particularly if antagonistic to 'feminism' , to read aspects of the heroine ironically. Readers who align themselves with a discursive community that includes recognition of the literary articulation and political purpose of feminist ideas are more likely to recognise 'Little Red-Cap' as a sympathetic and entertainingly satirised characterisation, but one where the satire introduces continual ambiguity into interpretation of the narrative.

The interrogation of masculinist traditions of poetry, problematically thematized in 'Little Red Cap', is also articulated in 'Eurydice', a narrative which potentially encodes a feminist critique of poetics and publishing practices, in which Duffy re-vision the myth of Orpheus whose sublime musicianship charmed inanimate Nature to a magical response.

'EURYDICE'

Duffy gives a voice to silent Eurydice, the beloved wife whose early death caused Orpheus to undertake the perilous journey to the Underworld to regain her.⁷ In contrast to 'Little Red-Cap', this satiric subversion of the original does not change the plot to a

contemporary scenario. In this re-vision the plot remains that of Orpheus's thwarted attempt to regain Eurydice, but Duffy contemporises Eurydice's diction and style of address to her listeners. In contrast to the silent muse of the myth, Eurydice is a rebellious out-spoken wife, totally adamant that she wishes to stay separated from her boring, poetizing husband and at peace in the Underworld:

in the one place you'd think a girl would be safe
 from the kind of man
 who follows her around
 writing poems,
 hovers about
 while she reads them,
 calls her His Muse,

Duffy's speaker, satirically trivialising her husband's achievements with 'Aardvark to zebra' and 'Wept wee silver tears', illustrates the irreverence characteristic of much revisionary mythology and articulates a coded rejection of the overworked imagery of the pastoral tradition:

Big O was the boy. Legendary.
 The blurb on the back of his books claimed
 that animals,
 aardvark to zebra,
 flocked to his side when he sang,
 fish leapt in their shoals
 at the sound of his voice,
 even the mute, sullen stones at his feet
 wept wee, silver tears.

However, Eurydice's diatribe incorporates more than a character assassination of 'Big O' the 'Legendary' musician and poet: her disputatious account of the mythological first sonneteer also appears to articulate a feminist interrogation of male domination of the literary canon, and the means of its perpetuation.

In the original tale, Orpheus goes to Hades and through his extraordinary gift of music persuades the Gods to release his wife, under certain conditions, to follow him back to

earth: her (sub)version of the story is 'In fact, girls, I'd rather be dead'. She complains that her audience only knows of the male-oriented version of her fate: the 'deal' between Orpheus and the Gods. She conflates this male perspective in the legend with male-oriented publishing practices:

But the Gods are like publishers,
usually male,
and what you doubtless know of my tale
is the deal.

This allusion to male publishing practices offers a position to feminist readers to contextualise the narrator's complaint with Montefiore's historicized account of this contentious issue where male-authored texts and male publishers dominate the production of literature.⁸ Eurydice's narrative may also be read as an encryption of feminist critique such as Russ's analysis of the commercial reality of marginalisation for the work of women writers and poets.⁹ However, I shall argue later in my reading that, as in 'Little Red-Cap' the entertaining satire incorporated into the narrative problematises argument for an unequivocal reading of the poem as feminist.

Much of the humour of this satirised narration is effected by the flatly declarative style of Eurydice's speech incorporating contemporary tropes, such as 'Past my sell-by date' and 'It suited me down to the ground', that position her as both a contemporary young woman and a classical figure from Greek mythology. The overall effect de-historicizes her exasperation at his egocentric stance and converts his idiosyncratic failing into a universal characteristic of male sonneteers. The satiric effect of the ponderous inevitability of 'knock-knock-knock' reduces Orpheus to a pantomime figure:

Just picture my face
when I heard-
Ye Gods-
a familiar knock-knock-knock at Death's door.

Eurydice's condemnation of her husband includes allusion to canonic writers and poetic conventions of the love poem. Here she voices her desire to change her role, from Muse to female poet, in her covert citation of Shakespeare and Robert Graves:

And given my time all over again,
rest assured that I'd rather speak for myself
than be Dearest, Beloved, Dark lady, White Goddess,
etc., etc.

Her articulation encodes the problematic relation between female gender and the signifier 'poet' that is historic reality and continues to the present day.¹⁰

Her derision targets the self-possession of male sonneteers whose Muse clearly reflects their own emotional and aesthetic responses, which are the true subject of their love poetry.¹¹ This derision focuses on a critique of objectification of the female muse, and the poetic conventions employed:

Eurydice, Orpheus' wife -
to be trapped in his images, metaphors, similes,
octaves and sextets, quatrains and couplets,
elegies, limericks, villanelles,
histories, myths...

At the beginning of her monologue Duffy's protagonist employs a gender-specific direct address to her listeners:

Girls, I was dead and down
in the Underworld, a shade,
a shadow of my former self, nowhen

'Girls' can function as a 'split' address to identify the presence of a female-gendered intradiegetic audience, and to address an extradiegetic female readership. This female-gendered extradiegetic address has the potential function of positioning female readers to

consider the speaker's complaints and perhaps recognise the feminist ideas that I have discussed in my reading. However, as in the previous poem, the use of satire produces ambiguity in the positioning of readers and problematises argument for the text as feminist polemic.

For this particular monologue I need to problematize another aspect of 'split' address. Eurydice's address to 'Girls' implies an intradiegetic audience but the scenario of a gathering of the narrator and her 'Girls' is not delineated. If Eurydice is back in Hades, who are the 'Girls' she addresses? They do not feature in the original myth. An interpretation of this is that Duffy has deliberately or inadvertently created a 'utopian' space for the narrative, from which Eurydice addresses a contemporary audience of readers. Read in this way, Eurydice's address can be interpreted as a gendered direct address explicitly to extradiegetic readers, rather than as a 'split' address to include an intradiegetic audience of females. This address functions to convert Eurydice's personal testament to a public statement that ambiguously interrogates the sexual politics of the writing and publication of literature.

Eurydice exhorts her listeners/readers, 'Girls', to believe her subverted account of events rather than the traditional, male-oriented legend: 'So imagine me there' and 'then picture my face in that place'. Throughout the narration, which follows the classical plot, she reinforces this effect by repeating her address to her female listeners: 'Just picture my face' and 'In fact, girls, I'd rather be dead'. The potential gendered address to her extradiegetic audience with the repeated injunctions to re-visualize the myth through a woman's eyes would be both persuasive and didactic were it not for the ambiguity caused by the use of satire.

At that point of the classical narrative where tension is greatest, Orpheus is about to lose his beloved wife, Eurydice uses a more insistent address containing internal and end rhymes which intensify the satiric tone:

Girls, forget what you've read.
 It happened like this –
 I did everything in my power
 to make him look back.
 What did I have to do, I said,
 to make him see we were through?
 I was dead. Deceased.
 I was resting in Peace. Passe. Late.
 Past my sell-by-date...

This stanza continues with a change from robust satire to a more earnest tone:

I stretched out my hand
 To touch him once
 On the back of his neck.
Please let me stay.
 But already the light had saddened from purple to grey.

The satire is resumed as Eurydice triumphantly narrates her successful ploy to trick Orpheus out of his contract with the King of Hades not to look at his wife until he reaches earth, and regain her peace in the underworld away from his oppressive poetising:

when inspiration finally struck.
 I stopped, thrilled.
 He was a yard in front.
 My voice shook when I spoke -
Orpheus, your poem's a masterpiece.
I'd love to hear it again...

He was smiling modestly
 when he turned,
 when he turned and he looked at me.

At the end of the poem the style of narration changes from satire to philosophical meditation:

The dead are so talented.
 The living walk by the edge of a vast lake
 near, the wise, drowned silence of the dead.

The semantic ambiguity of this ending, caused by the abstraction of 'The dead' and 'The living' makes a definitive interpretation problematic. The use of 'wise' in the final line, however, suggests that a sympathetic rather than ironic reading is appropriate. 'The wise, drowned silence of the dead' can be traced back to Eurydice's assertion that 'In fact, girls, I'd rather be dead' when she complains about her entrapment as Muse in her husband's poetry. It can also be read as an allusion to the lost tradition of female writers that has been extensively researched and theorized by feminist commentators.¹² The change in tone and the expression of regret suggests that this final voice may not be Eurydice's and can be read as a hyperdiegetic comment that functions to identify the problem of the unreclaimable writings of women over the millennia of literature production.

Extradiegetic Address and Satire

I shall summarize my analysis of the address in 'Eurydice'. Eurydice's critique is contemporised by tropes and slogans from mass entertainment that characterise her as both a figure from classical mythology and a speaker contemporaneous with readers. The notion of a utopian space, that I discussed above, converts her vocative 'Girls' to a potential explicit direct address to actual female readers and positions them to listen to what she has to say. I suggest that the overall effect of contemporary diction, utopian location and gendered address creates an added intimacy between the speaker and her extradiegetic listeners. The speaker's tone throughout is contemptuous of the valorization of her husband's achievements; her female listeners are instructed repeatedly with a woman-centred version of the myth.

There is the potential for a new dynamic in the extradiegetic address of the form here because the speaker can function as an instrument for consciousness-raising, a marker for feminist polemic. As I commented elsewhere, Langbaum has theorized a dynamic that bears some similarity to this reading effect with his concept of the strengthening of a reader's moral sensibility through reading Browning's ironic dramatic monologues. In this dramatic monologue however, if readers identify Eurydice as a sympathetic, rather

than ironised, narrator their awareness of feminist issues may be increased, not through ultimate rejection of their 'empathy' with the speaker but through direct recognition of the issues being voiced by the character, as would be the case in the 'sympathetic' monologues of Webster.

However, I have to problematic this reading for 'Eurydice' as a sympathetic dramatic monologue with a feminist polemic in the narrative. There is argument for the narrator as a sympathetic representation: this can be validated by differentiating between levels of satire used for Eurydice and Orpheus, the Eurydice character is satirised less heavily than her husband. But, as I discussed in reading 'Little Red-Cap', the use of satire produces ambiguous positioning of readers with the potential for various sympathetic or ironic responses from readers: those unsympathetic to feminist ideas, may read the narrator ironically as the representation of an 'over-the-top' feminist; feminist readers looking for recognition of gender issues may argue that the use of satire offers the opportunity for irony and muddies the literary politics of the poem thus reducing its effectiveness as a feminist critique.

The change in mood of the final lines, from the aggression of Eurydice's character assassination to the closing regret and sense of loss, may counter the potential for irony for readers expecting to recuperate Duffy's text as a feminist poem. Nevertheless Duffy's creative use of satire, which she clearly enjoys, causes indeterminacy in the overall tone of the monologue. Orpheus is strongly ridiculed but Eurydice is also delineated satirically although her exposition of her relation to Orpheus encodes the experience of contemporary women poets in a male-oriented tradition.¹³

In my earlier discussion of the 'mask' in preceding chapters I suggested that in some of Duffy's texts the 'mask' slips, that is, a lyrical element enters the poem. This is the case in 'Eurydice'. At the end of the monologue the dramatic mask slips in an illustration of the tension between self-concealment and self-expression that is likely to develop when

the poet dramatizes a situation that parallels her own. In Duffy's text this slippage is an overt device that may have been intended to add the gravitas of political purpose to the content but is problematised by the satire of the preceding narrative.

The direct gender-specific address throughout the monologue which I have discussed in my own reading is broad enough through the contemporaneity of Eurydice's diction and syntax to extend to female readers in general, but the sustained critique of male-oriented poetics and publishing practices, and the citation of more esoteric mythological figures, Sisyphus and Tantalus, facilitates a specific address to academic readers, though neither is exclusive of the other.

My final comment on this text concerns a discrepancy between an earlier version of the poem and that published in this collection. In the initial publication of the poem in *Poetry Review* Eurydice cites Orpheus's inadequacy as a lover.¹⁴ The simile used is often quoted by feminist 'stand-up' comedians and will be familiar to many readers:

Bollocks. Furthermore,
we've all, let's be honest,
been bored half to death by a man
who fucks like he's writing a book.

The version in this collection has been rewritten as:

Bollocks. (I'd done all the typing myself,
I should know.)

The original passage spreads the satiric attack from a critique of canonic male-oriented conventions to overt female chauvinism and has potential to alienate the conservative reading community identified by the publisher's dust jacket 'you, the wives of the past, the present, the future'. The preferred version removes the risk of alienation and also alludes to an issue of sexual/textual politics: many acclaimed poets do not acknowledge

the work put into their projects by the female members of their family - Milton and Wordsworth come immediately to mind.

Summary of 'Eurydice'

Duffy's use of satire creates humorous play with 'feminism' but also produces ambiguity in interpretation as I have discussed above. The status of the poem is uncertain: readers may differ in categorising it as a satiric variant of the sympathetic monologue or, conversely, as a satiric variant of the ironic form.

Although satirised, Eurydice's narrative is likely to be relevant to Duffy's own early experience as a poet. Her depiction of this mythical female character, using contemporary diction, dehistoricises her complaint of women's disempowerment as the muse of male poets. At the same time the character's direct address to female extradiegetic readers extends the explanation of this issue from the status of private statement to that of a public articulation of gender politics. However, as I commented above, the satire prevents an unproblematised correlation between the narrator's rage at her fate and a reading of the poem as feminist critique of sexual/textual politics.

In my analysis I have decoded tropes in the text as 'cues' that identify feminist concepts and theories concerned with sexual/textual politics.¹⁵ However, I cannot claim that the monologue overall is a feminist text. The satire is entertaining, which **should** increase its appeal to readers, that is, increase the readership. It also creates ambiguity about the representation of the speaker: is Eurydice depicted sympathetically or is she ironised? This will vary from reader to reader. No one category of reader is positioned by the indirect address of the content. This varies throughout the narrative, with, as I identified, an elegiac tone at the end of the narrative that potentially functions as a hyperdiegetic comment, attributable to the implied author. The hyperdiegetic comment may position readers to read Eurydice and her rage with Orpheus sympathetically: conversely it may

be so opaque to a general readership that it contributes further to the indeterminacy of the narrative that I have discussed.

The robust satire and gendered extradiegetic direct address to female readers also characterises Duffy's subversion of the fantasy romance, 'Beauty and the Beast'

'MRS BEAST'

I have chosen this monologue as representative of a large proportion of the poems in Duffy's collection which are infused in various ways with feminist ideas and incorporate varying degrees of satire. Some of the monologues are substantial in length, if not in gravitas, others approximate to a simple joke:

Mrs Icarus

I'm not the first or the last
to stand on a hillock, watching the man she married
prove to the world
he's a total, utter, absolute, Grade A pillock.

'Mrs Beast' exemplifies the complexity and indeterminacy that can arise in satiric texts. As in the previous poems of this chapter, the incorporation of satire prevents the construction of a dominant meaning for the narrative. This absence of a dominant reading suggests that the narrative will produce an effect of multiple address to different readers: this negates identification of an implied or preferred reader for the poem. My reading and analysis will illustrate the difficulty of identifying coherent reader positioning by textual elements. Duffy uses a traditional theatrical and literary device, role reversal, which should not confuse readers in itself, but the addition of heavy satire causes ambiguity in substantiating a polemic function for the text.

The narrative of 'Mrs Beast' is a strongly satirised, and therefore potentially ironised, articulation of female empowerment. The major events of the narrative are constructed with a satirised re-vision of the plot of the fairy tale, 'Beauty and the Beast', and a satiric parody of the cinematic cliché, the 'gangsters' Poker night'. The ending of the poem relinquishes the satiric mode with an elegiac passage that challenges the credibility of the gender politics of the satirised role reversal.

This mixture of satire, parody, and elegy causes difficulty in establishing a dominant reading of the narrative because, as I commented above, the opportunity for irony is variable throughout the narrative. Because of this complexity I shall paraphrase more than I generally do in my readings in order to open out the effect of the satire.

The speaker's narration of female empowerment is focused on a critique of the negative portrayal of women in the texts of history, literature and contemporary mass entertainment. This negative representation of women has been influential in feminist criticism since Millet's *Sexual Politics* identified male-authored representations of women as disempowering because of the objectification of their beauty or lack of it, and the depiction of them as passive and dependent upon men's agency.¹⁶ This disempowerment is inverted in the narrative of Mrs Beast's sexual relations with men, and the 'Poker' night and consequently implies that the narrative is addressed to feminist readers.

In the original fairytale a seemingly powerful yet courteous beast is tamed and regains his true nature as a devoted lover when an innocent, young and beautiful girl, forced to live in his house, agrees to marry him out of pity. In Duffy's re-vision the innocent young girl is replaced by the powerful and independent female protagonist who declares her intention to change the depiction of women's dependency upon men. She lists the legendary icons of female beauty and asserts her goal, a reassessment of the women of legend and literature:

These myths going round, these legends, fairytales,
 I'll put them straight; so when you stare
 into my face – Helen's face, Cleopatra's,
 Queen of Sheba's, Juliet's – then, deeper,
 gaze into my eyes – Nefetiti's, Mona Lisa's,
 Garbo's eyes - think again.

In her address to an intradiegetic audience: 'so when you stare/into my face [...] think again' she challenges them to reconsider their understanding of these women from the past. As in several of the poems, Duffy uses the second-person pronoun that implies one or more listeners within the narrative but also constructs a split-address to extradiegetic listeners/readers. There is the potential here to read the address as one that positions male readers to 'listen' because the narrator is challenging the notion of tragic heroines perpetuated by the conventions of male-authored narratives with 'think again', and positioning her listener/s as one who gazes avidly at these icons of feminine beauty. This potential positioning of a male audience is not continued through the rest of the narrative.

The narrator reminds her listener/s of Hans Andersen's mermaid with diction that contemporises the mermaid's story, and suggests how the fictional mermaid might have achieved a more satisfactory end to her relations with men:

The Little Mermaid slit
 her shining, silver tail in two, rubbed salt
 into that stinking wound, got up and walked,
 in agony, in fishnet tights, stood up and smiled, waltzed,
 all for a Prince, a pretty boy, a charming one
 who'd dump her in the end, chuck her, throw her overboard.
 I could have told her - look, love, I should know,
 they're bastards when they're Princes.
 What you want to do is find yourself a Beast. The sex
 is better.

The intradiegetic address of the last three lines suggests a split address to both a female audience and extradiegetic readers. The recommendation to the mermaid, who is a

hypodiegetic, absent character in the narrative, 'to find yourself a Beast' is more appropriate as a split address to a female, rather than male, audience.

The contemporisation of the mermaid's fate functions to de-historicise the heroine's downfall to construct a correlation of the fate of legendary, betrayed heroines with the social practices of contemporary society. There is brutality in the image of a 'shiny, silver tail' cut in two to form a 'stinking wound' that violently invokes a depiction of female masochism in the mermaid's acceptance of self-wounding in order to attract the Prince and conform to his notion of beauty. This resonates with feminist argument that women's continuing attempts to maintain relations with men against their own interests is a form of female masochism. There is also humorous and witty play with language and image in the mermaid's 'fishnet tights'. The juxtaposition of this humour with the shocking image of female masochism is symptomatic of the complexity and indeterminacy that pervades the narrative.

The next stanza functions as a satirised subversion of the conventional narratives of Romantic Love. The speaker is depicted as an empowered, worldly-wise and economically-independent agent:

What you want to do is find yourself a Beast. The sex
is better. Myself, I came to the House of the Beast
no longer a girl, knowing my own mind,
my own gold stashed in the bank,
my own black horse at the gates
ready to carry me off at one wrong word,
one false move, one dirty look.

The satiric mode continues as the narrator recounts her sexual life with her chosen lover. The traditional Romantic characterisation of the lover is subverted as bestial and grovelling for her attention:

But the Beast fell to his knees at the door
 to kiss my glove with his mongrel lips - good -
 showed by the tears in his bloodshot eyes
 that he knew he was blessed - better -
 didn't try to conceal his erection,
 size of a mule's - best. And the Beast
 watched me open, decant and quaff
 a bottle of Chateau Margaux '54,
 the year of my birth, before he lifted a paw.

The direct split address of 'I'll tell you more' that starts the next stanza emphasises the presence of an intradiegetic audience but has the same function of address for extradiegetic readers/listeners. The strongly satirised, scatological passage is dense with sexual and bestial imagery:

I'll tell you more. Stripped of his muslin shirt
 and his corduroys, he steamed in his pelt,
 ugly as sin. He had the grunts, the groans, the yelps,
 the breath of a goat. I had the language, girls.
 The lady says Do this. Harder. The lady says
 Do that. Faster. The lady says That's not where I meant.
 At last it all made sense. The pig in my bed
 was *invited*. And if his snout and trotters fouled
 my damask sheets, why, then, he'd wash them. Twice.
 Meantime, here was his horrid leather tongue
 to scour between my toes. Here
 were his hooked and yellowy claws to pick my nose,
 if I wanted that.

In a subversion of the original fable the heroine does not redeem her lover from his enchantment to regain his true self as a princely hero. Here the 'beast' does not have a hidden better nature. The protagonist relates her empowerment through her recognition of this and her ability to control and enjoy what the 'beast' has to offer in their relationship. This section of the narrative is explicitly gendered in the split address to listeners and extradiegetic readers, 'I had the language, girls'. The perverse detail of these sensual images and the empowerment of the heroine in the sexual act constructs a Rabelaisian, erotic scenario of sexual relations that is a satirised subversion of the

conventions of Romantic Love. It may also be read as an ironic, excessively sexualised representation of the 'revenge fantasy' texts that Modleski argues may offer female readers recompense for the disappointments of their real-life relations with men.¹⁷

The next passage begins with the protagonist's ironically humorous comment 'Need I say more'. In the light of the scatology of the previous stanza this can be interpreted in two ways: it can function as a split address inferring that she is confident that her listeners have got the 'message' of her empowerment through the subversion of normal sexual relations, or it can be read as an ironising hyperdiegetic voice, attributable to the implied author, which functions as a device calling attention to the dynamic excess of scatological imagery.

In this section of the narrative, the speaker identifies herself as the spokeswoman for a group of 'fantastic' lesbian characters subverted from myth and fairy tale, depicted as strong, independent women who meet to play Poker:

We were a hard school, tough as fuck,
all of us beautiful and rich - the Woman
who married a Minotaur, Goldilocks, the Bride
of the Bearded Lesbian, Frau Yellow Dwarf, et Moi'

The satiric treatment of the role reversal creates a parody of the stereotype of tough masculinity, familiar from mid-century American gangster films: the 'boys' night out becomes the girls' night out, playing poker for high stakes:

One night,
a head-to-head between Frau Yellow Dwarf and Bearded's Bride
was over the biggest pot I'd seen in my puff.
The Frau had the Queen of Clubs on the baize
and Bearded the Queen of Spades. Final card. Queen each.
Frau Yellow raised. Bearded raised. Goldilock's eyes
were glued to the pot as though porridge bubbled there.
The Minotaur's wife lit a stinking cheroot. Me,
I noticed the Frau's hand shook as she placed her chips.
Bearded raised her a final time, then stared,

stared so hard you felt your dress would melt
 if she blinked. I held my breath. Frau Yellow
 swallowed hard, then called. Sure enough, Bearded flipped
 her Aces over; diamonds, hearts, the public Ace of Spades.
 And that was a lesson learnt by all of us -
 the drop-dead gorgeous Bride of the Bearded Lesbian didn't
 bluff.

The simple device of parodying the cinematic cliché by substituting female for male
 Poker players is made more innovative and entertaining by Duffy's accurate details of the
 card-play, and the celebratory depiction of her subverted characters as lesbian.

In the next stanza the narrator refers back to victimised female characters of history,
 myth and fable but depicts them as resentful of their fate:

But behind each player stood a line of ghosts
 unable to win. Eve, Ashputtel, Marilyn Monroe .
 Rapunzel slashing wildly at her hair.
 Bessie Smith unloved and down and out
 Bluebeard's wives, Henry VIII's, Snow White
 cursing the day she left the seven dwarfs, Diana
 Princess of Wales.

This satiric allusion, mixing mythical with actual historic women, causes ambiguity in
 deciphering the meaning of this section of narrative: 'Rapunzel slashing wildly at her
 hair' is ambiguous in its meaning; 'Snow White/cursing the day she left the seven dwarfs'
 is comic; but the allusions to 'Henry VIII's [wives] and the fates of Bessie Smith and
 Diana, Princess of Wales are likely to be read sympathetically by readers who recognise
 these women as victims of their unequal power relations with male-oriented social
 practices.

The stanza ends with the group toasting the silent-film actress Fay Wray, the heroine
 captured by the giant ape in the film 'King Kong':

and we stood for the toast - *Fay Wray* -
 then tossed our fiery drinks to the back of our crimson
 throats.
 Bad girls. Serious girls. Mourning our dead.

The final line reads as the narrator's acknowledgement, 'Bad girls', of the lesbian group's subversion of societal conventions. The ambiguous 'Serious ladies' assertion suggests that the narrator is claiming that the group is powerful and not to be taken lightly, but there is also the implication that the satiric representation of the characters in the poker night scenario may have a serious political agenda encrypted into the entertaining satire.

The non-satirized strand of the narrative constructed with actual female characters emerges more overtly in the elegiac closing lines of the monologue, where, after rejecting the beast, 'turfing him out of bed', she stands alone thinking of 'those tragic girls'. Her prayer is articulated in the discourse of Roman Catholicism:

...And I made a prayer –
 thumbing my pearls, the tears of Mary, one by one,
 like a rosary – words for the lost, the captive beautiful,
 the wives, those less fortunate than we.

This is followed with two lines of metaphor conveying allusions to ephemerality, femininity and women of the past that are unvoiced in society's narratives of history and myth. The imagery is innovative and clearly related to conventional aesthetics:

The moon was a hand-mirror breathed on by a Queen.
 My breath was a chiffon scarf for an elegant ghost.

The monologue ends with her resumption of relations with the beast. Her final plea that she should remain in control of their relationship through a degree of emotional detachment implied that this control is uncertain:

I turned to go back inside. Bring me the Beast for the night.
Bring me the wine-cellar key. Let the less-loving one be me.

Satire and the Inscription of Gender Politics

Baldick defines satire as 'a mode of writing that exposes the failings of individuals, institutions or societies to ridicule and scorn'.¹⁸ Several sections of the narrative of 'Mrs Beast' could be read in this way. I have suggested in my reading that there is a covert inscription of feminist polemic embedded in the opening lines of the monologue that a feminist reader may categorise as an interrogation of two issues of gender politics, that is, women's disadvantage in the dynamics of heterosexual relations, and the objectification and victimisation of women in myth, history and contemporary society. However, the satire also facilitates an alternative reading of an ironic critique of female empowerment.

The satire and the feminist polemic of the narrative work against one another to produce a poem that cannot be categorised unequivocally as either a coherent satiric and ironic 'send-up' of female empowerment, or as a satiric but sympathetic vehicle for the feminist polemic for which I have argued. Because the narrative is complex, perhaps even muddled, I shall re-state the different elements that construct discontinuous sympathetic or ironising reading positions throughout the narrative.

The scenario of this dramatic monologue depicts a narrator who is telling her audience that the narratives of history and literature have misrepresented women and their relation to men. The protagonist relates her own life as that of an empowered woman who has found the strategies to overcome male dominance. She depicts herself as a dominant, 'masculinist' woman but throughout the monologue the overlay of heavy satire may offer readers the opportunity to ironise and ridicule the notion of female empowerment as a means to gender equality through this simplistic strategy of role reversal and the depiction of dominant, masculinist women.

Where the satire is replaced by the elegiac imagery of the final lines, the credibility of the notion of female dominance is again challenged: Mrs Beast's satirised celebration of her dominance of her lover's bestial nature is undermined by the non-satirised elegiac ending, where she resorts to the prayer that things might be otherwise in the actual power relation of the sexes, 'Let the less-loving one be me'.

The inclusion of the unhappy fates of actual, historic women threads an element of sympathy into the text, where the major satiric mode of the poem breaks down and readers may recognise the text as more than a satiric critique of the concept of female empowerment. This strategy of positioning readers for a sympathetic response to the narrative is privileged at the end of the monologue: this is likely to strengthen the response. However, reference back to the earlier passages that are strongly satirised problematises a simple delineation of the dialectic of the text.

The two most heavily satirised passages in the narrative are the descriptions of the speaker's sexual intercourse with the beast and the lesbian Poker night. A dominant reading of the first passage is unlikely: conservative readers will be alienated by the violence of the language and imagery; others may enjoy the scatology but find it difficult to identify the target of the satire and to decide whether the beastly behaviour of the male lover is the target of ridicule, or, that the ridicule and irony should include both the beast and the protagonist who shares in the strongly satirised events of the narrative. If both characters are read as the targets of ironising satire the passage may be interpreted as a satiric challenge ridiculing the notion that women can reverse the gender dominance of men by matching their behaviour/social practices.

The depiction of the lesbian Poker night appears to offer less opportunity for irony than the scatological passage. Nevertheless, it is ambiguous enough to be read as an entertaining ironic or sympathetic satirical encryption of the feminist theory that lesbian

sexuality offers practice/strategy that pre-empts the passive victimisation inherent in heterosexual relations. Alternatively the passage can be read as a form of textual Bakhtinian 'carnival'.

If the 'Poker Night' is interpreted as 'carnival', this is problematic for feminist readers if contextualised by Cranny-Francis' argument against the depiction of masculinist heroines as a strategy of feminist empowerment by women writers.¹⁹ Cranny-Francis argues that 'A female hero who is as blood-thirsty (i.e. brave) and manipulative (i.e. clever) as her male counterpart does nothing to redefine that characterization and the ideology it naturalizes: she may even reinforce it by lending it a new legitimacy.' Duffy's 'Mrs Beast' appears to fall into this trap to confirm reinforcement of the gender ideology; while the conservative conclusion of the poem recuperates the narrative to the dominant discourse of gender relations.

Zenon argues, in opposition to Cranny-Francis, that 'comic and festive inversion could undermine as well as reinforce' the hierarchy of power in society.²⁰ Read in this context, the two heavily satirised passages can be read non-ironically as humorous representations of 'carnival' polemic where the subversive narrative functions as a positive feminist critique undermining the dominant societal narratives of heterosexuality and female dependence. However, as I commented above, the elegiac ending of the poem recuperates the dominant discourse of women's disempowerment in heterosexual relations and problematises feminist readings of the poem.

Summary of 'Mrs Beast'

As I commented in my introductory paragraphs to this monologue, the use of satire prevents construction of a coherent dominant reading for this narrative: sections of the narrative have the potential to address different categories of reader. There is little direct address to female readers, a single citation 'I had the language, girls', although it can be

assumed that the content of the narrative, a satirised and woman-centred version of the war between the sexes, implies an indirect address to female readers.

I suggested that the opening lines of the narrative implied address to a male reader but this is not continued throughout the poem. It is likely that the depiction of male sexual behaviour as bestial and easily manipulated, although heavily satirised and therefore potentially ambiguous, will construct an exclusionary reading effect for male readers. However, in the Introduction to my thesis I discussed my proposed invocation of Mills's rationale that male readers may negotiate a reading position for themselves as 'eavesdropping' readers.²¹ This notion is significant in view of the remarkable success and outstanding sales figures for this collection (which was promptly reprinted in a softback edition) which suggest that the readership is not confined to women.

Overall, there is not consistent positioning of readers to either read sympathetically and consider political ramifications of the narrative, perhaps, or to read ironically throughout. This inconsistency is caused by elements and sections of the text clearly identifying women's historical disadvantages in the narratives of our society being melded into strongly satirised depictions of female dominance in the sexual, scatological and parodic sections.

The gender politics, where they can be unraveled, may be difficult to define, as my reading illustrated, because for much of the narrative, the heavy satirisation of the speaker's subversive strategy of 'masculinity' offers the opportunity to ironise the narrator and her strategies of female empowerment. Readers wishing to claim this text as 'feminist' may have difficulty in substantiating a polemic function for the text, although the social disempowerment of actual women is cited in the narrative.

I have referred to feminist and non-feminist readers in my discussion, and have argued that the former will be disappointed in the inconsistencies of the text although the

opening lines suggest a sustained feminist critique in the narrative. Duffy's inventive combination of satire, irony, parody, scatology, and elements of feminist polemic should perhaps be best categorised as a humorous challenge to the parameters of poetic decorum and to dramatic monologue form.

The next monologue has caused fierce argument amongst readers, not because of the diction, which is at times ambiguous, even obscure, in its meaning, but because of the subject matter of the poem.²²

'THE DEVIL'S WIFE'

This ironic dramatic monologue differs from other poems in *The World's Wife*: it is the sole representation of an evil woman, and as such adds gravitas to the collection although much of the text is problematic in both form and content.

Duffy varies form, syntax and diction throughout the five short sections of the poem, each of which differs from the preceding section. In addition to this variation of stanzaic form, Duffy's poem encodes salient features of a notorious criminal case of 1980's that will be familiar to many readers as 'The Moors Murderers' because of the intense media coverage at the time, and sustained interest in Hindley (and the undiscovered graves of several of the child victims) over two decades until her death in 2002.

Formulation of a theory to account for women who act as accomplices to male violence upon women and children is problematic for feminist critics. Duffy's monologue 'The Devil's Wife' functions as an interrogation of this complex issue: the narrative is a covert representation of the history of Myra Hindley and Ian Brady.

My reading discusses the poem, section by section, and includes paraphrasis of the narrative and comparison of stanzaic form between sections. I shall use extensive paraphrasis in my reading because I have found that reading groups of mature students

and undergraduate seminar students have difficulty in interpreting the narrative and, with few exceptions, do not detect markers for the identification of Myra Hindley as the specific subject of Duffy's representation.

The first section '1. Dirt' is constructed as three 6-line stanzas. It is a narrative in which the speaker, an office girl, relates the beginning of her liason with one of the 'men at work'. In the opening stanza she calls her lover 'The Devil': he is a woman-hater. Two lines internally rhymed with 'dirt' and 'flirt', and 'gum' and 'dumb' create an opportunity for irony because the consciousness of the poet is foregrounded:

The Devil was one of the men at work.
 Different. Fancied himself. Looked at the girls
 in the office as if they were dirt. Didn't flirt.
 Didn't speak. Was sarcastic and rude if he did.
 I'd stare him out, chewing my gum, insolent, dumb.
 I'd lie on my bed at home, on fire for him.

The second stanza describes their sexual liason that is perverse rather than romantic. It is not based on mutual affection although she implies that each had found a soulmate:

I scowled and pouted and sneered. I gave
 as good as I got till he asked me out. In his car
 he put two fags in his mouth and lit them both.
 He bit my breast. His language was foul. He entered me.
 We're the same, he said, that's it. I swooned in my soul.
 We drove to the woods and he made me bury a doll.

The first line of the third stanza suggests the strength of her obsession 'I went mad for the sex', and identifies the presence of an intradiegetic listener with 'I won't repeat what we did'. This intradiegetic direct address can also function as a split address to extradiegetic listeners/readers with the potential of stimulating their curiosity to know the history of this unconventional couple.

This third stanza is enigmatic until all five sections of the monologue are interpreted:

I went mad for the sex. I won't repeat what we did.
 We gave up going to work. It was either the woods
 or looking at playgrounds, fairgrounds. Coloured lights
 in the rain. I'd walk round on my own. He tailed.
 I felt like this. Tongue of stone. Two black slates
 for eyes. Thumped wound of a mouth. Nobody's Mam.

The speaker describes daily life with her lover in which she haunts playgrounds and fairgrounds, while he follows at a distance behind her. The significance of their activity is that she is soliciting unaccompanied children. This scenario can be clarified if readers connect it with 'We drove to the woods and he made me bury a doll' and 'Nobody's Mam'. When children are lost in public places the first question by a helper is likely to be 'What is your Mummy's name?'. The implication here is that when the speaker, 'Nobody's Mam', collects up these children they will not reach safety because she will not behave as a surrogate mother.

In the second section '2. Medusa' the narrator seems to be describing a later event. The citation of the 'doll' connects back to the first section '1. Dirt' but remains enigmatic at this stage of the narrative:

I flew in my chains over the wood where we'd buried
 the doll. I know it was me who was there.
 I know I carried the spade. I know I was covered in mud.
 But I cannot remember how or when or precisely where.

The following stanza may prompt readers familiar with text and images in the mass media concerning 'The Moors Murderers', to read the narrator as a representation of Myra Hindley, the accomplice and lover of Ian Brady. Myra Hindley's image has become an icon of 'evil' womanhood because of repeated publication of her 'mugshot' (initially released by the police), and continuing media interest in the infamous case where she and Brady tortured and killed several young children. The speaker describes her appearance in the first section as 'Tongue of stone. Two black slates/for eyes.

Thumped wound of a mouth'. If this is connected to the image constructed in this second section readers may recognise the repeated, widely-broadcast image of Hindley with crudely peroxidized hair and sullen staring expression:

Nobody liked my hair. Nobody liked how I spoke.
He held my heart in his fist and squeezed it dry.
I gave the cameras my Medusa stare.

Once the speaker is conflated with Hindley, the enigmatic citations of the doll in the first section '...he made me bury a doll.' and at the beginning of this second section 'I flew in my chains over the wood where we'd buried/the doll.' become decipherable as the speaker's euphemism for a child's corpse. Her flight 'in my chains' may be read as the police helicopter flights over Saddleworth Moor, with Hindley hand-cuffed, in search of the children's burial sites.

The use of 'doll' made interpretation of the monologue problematic initially. If the significance of the speaker's citation of 'the doll' is recognised, readers may interpret this euphemism ironically as the speaker's inability to accept the reality of her crime, that is, a psychological strategy to avoid self-blame. Alternatively, they may read it as a deliberate strategy by the poet to avoid alienating readers.

Duffy's use of a covert reference to children's corpses has political significance. This covert citation of child murder (and the inference of abuse) raises an unresolved issue concerning literature and censorship that has a long history: some critics argue against any form of censorship; others maintain that societal attitudes are, in part, derived from the texts that circulate in society, with the consequence that literature with representations of anti-social behaviour has the potential to perpetuate destructive attitudes in society.

This issue of censorship is of particular concern to feminist commentators on the effects of pornography in society.²³ Although there are feminists who adopt a positive response to pornography and argue that the male-biased power differential between genders can be reversed where woman acquire control of the production of pornography for their own sexual and commercial advantage, many feminists, particularly Dworkin, argue against this. They maintain that all pornography is a threat to women because it functions to perpetuate oppressive sexual attitudes to females that are already influential in society.

Duffy's choice to avoid overt citation of child abuse/murder may add another layer of complexity to the characterization of her speaker's psychology but equally as importantly, it lessens the potential for exploitation by readers seeking explicit description of child abuse for pornographic gratification. Duffy's euphemism functions to avoid the charge of potential pornography for her representation of Hindley. What I am arguing for here is the notion of a 'feminist decorum', which I can identify from my own response, but this will not be required by all readers professing a 'feminist' reading position.

The fourth stanza of this section raises an issue that is currently being addressed by feminist activists and is currently interrogated in the mass media. Statistics reveal that the law is often applied more severely to female offenders than males ones: there is a gender bias in the courts where females receive longer custodial sentences than males for equivalent offences. This bias arises perhaps from an underlying assumption in society that women are less socially destructive than men and are therefore more deviant than males when committing an equivalent criminal offence. This feminist issue is implied in the monologue where the narrator dwells on the length of her sentence:

But life, they said, means life. Dying inside.
 The Devil was evil, mad, but I was the Devil's wife
 which made me worse. I howled in my cell.
 If the devil was gone then how could this be hell?

The concluding enigmatic question 'If the Devil was gone then how could this be hell?' may represent the speaker's unvoiced thoughts. The complaint suggests that she is surprised by the intensity of her suffering in prison. Although the meaning is obscure, the comment has the potential function to strongly address extradiegetic readers because it is a question. A possible reader-response to the narrator's complaint is that there are worse places to be than in the 'hell' of prison: in the presence of 'The Devil' (Ian Brady) was a worse place for his child victims. This would suggest that the poet has devised this strategy to position readers to respond ironically to the narrator's revelation of her suffering with a moral judgement.

An alternative reading of the line 'If the Devil was gone then how could this be hell?' is to interpret it as an ironising hyperdiegetic comment from the implied author. Read in this way, the comment is a direct authorial judgement of the narrator implying that prison is not as extreme as hell, and constructing an ironising play on the word 'Devil' that invokes both the narrator's lover and the Devil of the Christian Hell.

Throughout these first two sections 'Dirt' and 'Medusa' the speaker's narrative suggests the social disadvantages and exclusion resulting from her inadequate social skills and repellent appearance. This may position readers initially, through the indirect address of the content, to feel some sympathy for the speaker, or at least a less than total condemnation for a female reviled by society and emotionally dependent upon a dominant, abusing male. It is widely recognised that lack of social expectations, 'a narrow horizon', is a contributory factor in many women's inability to break free of abusive relationships with violent men. Reading the speaker as a woman in this type of situation is likely to generate a degree of sympathy for her among some readers, although this may not persist once the narrative is completed.

The rhetorical strategies of the third section, '3. Bible', are likely to reverse the reading effect of qualified sympathy for the speaker: the speaker is more overtly ironised than in the previous two sections: readers are positioned by the indirect address of the content to assess the speaker ironically. The narrative is constructed with erratic syntax and impoverished diction:

I said No not me I didn't I couldn't I wouldn't.
 Can't remember no idea not in the room.
 Get me a bible honestly promise you swear.
 I never not in a million years it was him.

First-person pronouns saturate the two opening stanzas as the speaker denies all responsibility for her actions and explores, irrationally, every avenue of escape from blame and life imprisonment:

I said Send me a lawyer a vicar a priest.
 Send me a TV crew send me a journalist.
 Can't remember not in the room. Send me
 A shrink where's my MP send him to me.

'Send me a TV crew send me a journalist.' will alienate readers familiar with the self-aggrandisement of criminals who are rewarded with large sums by the media in return for the 'exclusive rights' to their version of events. The fractured speech patterns, the insistent 'I' and 'me', and the aberrant syntax convey an impression of both realistic utterance and repellent egocentricity. The speaker's refusal to acknowledge culpability, represented with the second line of the opening stanza 'Can't remember no idea not in the room', is repeated in slight variation in each stanza and forms the closing couplet of the section:

Can't remember no idea not in the room.
 No idea can't remember not in the room.

The third stanza continues the ironisation of the speaker and consolidates the potential for reader-alienation with the speaker's childish refusal of blame: 'I said Not fair not right not on not true/not like that', and her accusation, 'Can't remember no idea it was him it was him' in much the way that children blame their playmates for misdemeanours.

Paradoxically, although the text is constructed with a repetition of egocentric speech fragments which often gives realism to fictional dialogue, as the narrative breaks down from storytelling to repetitive self-excuses, the poetics become foregrounded. As a result, perceptive readers will focus on the ironic distance between character and the implied poet.

Attention to the poetics of this section may bring recognition of Duffy's use of unrhymed sonnet form in ironic alliance with the character's impoverished speech and pusillanimous excuses. In canonic tradition the sonnet form is held in special esteem but Duffy has employed this form for the speaker's incoherent attempt to evade responsibility for her crimes. Duffy achieves a double effect with this alliance; firstly, the evidence of her skill with poetic form; and secondly, the ironic encryption of moral censure.

I am not suggesting that the overall reading effect of the monologue conforms to Langbaum's formula for ironic dramatic monologues where readers ultimately recognise their morally unjustifiable empathy for an 'evil' character. Here, readers' initial sympathy for the speaker in the first two sections is more likely to approximate to listening objectively to what she has to say, rather than empathic identification with the character.

The fourth section '4. Night' represents the speaker's acceptance of the reality of her life sentence:

In the long fifty-year night,

These are the words that crawl out of the wall:
Suffer. Monster. Burn in Hell.

When morning comes,
I will finally tell.

Amen.

'Words that crawl out of the wall' can be read as the comments of the outside world that the narrator hears from the prison: comments from actual tabloid headlines and graffiti 'Suffer. Monster. Burn in hell'. The speaker narrates a form of self-empowerment, 'When morning comes, I will finally tell', that carries the implication that she is concealing further evidence of her own actions that was not revealed in the trial.

The poetics of 'the long night' and 'words that crawl out of the wall' seem uncharacteristic of the speaker. These two lines and the central sentence, which I suggested would be self-empowering if spoken by the narrator, are more convincingly read as the implied poet's mocking ventriloquism of the narrator, that is, putting her own words into the speaker's 'mouth'. The relevance of ironically ventriloquising the narrator becomes apparent if the comment is contextualised by the social reality that criminals often confess to their crimes when further prosecution is not possible, and sell their confessions to the media for large sums of money.

The final word 'Amen' is commonly used in prayer. Dictionary definition gives 'So be it' as the meaning from the Hebrew equivalent to 'certainty'. It could be read as the speaker's acceptance of her situation, however, 'Amen' seems unlikely diction for the narrator. An alternative reading would be to attribute it to read it as a hyperdiegetic ironising comment from the implied author.

The outstanding feature of this section is the typography. The three previous sections have a regular stanzaic construction although this differs from section to section, but here the form is that of three separate sentences of diminishing length to give a sequence of

three-, two-, and one-line stanza construction. This typographical effect and the potential to read the narrative as ventriloquism by the implied author is an unconventional and effective strategy for ironising the narrator.

The closing section, '5. Appeal', is the most problematic. The ten-line stanza of conditional clauses has no main verb: this makes it difficult to interpret the purpose of this list of violent images of death, some of which can be identified as judicial retribution for crime in different cultures and historical eras. The list is made melodramatic by the use of the first person pronoun that creates the opportunity to ironise the speaker:

If I'd been stoned to death
 If I'd been hung by the neck
 If I'd been shaved and strapped to the Chair
 If an injection
 If my peroxide head on the block
 If my outstretched hands for the chop
 If my tongue torn out by the root
 If from ear to ear my throat
 If a bullet a hammer a knife
 If life means life means life means life

The reiteration of 'life means life means life means life' paradoxically suggests both the certitude and boredom of the endless incarceration until death, but also ironically, the evasion of death and access to life that such a judicial sentence confers in comparison with the brutality and finality of the listed alternatives. This final section of the monologue may remind some readers that Hindley, the subject represented by Duffy's poem, had appealed for mitigation of her life sentence on the grounds that the many years of imprisonment had constituted suitable reparation for her crimes, and that her personality was normalized to the extent that she was no longer a risk to society.

The opportunity to ironise the speaker's melodramatic list is confirmed in the final couplet of the poem. The couplet is a question, an apparent examination of conscience

that implies a heightened awareness in the speaker of her culpability in supporting her evil partner:

But what did I do to us all, to myself
When I was the Devil's Wife?

I argued for a split address to both intradiegetic listeners and extradiegetic readers in the first section of the poem: 'I won't repeat what we did.' This overt direct address is not repeated again until this ending where it is gendered woman-to-woman. The speaker allies herself to all women with use of the plural 'us all' which potentially re-instates a split address to intradiegetic female listeners, and extradiegetic female readers who are positioned to respond to the question and interrogate the issue.

This implied admission of harm to all women is unlikely to come from the protagonist because it implies development of a feminist consciousness where a form of comparison is set up between the severity of the listed punishments that she might have suffered as an individual because of her crimes, and the severity of her disservice to all women. It is more feasible to read this whole section as the implied poet ironically ventriloquising the speaker.

This use of ventriloquism facilitates an indirect extradiegetic address to readers and potentially positions them to make a moral judgement of the speaker's actions as a 'woman', who chose to be accomplice to an abusing male. Many public attitudes are still influenced by traditional gender values, despite the dissemination of feminist interrogation of these values and a subsequent developing public awareness of gender issues. Although readers may be aware of the cultural, rather than biological, origin of gender values, they are still likely to hold traditional gender expectations of 'womanly' behaviour. This expectation and its covert interrogation is inscribed in the final

ventriloquised question: the narrator's actions confound society's expectation that women nurture rather than abuse, and that the abusers of women and children are male.

Although it may not be recognised by all readers, this ending sets up a dialogue with a specific field of feminist inquiry. It has been an ongoing major project for feminist theorists during the second half of the twentieth century to interrogate the signifier 'woman'. This field of feminist inquiry concerns the power of the signifier to determine the opportunities and life experiences of those who are positioned as women by society, and incorporates critiques of conventional gender values, Freudian theories of sexual difference, and the social construction of 'race' and 'class'. The ending of 'The Devil's Wife' dialogues with this field of feminist inquiry.

The direct woman-to-woman address of 'What did I do to us all' has the potential to position women readers, feminist or not, to respond with their own question How could a woman do this?, whilst challenged by the representation of a woman who did abuse and kill children. This reading effect of positioning women to respond in this way is particularly powerful if the narrator is identified as a representation of Hindley. For a general readership the narrator is depicted ironically to accord with readers' likely moral judgement of her: for readers conversant with feminist theory, the final question also encodes the problematic feminist issue identified above.

Summary of 'The Devil's Wife'

In common with the previous poems 'The Devil's Wife' contains intermittent direct address to an intradiegetic audience (in the first and fifth sections) which has the potential to also address an extradiegetic audience of readers. However, the location of the protagonist's narration is not defined and it is difficult to visualise a scenario where the protagonist narrates to an audience of females. This problematises the notion of split address between intra- and extradiegetic audiences. The address can be read as a direct extradiegetic address focused on actual readers that potentially makes the ironised

speaker particularly repellent: this is likely to increase the ironic, judgemental response from readers. The lack of definition of the location of the speaker seems to create a utopian space from which the narrator can 'speak' to readers (as I commented in my reading of 'Eurydice').

My reading has argued that as the narration proceeds the potential for irony increases: recognition of the continuous variation of form, syntax and diction adds to the potential for generating irony in the reading, which is largely established by the content of the protagonist's narrative, particularly if contextualised by knowledge of the 'Moors Murderers' phenomenon. The content of the narrative and the ironising strategies that I have identified in my reading suggest that overall a general, female readership is positioned to read the protagonist ironically but there are inconsistencies within this positioning.

Some readers may modulate their ironic response to the speaker because they acknowledge that adverse social conditions are relevant to women's expectations in relationships. This in turn suggests that the monologue does not promote a clear moral attitude towards the speaker but perhaps positions readers to recognise the complexity of social and moral issues surrounding women such as the speaker of 'The Devil's Wife'.

As I explained, from my own experience, many readers cannot 'understand' the poem and consequently do not recognise the covert references to the 'Moors Murderers' this means that 'The Devil's Wife' is not sufficiently consistent or overt in its positioning of readers to recognise that the speaker is a representation of Hindley. The feminist issues that my reading identified from cues in the text have the potential to position feminist readers to recognise elements of feminist interrogation in the narrative although this specific indirect address is not sustained throughout the narrative.

My reading of the content of the poem argued that Duffy's dramatic monologue is based on the facts of a notorious criminal case and incorporates interrogation of the conundrum of why women support men who harm them and/or their children. This interrogation dialogues with feminist inquiry into this problem but provides no answers.

The poem offers readers an insight into this problem through the representation of the mentality of a woman who is accomplice to an abusing male. Use of the dramatic monologue form, that has the facility for a split address to an intra/extradiegetic audience, positions readers to respond to the final question posed by the speaker, although this poem does not offer an explanation of the phenomenon, other than the narrator's implied excuse in the third stanza, 'I went mad for the sex'. Duffy's speaker can only be a representation of Hindley but the reading effect of the monologue positions, perhaps even coerces, women readers into considering the phenomenon of a woman like Hindley, and her challenge to society's expectations of 'womanly' behaviour.

Duffy does not directly identify Hindley in the title of the monologue although her image and the facts of the murder case are strongly invoked in the narrative. This has the effect of generalising the critique constructed by the ironising strategies of the text.

I began my reading with the claim that the poem was problematic in both form and content but adds gravitas to this collection of representations of women. Duffy has chosen a subject, child abuse and murder, which many readers will consider unsuitable for literary representation. It is acknowledged by feminists that while there are difficulties in theorizing the actions of women such as Hindley, this is not an issue which can be ignored. Duffy's poem brings this feminist issue into the public arena by including it in her collection of representations of women that is overtly publicised for the attention of women readers.

Duffy's poem published in 1999 appears to be part of a wider artistic response to the 'Moors Murder' case and the subsequent demonisation of Myra Hindley. The 1999/2000 exhibition 'Sensation' at the Royal Academy included a large painting by Marcus Harvey of the famous 'mugshot' of Hindley, constructed with simulated miniaturised handprints of the murdered children. The painting provoked much censure and debate in the mass media. Duffy's dramatic monologue, which I argue has the function of a political statement is unlikely to provoke the same volume of public debate and media interest, even if disseminated among the general public, because of the depth of her covert encryption of the 'sensational' case.

Summary of the Chapter

Duffy's fifth collection addresses different readerships through a variety of textual strategies and reading effects that range from overt gendered address, such as the 'Girls' of 'Eurydice', to the encrypted elements of lesbian address of 'Mrs Beast'. This female address appears to exclude male readers, but their reading position may be characterized as one of a sympathetic or hostile eavesdropper.

The address to different readerships changes from poem to poem, sometimes varying within a single text where different communities/categories of reader are implied by direct address and by the indirect address of content. Invocations of specific social and literary issues, as in 'Eurydice' for example, may function as the 'clues' theorized by Fairclough, whereby specific readers develop their own meanings for the poems. However, interpretation of these narratives is made ambiguous by Duffy's use of satire, with a resulting indeterminacy of reader positioning. Inevitably this will result in multiple meanings; different readers will contest both the meaning of the poems and the nature of Duffy's political engagement with feminist literary and social issues.

The strong satire of monologues exemplified by 'Mrs Beast' may convince some readers that Duffy mocks her speakers and their feminist attitudes because she satirises her

speakers as strident, ribald stereotypes of populist misconceptions of 'feminism'. In opposition to this the elegiac endings of poems such as 'Eurydice' and 'Mrs Beast' work against a simplistic reading of the poems as ironic satires. These endings challenge an ironic reading of the satiric characterisations with their elegiac tone but also set up a tension with the female-empowerment feminist issues embedded in the text.

Realist fictional accounts offer a critique of official records, whereas fantastic accounts provide the opportunity for blacker satire and a more insistent 'message'. Taboo subjects can be subversively articulated in fantasy. If the fictional characters of our literary myths are themselves re-fashioned as woman-centred revisionary mythology, then this literary sub-genre has the potential to function as a multi-layered critique with several targets. Duffy's use of satire produces entertaining dramatic monologues that have the nature of a palimpsest, where social and feminist critiques are articulated and interwoven to construct the text but the complexity and indeterminacy of textual positioning of readers does not permit assessment of this collection as unambiguously feminist.

As I mentioned in my reading of 'Mrs Beast', *The World's Wife* includes several entertaining but politically ambiguous representations of enraged wives who hold their husbands up to ridicule; 'Mrs Aesop', 'Mrs Freud', 'Mrs Sisyphus, and 'Pygmalion's Bride'. These satirical dramatic monologues may be read conservatively as ironically as over-the-top satires on the traditional theme of the 'war between the sexes'. Alternately they may be read as an oblique interrogation of male-biased accounts of history and literature and the subordination of women in the male-oriented hierarchies of society. Restrictions on the length of this thesis preclude longer exploration of these humorous and upbeat invocations of 'feminist rage'.

It has been part of my project in this thesis to assess Duffy's engagement with feminist ideas in her five published collections. Despite the overt dedication to a female readership for *The World's Wife*, the invocation of feminism is ambiguous in this

collection. However, as I have commented, although 'The Devil's Wife' may present difficulties in interpretation for readers, it is outstanding in its representation of the complexity of social and feminist issues that surround interrogation of the phenomenon of women that support child abusers and murderers. The collection is also noteworthy for its extensive incorporation of satire into dramatic monologue form.

NOTES

¹ U. A. Fanthorpe, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986). Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981).

² Deryn Rees-Jones, 'Masquerades' p.26, in *Carol Ann Duffy*, 2nd edition (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2001). Rees-Jones has argued that Duffy's fifth collection has recourse to feminist ideas of 1970's rather than more recent developments in feminist literary and socialist politics: 'Duffy's return to the politicized writing of the Women's Movement in the 1970's is in some ways an extraordinary one...'.
³ Chapter 4 'Discursive Communities: "How Irony Happens"' in Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁴ Jan Montefiore, *Feminism and Poetry* (London and New York: Pandora, 1987). Montefiore convincingly identifies various causes for the loss of women writers' contribution to literary history in 'Introductory: Poetry and Women's Experience, 4 Women's exclusion: a cautionary tale'.

⁵ Montefiore (1987) discusses at length the problematic interaction of gender difference, poetic identity and poetic tradition.

⁶ A compilation of Duffy's personal life and work is available on www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/carolannduffy Biographic information and a bibliography of Duffy's works, edited works, critical studies and interviews is available in Deryn Rees-Jones, (2001).

⁷ Reference to classical mythology for this chapter is taken from *New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (London: Feltham, 1968).

⁸ Montefiore (1987).

⁹ Joanna Russ, *How To Suppress Women's Writing* (London: Women's Press, 1984). Russ undertakes a detailed analysis of the social factors and publishing practices that inhibit the dissemination of women's writing.

¹⁰ Germaine Greer, *Slipshod Sybils: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet* (London: Viking, 1996). Greer is a recent example of critics who interrogate this issue: unfortunately, as I have commented elsewhere, she takes no account of the difference of content and poetics that is now recognised by many feminist critics.

- ¹¹ Montefiore (1987).
- ¹² Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977). Showalter's early work on uncovering a lost tradition of women writers was instrumental in establishing contemporary feminist research into the history of women's writing and critical approaches to their work.
- ¹³ Montefiore addresses this mismatch of poetic identity and canonic traditions.
- ¹⁴ *Poetry Review*, 86 no.4 (Winter 1996/7)
- ¹⁵ I discuss the use of Fairclough's theory of 'cues' in the text that lead to a developed reading in my Introduction. Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power* (Harlow: Longman, 1989).
- ¹⁶ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (London: Virago, 1977).
- ¹⁷ Tania Modleski, *Loving With A Vengeance* (Hamden, Connecticut: Shoe String Press, 1982).
- ¹⁸ Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- ¹⁹ Anne Cranny-Francis, *Feminist Fictions: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction* (Cambridge: Polity Press; Blackwell: Oxford, 1990).
- ²⁰ Natalie Zemon Davis, 'Women on Top' in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975).
- ²¹ Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995). Mills cites Montgomery's concept of listeners 'eavesdropping' on comments addressed to social groups other than their own. Martin Montgomery, 'DJ Talk', *Media, Culture and Society*, 8.4 (1986), 421-40. Mills uses this concept to argue that male listeners/readers may negotiate address to themselves although apparently excluded by female-gendered direct address in texts. (See my Introduction).
- ²² I have found that when I use 'The Devil's Wife' for discussion in general or academic seminar groups, a percentage of my students are indignant that Duffy should perpetuate the history of Hindley's atrocities. They argue that this is not suitable material for 'poetry'.
- ²³ Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography - Men Possessing Women* (London: Women's Press, 1981). Dworkin cites explicitly pornographic texts that are available to the general public and argues fiercely for their destructive influence on social attitudes towards women and their sexuality.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion draws together the findings from my readings and analyses and ends with a dramatic monologue of my own.

The work of this thesis was initiated by learning of the sympathetic form of dramatic monologue practised by Robert Browning's contemporary Augusta Webster, and recognising the dearth of critical attention to both the sympathetic and ironic variants of the form.¹ This subsequently led me to explore the work of contemporary female monologist's, which, in turn, revealed the use of rhetorical strategies for sympathy, irony and satire in dramatic monologues that interrogate a variety of social issues from a feminist perspective. It is clear that Langbaum's conceptualisation of the dramatic monologue as an ironised narration that 'renews our sense of moral judgment in a relativist age' needs amendment.² I structured my research on the work of Carol Ann Duffy who is critically acclaimed as the foremost exponent of the dramatic monologue and has five collections substantially devoted to this form. This concentration on Duffy's work has enabled me to explore possibilities of the form in depth.

Langbaum's theory focuses on the relation between characterisation of the 'speaker' and the response of a generalised 'reader', making no allowance for readers' specificities through the social determinants of gender, race and class. In contrast, my work has inquired into the structural and discursive phenomena of ironic, sympathetic and satiric variants of dramatic monologue form focused through specific reader positionings and self-positionings, with an emphasis on the difference of gender.

My readings and analysis have explored the interlocutory dynamics of the triadic relation of speaker, listener, and readers, and the correlation between the poet and her speakers. An important aspect of my readings has been enquiry into the role of the listener and the extension of the 'listening' role to actual readers outside the narrative of the poem. Dramatic monologue is identified as a scenario where a speaker is talking to someone about her/his life events. The presence of a implied listener in the scenario gives this form the potential of constructing an extradiegetic address to readers. This has particular significance when the function of extradiegetic address combines with a narrative that can be read as social critique because the status of the monologue alters to that of both private expression of the fictional character, and public statement to specific readers about the argument in the content of the monologue.

Langbaum's speakers, because they are ironised, function to prompt 'the reader' to 're-invalidate' a conventional and generalised morality. My thesis argues that many of these monologues teach specific readers about specific social issues because they function as an exposition of specific political arguments. Many of the poems that I have analysed are gender-specific in their content, several incorporate a gendered direct address. The development of feminist discourse in recent decades has facilitated this incorporation of feminist polemic into the dramatic monologue form.

Browning insisted that his dramatic monologues were fictional characters (though clearly they were relevant to moral and aesthetic issues of the time). My readings of Duffy's ironic monologues argue for her inclusion of specific social events and personalities in the range of subjects interrogated by her poems. The most innovatory of these are her representation of Robert Maxwell's criminal activities in the monologue 'Fraud' (*MT*

1993), and her representation of Myra Hindley in 'The Devil's Wife' (*TWW* 1999). These dramatic monologues are a departure from the general pattern in their controversial interrogation of specific criminal subjects and the experimentation with form: Maxwell is covertly identified by the phonetic device of using the phoneme 'em' at the end of every line throughout the narrative; Hindley is identifiable from the facts of the notorious 'Moors Murders' case which are inscribed in the narrative which has the unusual construction of five sections, each in a different poetic form. Several of Duffy's ironic monologues have sections of narrative that cannot be convincingly read as part of the speakers' utterance. I have characterised these as hyperdiegetic commentaries that should be attributed to the implied poet, and which function as an additional ironising strategy.

The sympathetic dramatic monologue form can be traced back to Webster's use of the 'mask' of a sympathetically depicted speaker to articulate critique of socio-economic issues relevant to women that were of concern to her.³ Duffy's work with this form interrogates a variety of social issues articulated through a female speaker (the male Native American of 'Selling Manhattan' is one of a few exceptions). The events and female-gendered address of these narratives construct a feminist perspective on the social issues interrogated by the poem. The use of the non-ironic form changes the function of the monologue: sympathetic depiction of the speaker constructs the potential to engage readers intimately, and positions them to consider the content of the speaker's narrative sympathetically, particularly where there is direct address to listeners in the narrative which can be extrapolated to actual readers. The unusual strategy of a substantial incorporation of sympathetic hyperdiegetic commentary in the sympathetic monologue 'Shooting Stars' (*SFN* 1985) constructs a doubled narrative throughout much of the poem.

Duffy's work with a multi-voiced variant of the form has demonstrated the possibility to use both sympathetic and ironised characters as alternating speakers in a single poem in order to set up the dialectic of the argument in the narrative.

At the outset of this thesis I proposed that Duffy's dramatic monologues showed a substantial engagement with feminist ideas. This is demonstrated in the interrogation of many different representations of women in *The World's Wife*. However, overall the tone of this latest collection of dramatic monologues is uncertain. Readers looking for a dominant feminist reading of the collection of monologues will be critical of the indeterminacy of interpretation that results from Duffy's use of satire.

Previous commentators on the dramatic monologue have dismissed, or mentioned in passing, the feasibility of incorporating satire into this poetic form. In this latest collection, Duffy uses varying degrees of satire and different subversive strategies in her representations of the silent/silenced women of History, Literature and Mythology. My readings of these narratives reveal the inscription of a range of social and psychological issues that have been theorised by feminist critics since 1970's but also identify the ambiguity and complexity of interpretation caused by the incorporation of satire.

My readings argue that satire can be unreliable as a strategic device because it causes uncertainty of reader positioning. By virtue of their dramatic monologue form, these poems construct a scenario where the speaker addresses her audience telling them of her life events; questioning herself or her listeners; explaining aspects of her own experience; teaching them how to conduct relations with men. The explanations and questions have the potential to set up an interlocutory relation with extradiegetic

listeners, the readers. Because of this, the address in the narrative functions as an intentional 'split' address to intradiegetic listeners and actual readers. However, the potential for a polemical function of these dramatic monologues is problematised by the use of satire which offers readers the opportunity to ironise the protagonist.

In my Introduction I proposed (as a minor component of my thesis) that there is an intersection between the subjectivity of women poets and dramatic monologue form. I suggested that women are acknowledged as having a socially conditioned disposition towards empathy with others that may facilitate their ability to write in this form. I supported this with argument that a factor for women's propensity to use this form might be a Chodorovian psychological trait that works against poetic expression through the traditional egocentric narrative of the lyric form. These factors, I argued, might explain women's success in writing critically-acclaimed poetry in dramatic monologue form. My reading of ironic, sympathetic and satiric monologues suggested that several of the poems contained material that could be read as autobiographic because the issues and debates of the narratives were relevant to Duffy's personal life and her work as a poet: in the ironic 'Head of English', I read the speaker's intradiegetic victim as potentially a silent representation of Duffy herself; the satirised narrative of 'Eurydice' is inscribed with sexual/textual politics and a challenge to the male domination of publishing practices; most notably, and unexpectedly, the content of 'Little Red Cap' correlates to the biographic facts of the early years of Duffy's development as a poet and her involvement with the Liverpool group of poets.

Smith and Watson's *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* has an appendix list summarising fifty-two genres of Life Narrative.⁴ Their list discusses the

lyric as a form of poetic autobiographical writing but does not consider the dramatic monologue form. My thesis argues that many of these narratives perform as autobiographical writings. Duffy's outstanding poem 'A Clear Note', with its depiction of the interrelatedness of the lives of grandmother, mother, and daughter in a fictional family of Irish immigrants, illustrates a dialogue between this multi-voiced variant of sympathetic dramatic monologue form and contemporaneous feminist theory of women's narration of self through significant others.

I return now to my consideration of the triadic relation between speaker, listener and reader in the dramatic monologue form. I suggested in my Introduction that the development of feminist discourse in recent decades was a factor in the increasing use of dramatic monologue form among women poets. The majority of the poems that I have explored have the potential to address actual, female readers. In *The World's Wife* dramatic monologues there is an intentional, explicit 'split' address to female readers invoked by the publisher's text on the dust jacket. Overall, with few exceptions, Duffy's monologues have female speakers that describe socio-economic disadvantage, gender inequalities, racial oppression and prejudice against physical disability in their narratives. This results in a feminist political dimension in the interlocutory triad of speaker, listener, and reader that changes the status of these monologues from that of private expression of an individual's experience to one of public, feminist political statement: the speakers function as representations of fictional (and in a few instances, factual) characters but they are also markers for the polemic of the text. Duffy now publicly self-identifies as a lesbian and feminist poet although this was not always the case.⁵ Where readers identify as lesbian and/or feminist, there is the potential for political collusion

between poet and a discursive community of readers through the poet's choice of themes and gender-specific issues.

My research, although focused through Duffy's poems, demonstrates that dramatic monologues can function as a form of political debate with the potential to disseminate the issues and theories of specific discourse (in this case, feminism) into a more general readership than the academic. This development in the function and political range of sympathetic, ironic and satiric variants of dramatic monologue form demonstrates that the time has come for a reconceptualisation of the form and recognition of the political possibilities of the interlocutory dynamics between poet, text and reader.

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Here is my example of a sympathetic dramatic monologue, constructed with an intradiegetic listener, a potential address to extradiegetic readers, a potential hyperdiegetic commentary, and a narrative inscribed with an issue of gender politics.

The Chance of a Lifetime

A bit puzzling, the fuss you're all making about this party.
 I'm only playing for the others. It's not like a proper audience.
 It's nothing special - just a few old songs they like to join in.
 I expect we'll do the usual; a nice tea, Alice is 87,
 little presents, and then a sing-song.
 I don't know who'll play after me,
 there doesn't seem to be anyone else, don't suppose they had the chance.
 I nearly didn't you know.

I saved up for years and bought a piano
 for my fortieth.
 That didn't go down too well.
 He wanted to know where the money came from.
 Housekeeping's HOUSEKEEPING he said, not
 for playing around with.

I worked nights in the pub to pay for lessons.
 That didn't go down too well either.
 He thought it was silly learning at my age.
 What's the point he said, you'll never be any good!

I suppose he was right but I loved it.
 Loved learning.
 Loved running up and down, scales and arpeggios,
 learning to swing my thumb under - properly.
 You know, I'd had a bad dream
 since I was a kid.
 How everyone was watching me on the stage,
 and I didn't know how to make the piano play
 music.

And the rest of the family? Just one son.
 He's a good pianist. It comes naturally.
 He started lessons when he was seven and took to it
 like a duck to water.

Is that enough?

I ought to go. I can hear them rattling teacups
 and squabbling about chairs.
 The ones by the window are best.
 I'm alright, I've got the piano stool - it's my own.
 They let me keep it.
 The stuff in this room all belongs to the council but
 I like it here. It's quiet. I can go downstairs when I like.
 She lets me play in the afternoons. Most of them
 fall asleep.

The room is small but the narrow window shows
 the late summer borders of french lavender, rosemary,
 montbresia. It's almost time...

NOTES

¹ My attention was brought to Webster's work by the following critics: Angela Leighton, *Victorian Women Poets: Writing against The Heart* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992); Isobel Armstrong, *Victorian Poetry: Poetry Poetics and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1993); *Victorian Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Angela Leighton and Margaret Reynolds (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

² Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

³ Armstrong (1993).

⁴ Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (London and Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001). See Appendix A for 'Fifty-two Genres of Life Narrative'.

⁵ See Duffy's discussion of 'feminism' in 'Carol Ann Duffy: An Interview with Andrew McAllister' in *Bête Noire*, Issue Six, (Winter 1988), 66-77.

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www.indiana.edu/cgi-bin-ip/letrs/vwwplib.pl for a substantial collection of Augusta Webster's poems

www.sbu.ac.uk/~stafflag/carolannduffy for a biography of Duffy's life events and professional career together with an extensive bibliography of her poetry, plays and other projects

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