

Abstract

THROWN VOICES: A SERIES OF DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES, WITH A DISCUSSION
OF THE GENRE
by Matt Finch

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This thesis examines the complex nature of the poetic genre of the dramatic monologue by providing multiple perspectives on the genre—namely, those of the literary critic and the creative writer. This thesis provides a selection of original dramatic monologues in various styles and featuring characters ranging from the prophet Jeremiah to a modern-day plastic surgeon, tied together by the theme of imaginatively filling in historical gaps and erasures with speakers in times of great political or cultural upheaval. Prefacing this collection of poems is a discussion of the genre of dramatic monologue, beginning with a general overview of the development and features of the genre, followed by a discussion of specific issues involved in writing this collection.

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CHAPTER 1: DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE: DEFINING THE GENRE

The dramatic monologue, as a poetic genre, has been notoriously difficult for critics to define, as critics themselves admit. The term itself did not come into widespread use until the late nineteenth century, at the end of the Victorian era, thus making “the dramatic monologue... effectively a twentieth-century concept” (Slinn). However, the genre owes its proliferation to the psychological and cultural pressures of the nineteenth century, such as expanding suffrage, expanding empire, and the place of women in society. This disjoint between the genre’s rise and its analysis thoroughly befits the genre itself, with its disjunctive mixture of features from other types of discourse.

The dramatic monologue draws from and combines a number of disparate elements; according to E. Warwick Slinn, it borrows “emotional expressiveness from lyric [poetry]... and mimetic detail and retrospective structuring from narrative.” Further, as Cornelia Pearsall argues in her book *Tennyson’s Rapture*,¹ the genre utilizes elements of persuasive speech found in political rhetoric (19-21). Finally, as the term “dramatic monologue” indicates, the genre derives certain aspects of its effects from theater, namely the crucial elements of the poem’s speaker as distinct from the poet and an audience for that speaker (Slinn). Pearsall also suggests that the monologue could be better defined by what it *does*, as opposed to what it *is* (22-25).

W. David Shaw, in his *Origins of the Monologue*, initially agrees that the “speaker [is] not to be confused with the poet” (12), though he seems to commit just that conflation over the course of the book (e.g., his reference to Tennyson’s thoroughly sincere, even confessional, *In Memoriam* in the same sentence as his dramatic monologues *Maud* and “Lucretius” on 117).

¹ Though I rely heavily on Pearsall’s work, it bears mentioning that, because her focus is on Tennyson’s monologues, her ideas on the dramatic monologue may not apply fully to later examples of the genre.

However, his discussion of the disjoints present within monologues remains useful, as does his discussion of some of the methods of analyzing the genre. Thus his definition of the monologue seems implicitly broader than those of most other critics.

What, then, is a dramatic monologue? If the phrase is split into its components, *dramatic* seems to most strongly refer to the theatrical elements of the speaker of the poem as a character distinct from the poet (or even playwright), the implicit or explicit specificity of the poem's setting, and the implied or stated audience or auditor; *monologue*, from *mono* (alone, single) and *logos* (speech), refers to the "single speaker" or the "sole speaker," and is cognate with *soliloquy*, the more widely-recognized term for the theatrical convention of a character alone on stage, voicing his or her innermost thoughts. Regarding monologues as theatrical devices, the term applies to any instance of a lone speaker for an extended stretch, whereas soliloquies carry the limitation of having the speaker totally alone on stage, his words heard only by the audience in the seats and thus more faithful to that speaker's actual thoughts.² The dramatic monologue, as a poetic genre, performs a similar function to the theatrical monologue—it performs on the page rather than the stage.

An alternate term for the dramatic monologue, *persona poem*, underlines the importance of the persona, or the speaker. In a persona poem, the poet creates, for the purposes of a given poem, a single persona who speaks his, her, or its mind in the course of the poem. The persona's voice is the only one heard, the only viewpoint explicitly articulated. The persona can present itself as a literary character, historical figure, or everyday person, separate and distinct from the poet; however, because the poet and persona are ultimately inextricable—that is, the persona is a

² As a contrary example, consider a monologue such as Henry's St. Crispin's Day speech from *Henry V* can be seen as disingenuous on Henry's part because of his promises that the average soldier will be "gentled" by participation in the day's battle, promises which remain unfulfilled by Henry's focusing on his pursuit of the French princess.

creation of the poet—it stands to reason that the poet could use a hyperbole or an exaggeration of a particular aspect of his or her own personality, in which case the hyperbole creates the distance between poet and speaker, while also establishing a connection between the poet and speaker.

Thus defined, the dramatic monologue has had multiple features and multiple functions over the course of its evolution, beginning in the Victorian era. The genre's most important features are the individual setting for a particular poem, the speaker associated with that setting, and the auditor whom the speaker addresses. The auditor is particularly important because the auditor's relationship with the speaker determines the rhetorical strategies chosen by the speaker to effect the speaker's purpose in utterance, making the speaker's purpose approximately equal in importance to the speaker-auditor relationship.

The functions of the dramatic monologue itself are manifold, but among the most important are the genre's capacity for exploration outside the self, its requirement of an actively-neutral reader, and its rejection of sincerity on the part of the poet. The first and third functions arise jointly from the genre's initiating historical-cultural circumstances; the first and second functions seem to me inextricable from the genre's methodology, in that the dramatic monologue requires the reader to explore alien mindscapes alongside the poet. After detailing the features and functions of the dramatic monologue, the discussion of the monologue's initial circumstances will also receive elaboration, as the genre has been employed in a number of ways since its late-nineteenth-century explosion.

Features

The first feature of the dramatic monologue requiring discussion is setting, which sets the tone of the poem relative to aspects such as social norms and political situation, as well as giving

the reader some idea of the speaker's likely idiosyncrasies of diction, though not always; poets may hew near or far when voicing their speakers, according to their own aesthetics or their particular aims for a particular poem. For example, a poet writing a dramatic monologue with King Arthur as the speaker might write Arthur's words so that they sound archaic, distantly removed from the reader of the poem as Arthur himself is distantly removed from the reader; alternately, the poet might have Arthur utter words fitting current speakers of the language so as to lend Arthur an aura of familiarity for the sake of comprehension and reader's sympathy.³

The most obvious of the dramatic monologue's features, though, is the poem's speaker, the character who serves as the primary focal lens of the piece. The speaker determines the poem's tone: her word choices, her relationship to the auditor, and her relationship to the reader (not necessarily the same as the auditor) are all functions of her character, her essential being. In creating a speaker for a poem, the poet must perform similar functions to those of a playwright or novelist, asking questions about the speaker's background, personality, and "motivation(s)" (to borrow the horribly overused term from Stanislavsky).

One of the primary keys to discussing the dramatic monologue lies with the speaker, specifically with the speaker's rhetorical choices. Critics have debated a great deal over intentionality, the speaker's ability to control his or her words and their effects on the addressee (Slinn). Pearsall explicitly mentions the tendency in criticism of the dramatic monologue to assume that speakers are not, in fact, able to control their utterances or the accompanying self-revelations that happen in the course of the monologue; however, the entire premise of her book is that Tennyson's speakers do not merely control their utterances, but control them to such a fine degree as to actively produce their intended effects, as well as to "enrapture" the audience

³ See also Tancock—though his article is on translation of poetry from one language to another, many of the same issues apply.

(10-11). Shaw adds that discrepancies between a speaker's speech and "truth" result either from outright lying, wherein the speaker possesses the truth but hides it; or from "bad faith" (as opposed to "good faith"), wherein "truth" is somehow hidden from the speaker as well (164-65).

Regardless of the speaker's intent, there must by necessity be a discrepancy between the speaker's intent and the speaker's effect—such is the nature of language. Yet it is the speaker's intent that provides *ethos*, inclining the auditor within the poem, not to mention the reader, to believe or disbelieve the speaker's sincerity, to follow or refute the speaker's logic, to accept or reject the speaker's proposals. Different dramatic monologues will exhibit varying degrees of fidelity to "the truth" according to the internal aims of the speaker and the external aims of the poet.

The final crucial feature of the dramatic monologue is the audience or auditor, the person or persons addressed by the speaker, who functions as a foil for the speaker; the speaker tailors his words to his audience, anticipates objections, and addresses potential concerns, with the caveat that the speaker may not always perform each of those tasks effectively. None of this is to say that the auditor is wholly passive; on the contrary, auditors can make certain silent moves that force speakers to change tactics, or they can loom as a "defining other... affect[ing] and shap[ing] the speaker's every thought" (Slinn).⁴ The auditor of the poem can also serve as a substitute within the context of the poem for the reader, allowing the reader a point of intellectual entry or providing the reader a participatory surrogate.

Not all dramatic monologues have clear auditors. For example, Browning's "Caliban Upon Setebos" contains Caliban speaking to himself, or no one at all, as he works through a system of natural theology, while the "you" of Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" is an

⁴ In fact, Slinn argues in favor of the term "interlocutor," since to him it better "acknowledges this active presence, pointing to the inherently intersubjective feature of what is otherwise an intrasubjective drama."

indistinct, practically unimportant addressee in much the same way that one might address one's diary—present but relegated to the background as the speaker speaks. These examples serve to reinforce the fact that dramatic monologues have room for many variations of their core elements.

Functions

Even if, as Pearsall suggests, one attempts to define the dramatic monologue through function rather than form, the genre still evades easy definition. Her definition, for instance, “deviate[s] significantly from other critics of the genre” by suggesting that dramatic monologues “constitute efficacious, highly intentional articulations,” rather than “unintentionally self-revealing” the character of the poet's speaker (10). Shaw, by contrast, focuses on transformations, including those based on unconscious effects, namely falsehood (7). Thus, even a functional definition seems incomplete.

One of the functions that the dramatic monologue performs, according to Slinn, is “empathic self-projection” or “sympathetic identification”—what I earlier labeled “exploring alien mindscapes.” Dramatic monologues allow poets to explore viewpoints alien to their own experiences, to open up their imaginations to other possible epistemologies, in direct opposition to the current dictum in the creative writing world to “write what you know” (Galvin). In the process of writing dramatic monologues, the poet—after research and with a great deal of sensitivity towards the researched subject and care not to accidentally assimilate or erase that subject—can cross gender, racial, and cultural boundaries; explore political stances and cultural issues indirectly, if those stances and issues seem too daunting to explore directly (Slinn); or

offer novel philosophical viewpoints. Likewise, the dramatic monologue presents readers with similar opportunities for the exploration of alien viewpoints.

The speakers of dramatic monologues fall roughly into three categories: literary personae, historical personae, and everyday personae. When poets use literary or historical personae, they usually do so in order to explore political or cultural issues within the framework of a setting with which readers will likely already be familiar (though not necessarily, as the intent is to explore novelty); further, the basic characteristics of the speaker are already set, as are those of the auditor(s), defined by the literary piece or historical situation from which they spring. Tennyson's "Ulysses," for example, features a literary speaker of dramatic monologue: Ulysses' role as Ithacan king and his references to his adventures spring from those elements of his story presented in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but his restlessness while at home and subsequent yearning for more adventures—even his willingness to abrogate responsibility in pursuit of those adventures—are Tennyson's additions. Similarly, Browning's "My Last Duchess" serves as an example of a historical speaker of dramatic monologue, drawing as it does on Browning's reading on the Italian aristocracy for the particulars of time and place and cultural attitudes; Browning gives the Duke of Ferrara life on the page and adds the implication that the previous duchess was murdered by her husband.

A poet's use of everyday personae in dramatic monologues, as opposed to literary or historical personae, often signals either humorous or unsettling content. These everyday personae are neither literary nor historical, though usually fictitious in that they are created *ex nihilo* or with only a little inspiration from the outside world. For instance, contemporary poet Brendan Galvin in his *Ocean Effects* collection uses his observations of Cape Cod locals to create a motley crew of police, miscreants, and businessmen, whose antics seem, in part,

intended to inspire amusement at the follies of humanity, though it must be remembered that the police are, in fact, pursuing voyeurs and drunks, among others. Another contemporary poet, Ai, showcases everyday speakers whose views seem rather disturbing—the eponymous speaker of “The Mortician’s Twelve-Year-Old Son,” for example, demonstrates necrophilia.⁵

Unique to the dramatic monologue is the genre’s demands on the reader. According to Slinn, “the reader is required . . . to assess the speaker’s qualities and arguments while simultaneously empathizing with the speaker’s predicament.” Further, the reader must remain aware of discrepancies, intentional or otherwise, between what the speaker intends to say and what the speaker actually says, to the point of active skepticism of a speaker’s intent and motives. Unsurprisingly, the dramatic monologue genre abounds with dramatic irony, which can be missed quite easily if the reader reads too literally. Moreover, especially in the cases of speakers who transgress the norms of acceptable behavior, the dramatic monologue requires the reader to suspend moral judgment of the speaker or even imagine himself in the speaker’s position (Slinn); the latter may subsequently provoke the reader to turn such moral judgment inward because of the mirror that the speaker holds up to the reader.

A simple example here should suffice to demonstrate how the genre requires both an imaginative reader and a skeptical one. In “Roy Olafsen, Cape Cod Craftsperson, Tells All,” Galvin presents the reader with a smarmy, underhanded carpenter who performs a well-choreographed sales routine in order to convince prospective clients to build summer homes; this routine plays off televised craft shows akin to *This Old House* (lines 37-40), off the benevolent wilderness existence of Thoreau (lines 2, 16-17, 19, 30-32), and off symbols of the Hippie movement of the 1960s (lines 4-5, 9, 11, 14-15). Each of these tactics is deployed to lure his

⁵ Worth noting about both everyday and historical personae is that they can be entirely imaginary — that is, the historical persona could just as easily be a fictional character in the historical situation as an actual historical figure.

imagined auditors, educated New Yorkers who want to “tell / their friends back home how rough they live all summer” (lines 57-58). Readers must imagine the sort of person who resorts to such tactics while acknowledging their effectiveness, perhaps even acknowledging that they might have fallen prey to such tactics themselves. While seeing this persona might evoke feelings of outrage from the reader, those feelings are subverted by the reader’s place in the poem as the speaker’s confidante, a place which makes the reader complicit in the speaker’s activities because readers will get the sense that they are alongside the speaker in deriding the swindled rubes.

One final function of the dramatic monologue that bears discussion is the genre’s innate rejection of both sincerity and confession. While the default assumption when reading poetry is that the speaker and the poet are distinct, if similar, entities, the dramatic monologue subverts that assumption by positing a speaker that is unequivocally *not* the poet. The genre further stands in opposition to the Romantic poetry that directly preceded the rise of the dramatic monologue, in which the lyric poet was assumed to be the speaker, due to the influence of Wordsworth’s formula of “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings... recollected in tranquility” (264).

By disrupting the authenticity, and thus the sincerity, of the Romantic speaker, the dramatic monologue opened the floor for questions about selfhood—the speaker of the poem is created by the poet, but the speaker is also created in the reader’s imagination via the words on the page (Slinn); while this imaginative alchemy occurs within all poems, there is an authority which can be felt in Romantic poems but which is lacking in dramatic monologues. Put another way, the speaker draws life both from the poet and from the reader, which in turn helps create the ironies that are ever-present in dramatic monologues. Of course, such semblance of life is

merely an illusion or even a fiction (Pearsall 33, Shaw 188-90), though quite convincing when dramatic monologues work as intended.

Further, the fact that the speaker's words both are and are not the poet's poses an interesting paradox, because such a state of affairs—the same words and ideas, and therefore the same mind, belonging to two different personalities simultaneously—should be logically impossible (Shaw 187-88). Does the speaker of the poem, the persona, merely become an extension of the poet, a mask behind which the poet hides, or its own entity? That is, to what degree does the dramatic monologue truly reject sincerity, if at all?

According to Shaw, the Victorian progenitors of the dramatic monologue began their labors under the premise that truth was limited and that antitheses might not be mutually exclusive (191-95); Shaw also forwards a deconstructionist attitude towards truth, in that there is no truth, only “fictions we choose to live by” (187-90). Both of these stances raise questions about the relationship between truth and fiction, which reinforces the disruption of sincerity (if equated with *truth*) present in the dramatic monologue as a genre. Pearsall provides an intriguing solution to this dilemma: the dramatic monologue, like the simile, presents two unlike things without actually conflating them and therefore validates the genre's rejection of sincerity by drawing attention to the fact that the identities of poet and speaker are connected but separate (i.e., “alike,” 29-33).

In its rejection of Romantic-era sincerity, the dramatic monologue also rejects confessionalism, a poetic genre that depends on the lack of a wall between the poetic speaker and the poet himself. Confessional poetry signaled a “rediscovery of the personal in American poetry” in the latter half of the twentieth century (Gray 225), and has constituted a major strain in American poetry since that time. Though confessionalism is not the same as Romanticism, they

share the fundamental premise of speaker-poet identification and a tacit commitment to using “natural” language. The similarities between Romanticism and confessionalism suggest a cyclic pattern to artistic practice; if such a cycle exists, the dramatic monologue could very well reappear in abundance.

Development

The rise of the dramatic monologue is generally dated to the Victorian era, the latter half of the nineteenth century (Slinn), though there are numerous precursors to the genre, namely the practice of *prosopopoeia*, an exercise in which rhetoricians would adopt the stance of a particular literary persona (Pearsall 20-21). This practice dates back to Quintilian, a Roman orator who (literally) wrote the book on the subject. Shaw goes so far as to use Chaucer as an example of dramatic monologue (90-92), which makes sense if one conceives of *The Canterbury Tales* as one extended monologue, with numerous smaller monologues contained within. Also serving as a precursor to the dramatic monologue is Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey,” in that the poem seemingly presents a soliloquizing poet reflecting on nature, until the poet-speaker turns to his sister, proving her to have been a silent auditor the whole while (Slinn); the primary difference between “Tintern Abbey” and a later dramatic monologue lies in the separation of poet and speaker through use of persona.

Though Pearsall focuses on Tennyson’s dramatic monologues, it is Robert Browning who often receives credit for popularizing the genre, in part because Tennyson’s examples harken more closely to *prosopopoeia* than Browning’s. Other notable dramatic monologists of the Victorian era include the Rossettis (Dante and Christina) and Augusta Webster.⁶ Thus, even from the genre’s inception, due to the poet’s ability to question contemporary social norms and

⁶ Examples of which are “Jenny,” “The Convent Threshold,” and “A Castaway,” respectively.

the poet's ability to "hide" behind the speakers of their poems, the dramatic monologue has proved a viable genre for a wide array of writers.

However, as the nineteenth century transitioned into the twentieth, the dramatic monologue lost its currency as a genre almost as quickly as it had gained prominence. What precipitated this literary form of evolutionary extinction was the meteoric impact of the Great War, an event which radically shifted aesthetics on both sides of the Atlantic away from the often-lengthy dramatic monologue and its indirect study of human character and toward concise, concrete images or more direct studies of human character. The dramatic monologue did not wholly disappear, though; Eliot produced "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and Randall Jarrell crafted "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner."⁷ These, however, were the last major dramatic monologues to be seen in the English-speaking poetic world for nearly three decades. This is due as much to a shift of the major locus of cultural (and therefore aesthetic) authority from England to the United States after World War II (Gray 214-15), as to the various aims of those postwar American poets, who were more interested in mapping their internal psyches or the vagaries of language than they were in exploring historical or literary characters (Gray 251-67).

The dramatic monologue proved dormant rather than extinct. The poet Ai, in similar fashion to the Victorian dramatic monologists of the previous century, brought back dramatic monologues, beginning in the 1970s and continuing into the twenty-first century; her poems are populated with "graphic, unadorned language" which "give voice to characters whose lives have been stripped to their bare essentials" (Poulin and Waters 595). Another poet of the late twentieth century, Brendan Galvin, also released a number of books composed entirely of dramatic monologues, such as *Wampanoag Traveler* (1989), *Hotel Malabar* (1998), and *Saints*

⁷ The latter, interestingly, utilizes the sensory intensity of the imagist poetry of the mid-twentieth century within the dramatic monologue, providing the poem with its unique punch.

in Their Ox-Hide Boat (1992); his best monologues revolve around historical personae, as opposed to the extremes of modern life seen in Ai's work. Finally, recent Pulitzer-winner Natasha Trethewey made extensive use of dramatic monologues in her collection *Native Guard* (2006); the eponymous section features historical speakers—specifically black soldiers in the Civil War. This allows Trethewey to explore racial tensions both past and present. This minor resurgence suggests that the dramatic monologue may experience a renaissance in the near future that mimics its eruption in the nineteenth century.

This discussion of essential functions and features of the dramatic monologue—the imaginative space the poet and reader create, in which philosophical stances are posed and deconstructed—and of the genre's development has been necessarily incomplete, in part because the dramatic monologue is difficult to define and because it is not my project to provide a comprehensive definition of the genre. However, this discussion helps provide a practical definition for the dramatic monologue: a poetic genre in which the poet creates a distinct speaker in a specific setting with an internal auditor for the purposes of affecting the reader emotionally or intellectually. This basic definition serves as the foundation for my own poetic efforts and for a discussion of the particular issues I encountered during those efforts.

CHAPTER 2: A POET'S PERSPECTIVE

In the previous chapter, I discussed the dramatic monologue as a genre, using some of the most recent criticism to arrive at a working definition of the genre. The process of developing this working definition also involved the practical experience of writing the dramatic monologues included in the following chapter. While crafting them, I encountered a number of considerations that required careful navigation, one of the most difficult of which was the importance of verisimilitude.

Verisimilitude is that quality of a piece of art—whether literary, visual, or theatrical—that makes the piece seem “real” or “true to life” (cf. Oxford English Dictionary definition 1: “The appearance [of a statement, narrative, etc.] of being real or true”). This quality is especially important in the dramatic monologue because any given monologue’s potency relies on its plausibility, on the ability of the reader to believe that the monologue’s speaker would utter the presented words in the presented situation. How, then, does a poet go about achieving this quality when writing dramatic monologues?

Veteran poet Brendan Galvin provides the following thoughts on verisimilitude and the dramatic monologue: “I see creating art as creating life, in the sense that, unless the poem feels like it’s alive, it’s dead. . . . I’ve been seeing people do the kinds of things [my speakers] do for years . . . [or] I picked up just enough diction and vocabulary . . . by reading . . . [to] draw on the language of their times and the ethos of their places” (email interview, 2008). Thus, it behooves a poet both to observe his surroundings (especially for the purposes of creating the everyday type of speaker I discussed in the previous chapter) and to read widely and carefully (especially for the purposes of creating literary or historical personae).

When allowing one's reading to serve as inspiration for dramatic monologues, especially literary or historical sources, verisimilitude becomes complicated by the gap between the time period and culture that the literary or historical persona inhabits and the time period and culture of the poet. Further complicating matters, a sizable minority of the most familiar literary works and histories are available to the poet in translation or in a foreign language. These factors complicate the poet's work because they both pose a crucial question: How can the poet best represent the speaker to his readers?

In order to answer this question, I shy away from drawing a strict dichotomy but instead posit two ends of a spectrum. On one extreme, the poet attempts to replicate as closely as possible the diction of the speaker from that time; for instance, Galvin relied on his reading of Roger Williams' letters to capture the diction of Puritan New England for his poem "Around Master Williams" (interview): "So thrive the fleas of rectitude . . . / nor suffer each other to breathe the common air. / There be no action too small to make war" (stanza 5, *Ocean Effects* 57). On the other extreme, the poet does not mimic the diction of the speaker's time and place, but rather utilizes speech contemporary to the poet's own; here Seamus Heaney's "Bog Queen" serves as an example, with an excavated Irish peat-bog mummy referring to her own body as "braille" and as a crucible for "the vital hoard reducing / in the crock of the pelvis" (lines 5 and 23-24, *Opened Ground* 108).

I utilized both approaches in my collection, though I favored the former; in fact, by replicating the poetic style as well as the diction of my historical personae, I have moved beyond even Galvin, who remained formally within the bounds of contemporary American verse. Only on one occasion—"Arrangements"—did I hew toward more modern diction. In the case of "Arrangements," a dramatic monologue spoken by Octavian Caesar, I might have used a dactylic

hexameter (six syllables, two sets of a stressed-unstressed-unstressed pattern) or hendecasyllabic lines (i.e., eleven-syllable lines of various patterns), both of which were popular in Classical Latin poetry. However, because I have been unable to master either of those meters to my satisfaction, I elected to write Octavian in a more contemporary style (though his speech still reflects his intelligence and education).

As models for two of my dramatic monologues, I used two texts in translation: the Lockman Foundation's New American Standard Version of the Bible, and Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. Since these two translations are not the best-known translations of these works, a brief discussion of the rationale behind my choice to use these translations as model texts seems necessary; also necessary is a rationale of my choices of these and other particular texts as examples of their particular poetic styles.

Translation Choices

In his entry on "Translation" in *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of World Literature*, L. W. Tancock presents the following difficulties translators encounter when rendering a piece of literature from one language into another, specifically into English: accuracy of meaning, details of syntax, and "pass[ing] across the style, tone, and [idiosyncrasies] of a particular author" (560-61). The translator's choices in these matters revolve around the translator's aims, usually "communicat[ing] to readers the closest possible *natural* equivalent of the meaning and form of the original" (560, emphasis in original). Tancock derives this definition of the translator's aims from wildly divergent viewpoints.

A translation should use the words of the original—it must give the ideas of the original. It should read like an original work—it should not attempt to read like

an original work, but like a translation, as is honest and proper. It should reflect the style of the original—it should possess the style of the translator. It should read like a contemporary of the original—it should be in the contemporary idiom of the time when translated. It may add to or omit from the original—it must never add to or omit from the original. (560)

Tancock's summary of such a wide array of translation stances allows for a lot of leeway in most of those categories—that is, he acknowledges the complexities of translation—but comes down strongly in favor of not adding to or omitting from the original (561).

When writing dramatic monologues featuring speakers from wholly different cultures, especially speakers who do not speak the language of the poet, the poet must, in essence, articulate on behalf of poem's speaker.⁸ Alternately, when creating the voice of the poem's speaker, the poet may read from a source—whether history, mythology, literature, or other source—that effectively preserves whichever facet of the original pleases the poet most. In doing so, the poet must be aware of the translator's methodology; this awareness is absolutely necessary when reading for inspiration from a translated work because the translator inevitably leaves his or her own stylistic fingerprints on the work, which the poet will likely absorb in attempting to reflect the speech that appears in the translated text. As Tancock eloquently explains, “the poet . . . expresses the logically inexpressible in the sounds of his own language . . . no other sounds can serve . . . the colour, sound, and evocative or even incantatory qualities cannot be the same, any more than a passage for the harp could be the same if played on the bassoon” (562). Thus it seems that the poet, in writing a dramatic monologue, merely transposes

⁸ Moreover, this raises questions about the capacities of poetic sympathy. For example: Is it even possible to write outside the self? Does projecting oneself into a different situation of race, gender, ethnicity, etc., constitute an assimilation, an erasure of the unique aspects of that identity?

the speaker from one cultural-historical moment to another, rather than translating (even in the most figurative sense).

I discuss Tancock's entry, in spite of its age, because it not only raises some of the key issues I considered when deciding upon my particular translations of poetic works to use as inspiration for my dramatic monologues, but also because he addresses the particular problems surrounding translation of the Bible in detail: "[T]he Authorized [i.e., King James] Version of the Bible, with all the errors and obscurities modern scholarship may find in it, stubbornly remains one of the supreme glories of our language... this text, apart altogether from its significance to believers, has a beauty of sound, rhythm, and depth of emotional power unique in our literature" (563). Tancock spends the remainder of the article giving specific examples of various attempts at Biblical translation and their levels of effectiveness, finishing with the statement, "the translator... must take linguistic competence as his point of departure and then use his intuition and become an artist" (564), which, to me, seems true of the writer of the dramatic monologue as well.

Tancock's analysis of the problems surrounding Biblical translation mirrors my own analysis when choosing to base my poem "Sixth Lamentation" on a version other than the Authorized Version (henceforth "KJV" for "King James Version"). Though lovely at most points, the language of the KJV is antiquated and sometimes incomprehensible—that is, in some places the words are a barrier to meaning.⁹ Moreover, choosing the New American Standard actually simplified matters by saving me the step of having to distill meaning from seventeenth-

⁹ Compare, for example, the following passage from Luke 2:8-9: (KJV, qtd. in Tancock 563) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night, / And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. (NASB) In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. / And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

century English before attempting to write a dramatic monologue in modern vernacular, whereas the Lockman Foundation from the outset presented the text in comprehensible modern English (Lockman Foundation iii-iv).¹⁰ This dedication to using modern English arose partly from aesthetics, since I had no desire for my speaker to sound unnecessarily archaic; partly this dedication arose from practicality, since it would have been much more challenging to write in King James English, and I had already planned another poem that would feature archaic English.

The other translated text I used was Nobel-winner Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. Heaney's own accomplishments as a poet certainly suggest that his translation will fit Tancock's prescription that a translator must become an artist, if not one already; Heaney's translation demonstrates a poetic elegance that I find most appealing. More importantly, Heaney demonstrates in his translation a great respect for the particulars of Anglo-Saxon diction as it appears in *Beowulf*, "a foursquareness about the utterance" as he puts it (xxviii); he also respects the requirements of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse while not remaining slavishly beholden to them, breaking the "rules" where he thought it necessary: "I have been reluctant to *force* an artificial shape or an unusual word choice... [i]n general, the alliteration varies from the shadowy to the substantive" (xxviii-xxix, emphasis mine).

In other words, if on one extreme there is strict adherence to the requirements of Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, and on the other there is antipathy towards or active rejection of those requirements in favor of a more modern aesthetic, Heaney strikes a balance between the two in his translation. For instance, the opening lines, "So. The Spear-Danes in days gone by / and the kings who ruled them had courage and greatness. / We have heard of those princes' heroic campaigns," (1-3) demonstrate both the proper alliteration (in lines 1 and 2) and "illegal"

¹⁰ The Lockman Foundation also avoided the snare of simply modernizing a pre-existing translation by returning to the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts, further strengthening the credibility of the New American Standard as a suitable translation.

alliteration (line 3) that nonetheless “bind[s] the line together” (Heaney xxix). I have tried to do likewise in my dramatic monologue “The Saxon Legacy,” with lines such as these: “Vortigern reigned in Roman Britain, / Building halls for celebration / While his people hungered and hated their king” (lines 5-7, wherein lines 5 and 7 demonstrate proper alliteration with line 6 demonstrating improper alliteration).¹¹

Stylistic Choices

As demonstrated by Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf*, related to the issue of translation is the issue of stylistic choice, specifically the choice to emulate specific cultures’ poetic forms in order to approximate, as closely as possible, the essence or “flavor” of those cultures’ poetry. This was a conscious decision on my part, and not wholly necessary to the execution of the dramatic monologue; Galvin, for instance, replicates the diction of Puritan New England but avoids the regularly-rhyming lines popular in Puritan poetry, and the Victorian poets tacked closer to their own aesthetics as a rule, even as they created characters as varied as ancient Greeks and lower-class “working girls.” The poetic forms I chose to emulate are classical Hebrew poetry, Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, Elizabethan rhymed verse (specifically the Spenserian *Faerie Queene* stanzaic pattern), and “Beat” poetry from the 1950s.

While the most readily-recognizable example of classical Hebrew poetry is the Psalms, other examples arise throughout the corpus of the Old Testament, from the “Song of Miriam” in Exodus 15 (a song of victory after the Red Sea incident), to the Song of Solomon (a lengthy Hebrew love poem), to the Lamentations of Jeremiah (a collection of five interrelated elegies about the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian invaders). In all cases, Hebrew poetry operates on

¹¹ Compare also *Beowulf* line 1826, “If ever I [Beowulf] hear from across the ocean,” which has no alliteration, to line 15 of “The Saxon Legacy,” “For standing in shield-wall against invaders,” which also lacks alliteration.

patterns of repetition and elaboration: “He [the Lord] makes me lie down in green pastures; / He leads me beside quiet waters,” for instance (*New American Standard*, Psalm 23:2); or this selection from the Song of Solomon 6:1:

Where has your beloved gone,
O most beautiful among women?
Where has your beloved turned,
That we may seek him with you?

This repetition also serves well for drawing contrasts, as evidenced by the famous “time for everything” passage in Ecclesiastes 2: “A time to give birth and a time to die,” etc.

My reading of classical Hebrew poetry has also revealed that the ancient Israelites were fond of simile, as it appears in the writings of authors as divergent as Jeremiah (Lam. 1:7: “Her [Zion’s] princes have become like deer / That have found no pasture...”) and the author of Job (Job 40:16-18: “Behemoth... eats grass like an ox... / He bends his tail like a cedar... / His limbs are like bars of iron”).¹² The ancient Israelites also seemed to have had a penchant for simple metaphors (e.g., Isaiah 66:1: “Thus says the Lord, / ‘Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool.’”) Finally, classical Hebrew poetry abounds with evocative imagery, such as the following from Lamentations 3:48-49:

My eyes run down with streams of water
Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.
My eyes pour down unceasingly,
Without stopping...

¹² This will, of course, recall the parable about the blind men trying to describe an elephant by feeling various parts of the animal.

All of these elements—repetition for emphasis or contrast, figurative comparisons, evocative imagery—I consider crucial to classical Hebrew poetry, and my sample dramatic monologue from that form, “Sixth Lamentation,” utilizes each of them.

Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, as it appears in *Beowulf*, showed itself a very different animal from classical Hebrew poetry. Instead of Hebrew phrasal repetition, which could vary in length from one line to an entire stanza, Anglo-Saxon repeats certain sounds within a given line. Heaney’s introduction provides several examples of the sonic repetition, “from shadowy to substantive,” with the caveat that he has “not followed the strict metrical rules that bound the Anglo-Saxon *scop*” (xxviii-xxix).

Before breaking the rules of a given form, the poet must first know those rules. Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse consists of a four-beat line, split into two pairs of emphasized syllables separated by a caesura (e.g., “Shield had fathered a famous son” in line 18, where there is a caesura between “Shield had fathered” and “a famous son”). The first emphasized syllable of the second half-line typically alliterates with either strong syllable of the first half-line, or even both of those syllables; however, Heaney also alliterates using the fourth emphasized syllable, following common practice among *Beowulf* translators (xxix). Following Heaney’s example, my Anglo-Saxon lines hold the four-beat tempo and alliterate, according to the original rules, as frequently as possible; where my alliteration is slightly off-kilter or nonexistent, it is for the sake of sense-making.¹³

An additional challenge that arose out of using *Beowulf* as the base text for a dramatic monologue was the challenge of converting the impersonal narrative tone of the ancient poem into the more personal tone of a dramatic monologue. My initial attempt proved less than

¹³ Additionally, contemporary American English stands at several removes from the Old English of *Beowulf*, making some of the features of alliterative verse difficult or impossible to accurately emulate. See Heaney xxix-xxx.

successful, more narrative mimicry than anything else, but the majority of the poem remained intact during revision. The revision, as I executed it, shifted the relationship between the figures Hengist and Horsa from a fraternal relationship, with both of them as actors within the poem's action, to a father-son relationship, Horsa relating the deeds of his father Hengist. This revision worked for several reasons, not least of which being the incredible importance of the father-son relationships that recur throughout *Beowulf*, indicating its importance in Anglo-Saxon culture. This revision also worked because it gave the poem a definite speaker, a strong central voice that rings with pride in the father's accomplishments or with disgust for the slain tyrant Vortigern.

Moving forward chronologically, the next poetic form that served as a pattern for one of my dramatic monologues was that of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. An epic narrative claiming to be the true history of Britain, *The Faerie Queene* stands as one of the most thoroughgoing allegories in English, containing religious, political, philosophical and societal dimensions. Spenser wrote the poem in iambic meter using a variant of his sonnets' interlocking rhyme scheme,¹⁴ ABABBCBCC; additionally, the last C-line differs from the rest of the stanza in that it is an alexandrine, a six-foot line of iambs that emphasizes the completion of the stanza while stretching forward into the next.

Given the wide scope and dimensions that *The Faerie Queene* encompasses, and given that Spenser only wrote half of what he had set for himself in his "Letter to the Authors" preface (16-17), writing a dramatic monologue directly inspired by Spenser's magnum opus seemed far too ambitious for an already-ambitious project. However, the stanza pattern's ability to carry a narrative intrigued me, as did the pattern itself; because my prior reading has been centered on those poets—Donne, Milton, Blake, Shelley, Poe—best known for their use of form, my aesthetic sense gravitates in that direction. Additionally, due to past experimentation with the

¹⁴ The sonnets have the rhyme scheme ABABBCBCCDCDEE.

Spenserian sonnet, the stanza of *The Faerie Queene* proved easier to handle than it would have otherwise.

At this point I had a structure, a framework upon which to build a poem, but no subject matter with which to do so. The decision to use a sixteenth-century English poetic form led naturally to the use of sixteenth-century English subject matter, and the decision at the outset of this project to focus on history further ruled out the possibility of using a *Faerie Queene* character as the speaker. The Spanish Armada—with its attendant Protestant-Catholic baggage—seemed too clichéd, and I felt less-than-qualified to discuss the Irish situation. Ultimately I drew on my experiences working on the Roanoke Illuminated Project, a close study of the English “first contact” with the New World.¹⁵ Among other duties, I was involved in the process of transcribing the text of Thomas Harriot’s *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia* from its original ornate print into an electronic form capable of being manipulated in various ways; this transcription process caused a familiarity with the text that in turn inspired my dramatic monologue, “Roanoke, 1588: Lost Dissent.”

What both *The Faerie Queene* and *Briefe and True Report* have in common, coming as they do from very similar late-sixteenth-century early-print contexts, is the strange, often unpredictable orthography that greets the reader’s eyes. Given that Spenser deliberately wrote in an archaic fashion in imitation of his epic-narrative and medieval-romantic forebears (Spenser 15), to say nothing of the syntactic inversions typical to rhymed verse of the time, one still sees the strange spellings of some of the words in lines such as these: “There this faire virgin wearie of her way / Must landed be, now at her iourneyes end...” (I.xii.1.6-7); nonetheless, such

¹⁵ The Roanoke Illuminated Project focuses on exploration, not on the mysterious disappearance of the colonists. In fact, the project directors have chosen to focus on the 1589 text of Richard Hakluyt’s *Principal Voyages and Navigations*, including Thomas Harriot’s *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia*, specifically because it does *not* include Governor White’s final voyage to discover the colony vanished, with “Croatoan” his only clue as to their whereabouts.

variations appear in Harriot as well: “For English corne neuertheles, whether to vse or not to vse it, you that inhabite may do as you shall haue farther cause to thinke best” (754). Certain variations, such as *i* for *j* and medial *u* for *v* (and, conversely, initial *v* for *u*), are consistent throughout both texts; the other variant spellings, however, are not so consistent.

I mention these oddities because my sample dramatic monologue, “Lost Dissent,” employs similar vagaries of spelling to further reinforce that poem’s sense of having been written by one of the colonists desperately awaiting Governor White’s return with supplies, specifically one of his more literate Assistants. Additionally, the strange orthography of “Lost Dissent” sets that poem apart from the others through its visual aspect, an aspect of poems not often exploited by poets. This distinction makes “Lost Dissent” the “statement piece” of the collection, in that it diverges furthest from my usual aesthetic as well as from the other poems because its strong visual element lends “Lost Dissent” more readily to being read on the page than read aloud.

Equally divergent from my usual aesthetic was “Lofty Incantations, Stanzas of Gibberish,” a poem patterned after the Beat poetry of the mid-twentieth century (specifically, patterned on Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl”). This poem swerves away from my usual aesthetic because Ginsberg borrows heavily from Whitman, whose work I find bland in its long-windedness, and from Blake, whose prophetic, or visionary, or metaphysical, poetry can be difficult to follow (Gray 300-01); further, Ginsberg’s poetry actively attempts to shock with its crudity, in that nothing is taboo (Poulin and Waters 614)—not a goal I typically strive for in my poetry.¹⁶ These two considerations forced me into a different method of writing, more organic and less deliberate, less methodical. However, Beat poems often have a performative aspect, since they draw on jazz musical rhythms (Gray 301), making it easier to write one as a dramatic

¹⁶ Consider, for instance the following line from “Howl”: “I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked / . . . who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset, and were red eyed in the morning but were prepared to sweeten the snatch of the sunrise . . .” (lines 1 and 43).

monologue, since it was easy to imagine the speaker as a poet on-stage reading to an audience.¹⁷ That is, the relationship between speaker and audience became much more literal, more clear-cut within the poem and illustrative of the speaker-audience relationship, despite how it blurs the line between the poem's audience and its reader.

Final Thoughts

This collection of poems, in sum, represents more than an exploration of the genre of the dramatic monologue, with its attendant challenges of imaginative sympathy and complication of the relationships between poet and speaker and audience and reader. This collection represents the culmination of academic reading, incorporating genres as varied as early-modern English poetry, Victorian poetry (on both sides of the Atlantic), and contemporary American poetry, not to mention personal readings in science fiction, history, and mythology. The collection also contains examples of various poetic forms that I find interesting and aesthetically pleasing, or forms that I find challenging, since growth through self-challenge is usually one of the primary goals of the serious poet.

Preceding each of the historical poems is a brief introduction describing the context of the speaker's speech, and sometimes identifying the speaker. In some cases, the speaker remains vague enough to plausibly represent either side of a given conflict; in others, speakers reveal their identities through their words. Thematically, the collection hinges on moments of cultural or political change, ranging from the Babylonian sack of Jerusalem which destroyed the First Temple, to late-sixteenth-century England grappling with the still-unexplored vastness of the New World, to contemporary America with all its quirks and idiosyncrasies. Additionally, and

¹⁷ In fact, at live readings, "Lofty Incantations" reads quite well, though it leaves me gasping for air by the end.

perhaps more importantly, the poems in this collection perform the important imaginative function of “filling in the gaps” in the historical record, so to speak; they bring color to otherwise blank eras or provide additional shading to well-established times.¹⁸

¹⁸ For example, all the characters of “The Saxon Legacy”—Hengist, Horsa, Vortigern—exist now only as names in a history book (Fraser 24-25), the reasons behind their connection now lost to the mists of time; “Lost Dissent” arose from a logical extrapolation of human reactions when humans realize their trust has been betrayed (the New World, specifically Roanoke, was “sold” to potential settlers essentially as an investment opportunity, one that proved itself a “lemon.”

CHAPTER 3: SELECTION OF POEMS

After narrowly escaping destruction at the hands of the Assyrians in the 7th century BC, Jerusalem's wealthy temple attracted the attentions of the expanding Babylonian Empire, culminating in the city's fall in 597 BC and again in 587 BC, leading to nearly a century of Jewish exile from their homeland. The prophet Jeremiah foresaw these events and wrote five poems of lamentation, recorded in the aptly named Book of Lamentations.

Sixth Lamentation

- "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" Matt. 27:46

The hand of Babylon has smitten Jerusalem;

The might of Babylon's arm has subdued her —

Zion, daughter of kings;

Zion, queen among cities;

Zion, now enslaved to Babylon.

The lines of Babylon's men of war,

Swords and spears,

Bowmen and slingers,

All these mock her ruin.

My eyes are as jars without stoppers;

My tears roll like flooding rivers.

My feet are broken by stones,
Rubble strewn by our tormentors
In the overthrow of Zion.

O Lord, why have You forsaken Zion?

Why have You turned Your back on her?

What iniquities deafened You to the cries of daughters?

What wickedness blinded You to widows' laments?

Whence came the chastening rod of wrath?

Whither went Your gentle mercies?

The foreigners have shorn Zion;

They have stripped her of gold and jewels;

They have bled her sons and daughters

And have stolen her widows away.

They mock Zion in her ruin.

The invaders have granted no mercy

To the elders or the young ones.

In their wrath they have slaughtered

Even priests and elders.

The Lord has permitted the heathen
To desecrate his temple —
The holy place lies in ashes;
Its doors have become as splinters.

All the temple furnishings
Have become as kindling;
Our foes warm themselves
From the ashes of Zion's ruin.

False prophets promised,
“No harm will befall Judah,
For the Lord is with us.
Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

These prophets spouted lies;
They spoke foolish visions.
We sheep of Zion have been led astray,
And our true Shepherd has chastised us.

Why, O Lord, why did I not see?
Why did I fail to speak?

When my belly was full of meat,

Then I bit my tongue.

Now that my gums bleed with hunger,

Now will I speak.

Now will I cry out to the Lord.

O Lord, hear my wailing,

The gnashing of my teeth.

Hear our bitter cries, O Lord,

The sorrows of our voices.

Hear the woes of Your broken people

And have mercy.

Will You withhold from us the balm of Gilead?

Will You not heal our land?

You, Lord, promised to Abraham,

You promised to Isaac and Jacob,

You promised to Moses and Joshua,

You promised to our people, Your chosen people,

That we would dwell in the land of milk and honey;

Yet the sons and daughters of Zion are slain,

And we are led in chains to Babylon.

How far must we have strayed

For the Lord to bring ruin to Zion!

How wicked must we have become

For the Lord to raise Babylon against us!

Lord, I know you will remember Your people in time;

You will hear the groans of the enslaved,

As You did when we dwelt in Egypt.

Blessed be the name of the Lord.

In 40 BC, Octavian, later known as Augustus Caesar, divorced his wife Scribonia, whom he had married for political reasons. He set his sights on marrying Livia Drusilla, a higher-born woman of Rome, despite the fact she already had a husband, Tiberius Claudius Nero; Octavian's influence was so great that Drusilla's husband was forced to consent to divorce her. They remained married for the rest of their lives, but they had no children together. Rumors swirled about their behavior: outward fidelity supposedly masked sordid private behavior, with Drusilla and Augustus both engaging in what later became known as "swinging."

Arrangements

My dear Livia Drusilla,

I was hoping to see you at this symposium.

You are well but not thriving, yes?

I say "not thriving" in truth,

Because if you thrive

You should refuse my proposal.

Your refusal would force my hand;

I would need to ensure your need

Should become as great as mine.

How careless of me to forget —

I hope your son grows strong

And proves himself a little man.

Now, for my proposal: marriage.

Union between our families

Must by nature produce

Great yield of peace for Rome,

Establishing both our positions.

Surely you realize your husband Tiberius

Fades quickly,

Morning mist melting

Under the heat of the Julian sun.

It would be a terrible shame

If your son grew up

Without a man to call “father.”

No need to fret over my eligibility —

Dull, dreadful Scribonia,

Her brother no longer a thorn in my side

But rather food for hungry fish,

I have set aside without rancor.

If she has a redeeming quality,

She’s kept to herself; she wants

As little to do with me as I with her.

Fret not, dear Drusilla,

I value our friendship.

I could never set you aside.

Our union will stand firm,

Permanent as granite,

Lovely as marble.

Perhaps you and I should discuss

The particulars in one of the private rooms?

In the late 5th century AD, the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes began emigrating from their homelands in continental Europe to the British Isles. Originally, they would hire themselves out as mercenaries to whatever local power could pay them, since Roman authority by that time held little sway anywhere that one of the legions was not occupying at a given moment. Eventually, these tribes began seizing power for themselves and opening their lands for their kinsmen's settlement. Their motivations are now obscured by time, but the most likely motivation would be a general thirst for conquest inherent to a warrior culture combined with the opportunity to satisfy that thirst while leaving the harsh North-European climate.

The Saxon Legacy

The words of Horsa, Hengist's son,

Both Saxon kings and mighty conquerors:

We Saxons sailed across the whale-road,

From hearth and home to hostile lands,

The realms of Romans resilient still

Before the might of many nations.

Vortigern reigned in Roman Britain,

Building halls for celebration

While his people hungered and hated their king.

“He has failed his people as faithful shepherd,”

The Britons groaned to their emperor-god,
But he did not hear; “Barbarian hordes
Drive us before them to the surging sea-coast,
But it is no refuge from those ravenous men.”

Hengist my father held vast estates,
Prizes received for services rendered,
For standing in shield-wall against invaders,
Bulwark of a king battling rivals.
But Vortigern, both greedy and vain,
Withheld the gifts, what he should have given.
He should have increased their shares of land
In accord with his promise. That was one bad king.

Thus Hengist my father hatched a plan.
Hotly he railed, “How could the king
Deal with us this way? We have weathered
Sacks and assaults on this sot’s behalf,
While he lounges in London’s lap,
Behind stone walls of his capital city,
Safe and secure! We refuse to call
Him by name of lord unless he grant
Our rightful due as his retainers!”

“This Briton coward,” cried the king,
“Dares insult our sacred honor?
What king is this who cannot be trusted
To fulfill his word? Worthless, worthless,
Are men who depend on broken oaths
Instead of the strength of their own swords.”

But Hengist had lived a life of honor,
And tempered his words with hard-won wisdom:

“First we must make a formal request
For the king to pay the price he owes us
In land and gold for our warriors’ courage,
Else our grievance seem more like greed.
Let us make request to our errant king
That he pay the price for our fallen kin.”

He held his honor in such high regard
That he would let trifles remain trifles;
He withheld his wrath and did not act rashly.

He readied retainers to row his ship,
The keel carving the curling waves,
The prow parting the foaming breakers.

My father walked the wide whale-road
From the country of Kent to the king's mead-hall
In London. The sea stayed his trek;
The frothy waves waylaid his ship.
In London Vortigern learned of this wrack;
The king was pleased to hear of this plight.
He never planned to pay the blood-price,
Although their hands held up his throne
By spreading terror among rival tyrants
And reducing rebels to dust and ashes.

But Vortigern's hopes would prove short-lived,
Because my father, canny swimmer,
Washed ashore on the water's edge.
His lips were covered with sand and salt;
His hair hung soaked before their eyes.
Crabs on the beach crawled across him
Till finally he stirred from lying sea-struck,
And roused himself to resume his errand.
Despite his retainers sunk to the bottom,
My father refused to falter now.
The miles ahead of Hengist, my father,
Leading to London lay many and long,

But his hardy feet remained firm —
He knew each step carried him closer
To the tyrant whose debt had triggered his trek.

At London's walls the watch-men stopped him:
“Saxon Hengist, honored ally,
What business brings you to our bustling town?”

Then Hengist my father opened his word-ward:
“We are here to pay our proper homage
To Vortigern, the giver of rings
And other gifts that make us glad.
We do have a grievance against the king,
Which we hope to settle.”

“Saxon friend,”

Replied the wall-guard, “If you promise no violence,
We will open the gates to honored guests.”
With furtive smile my father agreed.
Inside the gates Hengist received
A formal escort, as befit his status.

The escort addressed him: “Perhaps your request
Will not fall on deaf ears.”

“Ever hopeful,”

Hengist muttered, “but Vortigern’s hands

More readily grasp, than give freely.

Remember our kinsmen, now bloody corpses,

Their souls departed to sit in the mead-halls

Beside our fathers till the final battle

When the world will wither away.

We must earn such honor for ourselves!”

The escort stood, stunned by his words;

The strength of Hengist’s honor silenced him.

The great oak doors of Vortigern

Swung open, wide to receive my father

Hengist, his ally. The tyrant’s hall

He had draped with fine tapestries, finely

Woven, the work of women’s hands.

The hangings hailed him as a mighty hero,

Who had wrested his lands from Roman lords,

A boon to his people; no mention was made

Of Hengist my father or the Saxon heroes

Whose blood had bolstered Vortigern’s crown.

When he saw the Saxon, the tyrant scowled;

He accosted him with cruel words:

“How dare you, brigand, fake your demise,
Then appear in my hall, hale and hearty!
What business brings you here before me?
Speak quickly!”

“King Vortigern,”

Answered Hengist who sought no battle,
“We wish you to hear one humble request,
But one you must immediately
Redress. We Saxons, your faithful servants,
Have battled your foes on your behalf,
Bled on the fields to fend off invaders,
Offered our swords to slay your enemies;
Now we claim our reward, our kinsmen’s blood-price,
From the just hand of our generous king.
Increase the lands we call our own —
That’s the fairest price for our fealty.”

Once Hengist finished, the tyrant frowned.

“Ungrateful worm whose worth I know,
I have already granted all I am going to;
No more of my lands will belong to you.
Now, leave this hall!”

Now Hengist's fury
Knew no bounds; he brandished his sword.
"Vortigern, your greed is folly,
And today it will work your ruinous demise!
Our heart warned you would not listen;
Now honor demands we make you pay
Dearly by force what you fail to give."

Thus my father dashed up the tyrant's dais
And pierced his heart with his harm-edge.
Hengist reveled in the tyrant's ruin,
Bathing his hand in Vortigern's blood —
The red life-river that ran from the wound
And carried away the stingy king.

Hengist dethroned the now-dead tyrant;
My father marveled his manly deed:
"Our stroke has felled that foolish tyrant
Who forgot how fierce we of Saxon blood
Have been to his foes We fought his battles,
But for his gain only, and his greed.
Now we have become the new ring-givers,
And our rule ordained by doughty deeds.

From this day forward we lead this land,
And mold the country into a Saxon kingdom.”
Thus my father reigned as sovereign ruler,
Giving freely to his friends,
But crushing his foes with Odin’s fury.

Now I must wear my father’s mantle;
My many conquests must spread the kingdom
I have inherited from Hengist, my father.
His son must earn a place to sit
Among the mighty in Thor’s mead-halls.

English explorers described the New World as a land of opportunity, causing a number of enterprising individuals to attempt settlement beginning in 1586. The next year, John White, governor of the first English colony in North America, returned to England to request a shipment of supplies to the struggling settlers. He did not return for several years because of the imminent threat of a Spanish attack on England itself, and no ship could be spared from the defense of the island. Meanwhile, the colonists suffered from privation and attacks from hostile Native Americans, likely souring their attitudes towards their new homes.

Roanoke Island, 1588: Lost Dissent

VWhen first wee landed vpon this distant shoare,
VVe receaued greetings from the Sauages there,
Signes of ioy and wellcome, as they gaue before:
Master Lanes account warned vs to beware
The inhabitaunts their conspiracies, their fayre
VVords beguiling, their deceauing harts
Vntrustworthy due to promises broken. Bare
Their cruell plots were layd and failed their darts
VWhen they stroock the yron plates armouring our vitall partes.

These yron plates the Sauages long haue craued,
But wee would not trade the plates for any price.
Truly though it was the Lord that saued

The Colonie, none of mans deuise.

VVe were told that heere would growe *Orient spice*

(All kindes) and marchant commodities of diuers sortes,

The land it selfe a second Paradise.

But *Roanoke* is vnlike Spanish ports,

For we are only safe while huddled in our forts.

VVhat treasures we haue foud are dearly bought,

Their value out of ioint with their monstrous cost.

Nothing that wee haue found is what we sought:

No seas to sayle but those by tempest tost,

No balmy winters here but hoary frost,

No land of plenty heere, only dearth.

Euen the goodes we finde are quickly lost

In Sauages raids or wracke of stormes. What woorth

Remaines for vs to stay on this blotte of earth?

September 17, 1862, saw the bloodiest single day, not just of the American Civil War, but in the entirety of North American military history. Both the Union and Confederate armies suffered casualties in excess of 25% of the forces committed to battle, totaling almost 23,000 casualties.

In Sharpsburg by Antietam Creek

The ground lies before us,
Thick with gray and blue,
Bodies slain in neat lines of battle,
Asleep, asleep till the Final Judgment.

The ground has soaked up the blood;
Antietam will run red tonight,
Perhaps for several days hence.

Their blood stains my gloves,
Your reins, your mane, your neck.
My companion, my faithful gray Traveller,
You have borne me on your back
While cannons roared.
Does you also bear
The burden of my sorrow?

Yet as long as my home
Lies under the sword,
I must continue to defend her.
I must seek victory with utmost vigor
To spare more of these boys
This great calamity.

Lofty Incantations, Stanzas of Gibberish

-“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness.” - Allen Ginsberg, “Howl”

America, America the beautiful, the bountiful, the fruitful —

we multiply like white rabbits and black rabbits and red rabbits and brown rabbits and Mexican
rabbits and chink rabbits,

we multiply like the bacteria on our tongues and teeth before the Listerine advent, the
apocalyptic alcohol that washes all away,

blue-green-yellow flood inundating all our white picket fences and suburban cul-de-sac homes
and cars and broods of kids,

all the hardly hard-earned wealth of stock portfolios and gin and tonic and televisions and
jukeboxes and pinball machines and Coke bottles and gasoline,

all fuel for the fires of nuclear ambition launching rocket ships right up the corporate ladder with
a message of war to the boss and an ultimatum to blow it out his ear,

all the righteous deeds and sinful acts left to burn like tires on the brand-new interstate where the
cars zip zip zip along at break-neck break-back break-even break-barrier speeds till they
exceed the speed of thought,

too fast to see or hear or smell or wonder or like or fuck or even think,

too slow for bards to immortalize with Gregorian chants and conga drums and minaret calls and
Wailing Walls,

walls that separate and ties that bind the tracks together but keep the negroes in their proper
ghettoes and away from nice white girls who just wanna get laid,

bodies burning, minds yearning for their steady and whispered promises and poodle skirts and
sweet sixteens and the title of prom queen or homecoming queen,
and maybe a cigarette or two with grease monkeys, sporty cars and motorcycles, angels of death
and liberation,
thrusting their pelvises in time with Elvis records, in time with their boyfriends' cocks, in time to
their heartbeats and the heartbeat of all Creation,
the beat that keeps workers working, hammers falling, dice rolling on the felt, chips laid out on
the green felt field of dreams,
the master time-clock that all people of all nations punch in to when they're born and punch out
of when they've run out of ways to fuck up, so they cook new follies in microwave ovens
to serve to everyone, not caring about radiation or constipation or flatulation or
flagellation of the masses,
the proletariat, Commies huddling yearning to breathe freely, Red ideas jarring red faces
plastered on pale faces, but not with the devils below or the angels above,
Red Ruskis whose bomb hangs over our heads like Damocles' sword, whose Sputnik hangs in
airless outer space without form and void where prohibited, watching, watching our mere
insignificance,
watching, waiting for us to do the work of destroying us in all our impotence of thought and will
and moral fiber,
watching our greed consume Burmese rubber and Arabian oil and wood turned into paper for
typewriters churning out endless memoranda and mortgage bills and fruitless bills that
never become law and barren poems and songs and prayers that fall on deaf ears because
there's no one there to hear,

because the angels are on strike demanding better pay and fewer hours and 365-day years and
thousand-year millennia,
because Christ and Mohammed and Buddha are fighting over who controls the TV dial, while
Krishna wants to play Monopoly,
because Lucifer steals the mail and puts the wrong prayer-letters into the wrong mailboxes and
tosses in an M80 firecracker and runs when it explodes, showering sulfur sparks that
were hopes and dreams and desires and lusts and fears,
because the World-Spirit lies exhausted, bleeding from many wounds of disbelief and apathy and
greed, ears bleeding from blaring radios,
signals streaming off in all directions, showing intelligent extraterrestrial species what fools we
earthlings be,
what fools we listen to and vote for and jack off to and fear and kill and are killed by,
how we strut and fret for hours and years on end on this pitiful pitiful stage—all the world's a
lightless stage—and pretend that we really matter,
we pretend that something matters, that everything matters before it's converted into energy.

August 6, 2005, marked the sixtieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima.

***New York Times* Editorial: How Far Have We Really Come? (August 6, 2005)**

The bomb is too much with us,
Even after all these years.
We still jump at nuclear shadows,
Cower before the bogeymen
Of WMDs: Saddam, Mahmoud, Kim,
Or the introverts next door.

We fear not only
The flash-frying radiation,
But also the lung-dissolving chlorosulfates,
The superviruses and the anthrax,
The dirty bombs that spread
Poison into water supplies,
Into school systems,
Into neighborhoods,
Into our homes with us.

Not Quite Pygmalion

Some people say

Plastic surgery is “frivolous,” “unnecessary”—

Look at that blonde stewardess.

Fine, “flight attendant.” Whatever.

She’s one of my patients.

When she woke up after the operation,

You’d have thought I’d bought her a diamond —

Grinning, squealing even,

Turning her profile in the mirror

To check out her new curves,

My handiwork.

You *really* couldn’t tell they weren’t real?

Bullshit.

Fine, I take it as a point of professional pride

If you think she was born to carry those melons.

Other guys know the difference,

First and second hand.

Truth is, I’m a leg man myself.

Ever seen breasts from the inside?

I lost interest a long time ago.

Like hot dogs.

Five-Year Roanoke Mission

I read Harriot's *Briefe and True Report*

And, I have to say, it'd make a good *Trek* episode.

First, the *Enterprise* arrives in the system

To survey a colony site; problem is,

People live here already.

The landing party—Kirk, Spock, Bones,

A bunch of redshirts too—

Finds the inhabitants lacking idyllic, Edenic.

True, that's the plot for most episodes.

The English explorers have an advantage

Over the *Enterprise* crew: Englishmen

Don't have to worry about the Prime Directive—

Never provide indigent civilizations

With advanced technology

Like swords and guns.

Yet, unknowingly, they follow it:

Amadas and Barlowe refuse to trade

Their metal implements at any price.

Self-interest, I'm sure—

They want to preserve their advantage

Over “naturall inhabitants.”

The *Trek* connection runs deeper.

Richard Grenville leaves fifteen men behind

To hold the fort—

They might as well have worn red shirts.

Motives for the English

More closesly match those of the large-eared Ferengi,

Ruthless pursuers of profits.

Don't believe me?

Harriot spends a full third

Of his report on “merchantable commodities,”

And that's the longest section.

Perhaps the “Croatoan”

Enigma would make for better *Trek*.

Landing parties scan

For human life-signs, but something—

Electromagnetic static in the atmosphere,

Rare minerals in the soil,

Romulan cloaking device—

Something always interferes,

Keeping mystery alive.

The speaker of this poem I left deliberately unclear, so that the reader can imagine that these words would be equally likely to come from either an Israeli or a Palestinian.

City of Peace

Violence defines the “City of Peace”
From the days of Father Abraham
Through the four Crusades that actually
Reached this Holy Land,
Through two World Wars and almost a third.
Three world-spanning faiths
Call this city “holy,”
Including yours and mine.

The city stands partitioned,
East and West,
Muslim and Jew —
Facts to fly in the face
Of unification claims.

Will we forever
Lob grenades and launch rockets,
Brawl in the streets,

Hands at each other's throats?

I cannot speak for you,

But I am weary of fighting.

No more, I say!

No more will I clench my fist

At you, my neighbor;

But instead I extend

The hand of friendship.

Let us make this city, in truth,

The City of Peace.

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