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“Out of me, out of me!”: Andrea, Ulysses, and
Victorian Revisions of Egotistical Lyric

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In speech the use of the first person is common, even universal; but certain problems arise the moment first-person discourse is frozen and fixed in a lyric. The use of the word “I,” so usual as to pass almost unnoticed in conversation or in dramatic poetry, comes to seem distortedly egocentric in lyric poems, where we are presented with the words of only a single speaker. This egocentricity, which may be inconspicuous when a poem first appears, grows more and more obvious as time goes on. Like a smile frozen in a photograph, which may have looked natural enough to begin with but which comes to look false or uncanny when seen repeatedly over many years, a much-read lyric seems to become more egotistical with time.

It is thus the readers rather than the author of a given poem who are likely to be troubled by “lyric egotism” – by the tendency of the speaker’s voice and point of view to seem to drown out or pre-empt all others. I believe that Tennyson and Robert Browning, both great readers of Romantic lyrics, were sensitive to this aspect of their predecessors’ work and were disturbed by it. This sensibility is detectable in the dramatic monologue, the form which these poets independently developed in the 1830’s and which has long been recognized to have derived from the Romantic lyric (and more particularly, as W. David Shaw points out, from the works we now refer to as “conversation poems”)¹. The grotesquely exaggerated egotism that distinguishes dramatic monologists from

the very first suggests that Browning and Tennyson were more acutely conscious of the difficulties that accompany the presence of a single lyric voice than their predecessors were. For although the Romantics recognized poetic egotism, they tended to see it as an epic problem: Wordsworth was referring only to *The Prelude* when he felt misgivings “that a man should talk so much about himself” in verse². Wordsworth’s contemporaries, when they complained of his egotism, tended to refer rather to *The Excursion*, of which Hazlitt wrote that “an endless intellectual egotism swallows up everything. Even the dialogues introduced ... are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet.”³ Keats was likewise reacting most probably to *The Excursion* when, not long after Hazlitt’s essay appeared, he distinguished his own sort of poetry from “the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime.”⁴ None of these men seems to have sensed a similar egotism in Wordsworth’s lyric poems; as a result, despite his resolutions, Keats’s own odes and lyrics do not differ significantly from those of his predecessor on the score of self-centeredness and self-projection. Thus Harold Bloom observes, “Keats, I think, protested too much in his zeal to overcome self-concern, and I think also that Keats has deceived his critics into literalizing his figuration of destroying the self.”⁵ A glance at his odes reveals that Keats’s self-effacement was certainly selective.

The Victorian poets registered their discomfort with the Romantic lyric, and especially the “conversational” lyric, in their dramatic monologues, where the profusion of grotesque details and comic allusions ironize the egotistical speaker. I wish to begin with an extended reading of “Andrea del Sarto,” first briefly exploring its self-ironizing allusions to Shakespearean comedy, and then

considering its relationship to “The Eolian Harp,” the conversation poem with which I believe it is intended to contrast. I shall then go on to discuss subsequent Victorian responses to the problem of lyric egotism. For the early dramatic monologues of Browning and Tennyson did not of course solve the difficulty, but were themselves subject to revision and ironization as the poets continued to experiment. Most notably, some of Tennyson’s late lyrics combine the intimacy of the conversation poem with the irony and dramatic immediacy of the monologue, and so manage partially to efface their own dependence on a single speaking voice.

I

Browning’s Andrea del Sarto demands little enough of his wife Lucrezia; he asks only that she smile at him and hold his hand. He had plenty of such encouragement in France, he remembers:

That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael’s daily wear,
In that humane great monarch’s golden look,—
One finger in his beard or twisted curl
Over his mouth’s good mark that made the smile,
One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me. (ll. 149-158)⁶

Whose finger is playing with Francis’s “beard or twisted curl”? His own, of course, we reply; the lines that follow make that clear enough. Besides (we might add), the picture is so explicitly intimate that it seems unnecessary to insist upon the slight grammatical ambiguity that temporarily allows the “finger” to be Andrea’s.

And yet there is precedent for such dalliance (though with the roles reversed). Armado, the ridiculous Spanish retainer of the king of Navarre in *Love's Labour's Lost*, boasts to Holofernes:

I must tell thee it will please his grace, by the world, sometime to lean upon my poor shoulder, and with his royal finger, thus dally with my excrement, with my mustachio— By the world, I recount no fable! Some certain special honours it pleaseth his greatness to impart to Armado. (5.1.91-5)⁷

The similarity between Armado and Andrea does not end here. Both are southerners invited to the court of a French king to entertain him; both fall in love with women who are considered (and whom they consider) below them, and both break their oaths to the monarch on account of this love. More broadly, Shakespeare's Navarre is very similar to Andrea's image of Fontainebleau: a royal enclosure where one can supposedly escape from intercourse with women and dedicate oneself entirely to one's calling. The courtiers of Navarre, however, almost immediately forswear their high-minded intentions, and spend the rest of the play self-consciously rationalizing their broken faith. In this sense Andrea finds an even closer soul-mate in Biron than in Don Armado.⁸

The allusion to *Love's Labour's Lost* adds an important comic note to Andrea's description of France, ironizing and undercutting his profession of artistic selflessness at Fontainebleau, and leading us to question his representation of it as a locus of artistic integrity. Some critics are not so skeptical: Mario D'Avanzo's excellent article draws a strict distinction between Francis and Lucrezia, between the type of artist that Andrea is when abroad and when at home. Francis, he writes, is an "impartar of inspiration," a Shelleyan epipsyche, a "*roi soleil*"⁹. Carefully noting recurrent figures in the poem, D'Avanzo remarks that around Francis cluster images of gold, the sun, Apollo,

and “subjective” poetry, while on the other hand Lucrezia is associated with silver, the moon, the python (Apollo’s enemy), and mere craftwork. This dichotomy is undeniably present in the poem, and no doubt this is the way that Andrea views his life, or would like to view it: he would like to think that he really was an inspired, Apollonian artist back in France, and that he gave up everything for Lucrezia’s sake.

But how different is France from Fiesole? Is it not different in degree, rather than in essence? In those days when Andrea “put on ... Rafael’s daily wear,” his inspiration was quite earthly:

I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
Such frank French eyes. (ll. 158-60)¹⁰

This is an echo of the description of Raphael when he was doing his best work – “Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see, / Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him, / Above and through his art” (ll. 108-110). What Andrea imitates, however, is not Raphael’s divine effort, but his worldly circumstance – working under the eyes of rich patrons (“kings and popes”), which Andrea takes as a substitute for inner vision. Francis is no more a true epipsyche than Lucrezia; no more than she does he urge Andrea, “God and the glory! never care for gain” (l. 128). Andrea’s work in France is a better-paid, more happily and perhaps more perfectly executed version of his other work: it is done “proudly,” self-interestedly, for the sake of the king and for those who allow their judgments to be swayed by his. Andrea at Fontainebleau not only falls short of Raphael (except in his outer appearance), but does not even approximate those failed Florentine painters in whom “there burns a truer light of God” than in himself (l. 79).

For Fontainebleau is no nearer heaven than Italy is. All the mediocrity that characterizes Andrea's career at home – the “fetter” that he feels, the reduction of his art to “ware” – is equally present abroad; the only difference is that Francis's fetter and his payment are made of gold: “The jingle of his gold chain in my ear” (ll. 52, 225, 157). Again *Love's Labour's Lost* is relevant: although the four protagonists believe they have set themselves free from death and time by retreating to their court, in fact they accomplish nothing of the sort. They congratulate themselves on having escaped and transcended earthly limitations, but Princess Katherine quickly sets them right. When the king is forced by the terms of his oath to receive the princess in an open field outside his court, she lets him know that heaven is not part of his domain:

King: Fair Princess, welcome to the court of Navarre.

Princess: 'Fair' I give you back again, and welcome I have not yet. The roof of this court is too high to be yours. (2.1.90-2)

Andrea seems to be aware of such limitations without being told, and herein lies his difference from the courtiers of Navarre. He speaks of how his “hand kept plying” its trade in France – clearly the same “craftsman's hand” that he earlier contrasted to the “brain, / Heart, or whate'er else” of the inspired artist (ll. 161, 80-2). Andrea needs no princess to reveal to him that he was in fact no greater abroad than at home; his conscious attempt to convince himself otherwise (“I *surely* then could *sometimes* leave the ground” [l. 151, emphasis added]) is half-hearted.

The essential similarity between the two imaginative loci of the poem becomes even more obvious if we compare “Andrea del Sarto” to the great Romantic lyric that it rewrites, “The Eolian Harp.” The situation in Coleridge's poem is the same in miniature: the speaker, sitting at home with his wife in the

evening, looking over the landscape, recalls a time when he too went off without her and was meekly recalled by her imperious voice. But the “random gales” of inspiration that Coleridge experienced on the hillside, the “intellectual breeze” that filled his soul, are reduced in Browning to Francis’s breathing down Andrea’s neck: “I painting proudly with his breath on me” (l. 158).

The relationship between “Andrea del Sarto” and “The Eolian Harp” is worth pursuing, not only because they are so closely related, but because each could be considered to stand as an approved representative of its genre, the dramatic monologue and the Romantic conversation poem¹¹. Browning’s poem takes up exactly where Coleridge’s left off – “But do not let us quarrel anymore.” If it is not obvious that “The Eolian Harp” ends with a quarrel between the young couple, that is because the nature of Coleridge’s poem occludes the presence of a second voice. The supposed otherness of the voice we hear at the end is a transparent fiction: it is the speaker’s own guilty conscience that prompts him to silence himself and his “vain Philosophy” (l. 57)¹²; had Sara not been present, he would have projected the remonstrance elsewhere. This is the prerogative of the pantheistic thinker: the world, after all, seems to the speaker to consist of “one Life within us and abroad” (l. 26), and hence any conflict appears to be as much internal as external. The theory is attractive; but the effect of such high-minded, all-encompassing speculation is to permit the speaker to take on the role of spokesman for all of nature, including his wife. He feels free to interpret her glance, and to cut off any “reproof” that she was actually going to speak (l. 49). Coleridge (like Hazlitt) complained that Wordsworth, in his “dramatic” poems (notably *The Excursion*), projected his own voice on more than one character, creating “a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as

talking, while in truth one man only speaks”¹³. It might be retorted that in “The Eolian Harp,” one man is represented as talking, while in truth there are two people quarreling. This is not to say, of course, that the “reproof” we hear is actually hers: Coleridge’s permanently guilty and self-flagellating nature is more in evidence than Sara’s evangelical piety. But it is important to keep in mind the possibility that Sara might really have objected to her husband’s speculations, if he had not pre-empted her by silencing himself. For if we accept Coleridge as spokesman and exclude the possibility of a second voice, we fall into the trap of believing in the very unanimity (the oneness of souls) that the poem itself seems so reluctant to approve.

Browning was quick to recognize the self-serving nature of Coleridge’s willingness to contradict himself before anyone else had the chance to do so. As Loy D. Martin writes, “To Browning, modern individuals, including the Romantic poet, *create* their alienation as a wish-fulfillment, as a division of labor, a contradictory self-reification. Their estrangement is not antithetical but identical to the metaphysical commodity that is the Romantic myth of wholeness”¹⁴. It is important to Coleridge that the poem should end with consensus, even though the consensus is to renounce and alienate the speaker’s most heartfelt ideas. For such agreement paradoxically confirms the speculations it dismisses: if Sara agrees with her husband (in his self-disapproval), then he is confirmed in his right to speak on her behalf, and this in turn endorses the possibility of the existence of a shared transcendental soul. So by beginning his own poem (which might almost be called “The Eolian Harp Sixty Years After”) with a quarrel, Browning radically reassesses the situation at the end of Coleridge’s poem. From the point of view of an outsider who is not

invested in seeing all things as animated by a single spirit, he suggests, Coleridge and Sara do not really seem to be agreeing, and perhaps are not even communicating at all. The speaker's communication with another person at home is revealed to be as much a fantasy as his communion with nature abroad.

Browning also exposes and rewrites other instances of "the Romantic myth of wholeness." Whereas Coleridge's cottage had become part of the natural landscape in which it appeared – "our Cot o'ergrown / With white-flowered Jasmin, and the broad-leav'd Myrtle" (ll. 3-4) – Andrea sees his own house as nightmarishly unnatural:

When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
The walls become illumined, brick from brick
Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
That gold of his I did cement them with! (ll. 215-18)

Thus Coleridge's peaceful and overgrown Cot becomes Andrea's "melancholy little house / We built to be so gay with" (ll. 212-13), in the same way that the intellectual breeze, "At once the Soul of each and God of all," is reduced to the approving breath of Francis and his court. The totalizing view of the world disintegrates, until eventually everything that Coleridge took to be an essential part of himself, an outright possession, Andrea recognizes to be distinctly other. Thus the grateful conclusion to "The Eolian Harp," where the speaker thanks God who "gave me to possess / Peace, and this Cot, and thee, heart-honour'd Maid!" is reversed at the end of "Andrea del Sarto." "Peace" Andrea can not possess – only feeble peacefulness ("I am as peaceful as old age tonight" [l. 244]) bought at the expense of having to ignore the cousin, the Paris lords, and the memory of his parents. His "Cot" is not his at all, being given not by God, but (unwillingly) by Francis. And as for the "Maid" – Andrea does call her "mine,"

but concludes the poem two lines later with “Again the Cousin’s whistle! Go, my love” (l. 267).

What Browning accomplishes by the rewriting of the earlier lyric is not, however, merely a grotesque and heavy irony, but a type of modesty. For all his egotism, Andrea never goes so far as to suggest that his inability to reach beyond his limitations forbids anyone else’s achieving transcendence. When Coleridge on the other hand calls himself back from his speculations, his renunciation presupposes not only Sara’s approval, but everyone’s. This does not mean that the reader is necessarily supposed to agree or even to sympathize with the speaker’s renunciation; it only means that the poem and the speaker of the poem end up saying two very different things. Of the two philosophies voiced in the poem – the pantheism of the middle section, and the more orthodox renunciation of the conclusion – the former is more appealing: it is described with rich, even erotic images, whereas the conclusion relies on flat rhetoric and litotes (“never guiltless,” “nor ... dost thou not reject”). But this bias belongs to the poem (and perhaps to the poet). The speaker himself, on the other hand, seriously believes what he says: his dismissal of “the shapings of the unregenerate mind” (l. 55) is not a personal resolution based on the immediate situation, but a universalizing conclusion. And herein lies a major difference between the lyric and the monologue: the speaker of a monologue may not always be aware that his¹⁵ viewpoint is limited (Johannes Agricola presumably is not), but at least he has that possibility. But the Romantic speaker, though what he says may be (and often is) ironized in the context of the poem, and though he may only question or vacillate, claims to speak for all.¹⁶

Yet though Andrea may seem “modest” in contrast with a Romantic speaker like the one in “The Eolian Harp,” he is not therefore a liberal humanist. If his conclusions are meant to apply only to himself, this is not because Andrea has an innate understanding of others, but quite contrarily because his viewpoint is so limited. Andrea has, for instance, a predilection for enclosure¹⁷, and he imputes this particular preference of his to everything around him: because he himself feels “safer” (l. 142) in his limited mediocrity, he assumes that the trees he sees feel “safer” (l. 43) inside the convent-wall. Even the “ruff” he is so anxious to give his wife as a gift is probably not her idea but his, because it will frame her, just as he himself has already done – “Let my hands frame your face in your hair’s gold” (ll. 241, 175).¹⁸ And yet, for all that he submits everything he sees to this process of containment, at least it can be said that he never puts words in his wife’s mouth.

Nor is Andrea’s comparative modesty in this respect a function only of his weakness: the disinclination to impose one’s views on others is characteristic of the genre. Sometimes the speaker of a dramatic monologue is convinced of what he says, and sometimes he feels the need to convince a listener (usually of something practical, as when Fra Lippo resists arrest). But generally his egotism is such that he does not much care what others think. Even Johannes Agricola, whom I mentioned as an example of a dramatic speaker who believed what he said to be absolutely true, could not care less whether other people shared his view.

This claim may seem problematic: the shrilly insistent tone of many monologues would appear to suggest that monologists do care what their auditors believe. We might take as a prime example Tennyson’s St. Simeon, who

surely seems to require affirmation from his audience, whether human or divine. Yet a comparison of “St Simeon Stylites” to Coleridge’s “Frost at Midnight” reveals that the distinction between Victorian monologist and Romantic lyricist holds true even here. I believe that Tennyson’s poem is a conscious response to Coleridge’s: “[A]ll my beard / Was tagged with icy fringes to the moon” is a grotesque and ironic rewriting of the final lines of “Frost at Midnight.” Similarly, Simeon’s paranoid recollection of his earlier, studious life, when demons “flapped my light out as I read: I saw / Their faces grow between me and my book,” parodies Coleridge’s schoolboy memories – “Awed by the stern preceptor’s face, mine eye / Fixed with mock study on my swimming book.”¹⁹ More generally, Tennyson’s poem picks up from Coleridge’s the discourse of a man who has suffered in his youth and who bequeaths the benefits of his experience to others. These similarities encourage a comparison of the two speakers, and such a comparison reveals that Simeon, for all his monomania, is less inclined to impose his own views on others. Unlike Coleridge, he does not conclude by dictating what his audience shall think and feel and does not seem particularly concerned with the universal applicability of what he has learnt. Simeon is a rhetorician, not a philosopher; he seeks approval and worshippers, not agreement and disciples. So long as his listeners respond as he wishes, they may think as they like.

In this respect Simeon, like Andrea and other monologists, is distinguished from the typical speaker of a Romantic lyric, who feels a compulsion to hear his own thoughts echoed by other people or things. That is why Coleridge puts the voice of his conscience in Sara’s mouth (or eye), why Wordsworth tells Dorothy how she will feel, why Keats causes even the “foster-

child of silence" to speak out. None of these speakers could have rested content with Ulysses's dismissive "He works his work, I mine." The Romantic speakers are examples of "the egotistical sublime," projecting and imposing themselves on others, and then demanding approval. The speakers of Victorian dramatic monologues are no less egotistical, perhaps, but their egotism is less sublime, more modest.²⁰

II

The eleven lines that Tennyson's Ulysses devotes to his son Telemachus provide perhaps the most concentrated example of this peculiar egotism of the dramatic monologist. Ulysses does not strike us as grotesque at this moment: the comic allusions that undercut Andrea's dignity are wholly absent. Nor does Ulysses immediately strike us as being as gross an egotist as Browning's Bishop Blougram, although his attitude towards Telemachus does closely resemble the bishop's derision of Gigadibs. The difference lies mostly in Ulysses's use of the third person rather than the second person. Both Telemachus and Gigadibs are charged, not with actual evil, but with pusillanimity in a respectable cause. But Blougram impugns Gigadibs directly, and this requires exaggeration: Blougram exaggerates his interlocutor's weakness in order to save face while making such a shameless accusation, and Browning exaggerates Blougram's brazenness. Tennyson avoids both caricature and confrontation by avoiding direct address; hence the rather awkward "This is my son." Is Telemachus even present? Probably; but even if he is, he is not prompted to speak in his own defense, because he is not addressed.

The relationship between speaker and auditor is thus more decorous in "Ulysses" than in "Bishop Blougram's Apology" or in many other dramatic

monologues. Both men are still subject to irony: Telemachus, Ulysses implies, is a good civil servant who is more fitted to run an island than to undertake great adventures like his father; Ulysses, the reader feels, is a little too interested in the quixotic pursuit of glory to be an acceptable king. But neither is grotesque; and neither imposes his views or his will on the other. The price of such decorousness, however, is a terrible estrangement. The egotism of the speaker of "The Eolian Harp" led him to force his own words on his interlocutor; the egotism of the speaker of "Ulysses," on the other hand, more muted but more overwhelming, leads him to dissociate himself from his auditor entirely. He refuses to address him directly²¹, and seems to insist that a public man ("centred in the sphere / Of common duties" [ll. 39-40]) and a private man ("yearning in desire" [l. 30]) can have nothing in common. If the troubled relationship at the end of "The Eolian Harp" seemed to ask to be exposed and readdressed by later poets, the same is just as true of the dissolved relationship in "Ulysses."

Tennyson's extraordinarily long career gave him the perhaps dubious advantage late in life of being his own greatest immediate predecessor. Several of the major poems of his final decade are responses to earlier poems of his own, including "Locksley Hall Sixty Years After," a notable example of a later reaction against the egotism of a dramatic monologue. "Locksley Hall" does not qualify as a "perfect" dramatic monologue since it has no auditor, but its speaker has a typically narrow and self-centered viewpoint. This is exactly what he renounces in the later poem; but ironically, he needs to browbeat an auditor (his grandson) to feel that his renunciation is effective, and thus repeats his old error in only slightly less virulent form. A more complete and unusual response to the

specific blindnesses inherent in the form of the dramatic monologue, however, comes in a very different late poem, “To Ulysses” (1888).

“To Ulysses” can not compare to “Ulysses” as a work of art, but it manages to rewrite the earlier poem in such a way that the speaker loses his egotism without losing all his power and dignity; his modesty is exemplary. The poem, which uses the intimate *In Memoriam* stanza, is addressed to the writer W. G. Palgrave, as a thank-you for the gift of his book of travels entitled *Ulysses*. Thus the “Ulysses” of the title refers to Palgrave; yet within the poem, Tennyson as speaker also figures as Ulysses. His age, his recollections of a romantic youth (“I, once half crazed for larger light” [l. 29]), even his home on a rocky island off the mainland (“Among the quarried downs of Wight” [l. 32]) all recall the speaker of the earlier poem. And if both men are Ulysses, both are also Telemachus: Palgrave because he is a younger man to whom the older speaker contrasts himself; Tennyson because he is the one who stays at home taking care of business (the business, above all, of being Poet Laureate) while others follow knowledge and adventure. Thus the distinction between Ulysses and Telemachus – seemingly so unbridgeable in “Ulysses” – here collapses. In contrast to the earlier poem, “I” and “you” are not so irreparably estranged as to be mutually irrelevant, but are balanced and even intermingled.

The change is most evident in the final stanza of “To Ulysses.” The old Ulysses’s most biting and dismissive irony – “He works his work, I mine” – is explicitly revised:

Through which I followed line by line
 Your leading hand, and came, my friend,
 To prize your various book, and send
 A gift of slenderer value, mine. (ll. 45-8)

The modesty of the final line may be mere courtesy, but it is not the ironic courtesy of the earlier poem, which masked an underlying egomania. Tennyson's willingness to address this new Telemachus unabashedly in the second person is the sign of his sincerity. Tennyson does not shy away from poking fun at his addressee: it was Palgrave who came up with the title *Ulysses* for his book, and "To Ulysses" suggests that he does not compare well with either his Homeric or his Tennysonian prototype. Like them he has "seen and known" much (his "eyes have known this globe of ours" [l. 2]); but unlike Ulysses, who fought with gods and was a part of all that he met, Palgrave seems to have spent most of his time cataloguing trees. (In actuality, he was an adventurous missionary, not a horticulturist; but although Tennyson was aware of this, he refrains from imposing an identity onto Palgrave, but instead accepts and responds to the explorer's own self-depiction in his book.)²² In Tennyson's playful address, Palgrave with his love of plants is made to resemble not Ulysses so much as his companions, as they are described in "The Lotos-Eaters," Tennyson's earlier treatment of the Ulysses story.

But the irony of this implicit comparison is far less damning than the condescending respect paid to Telemachus, especially since the speaker of "To Ulysses" directs the same sort of irony at himself. Tennyson does contrast himself to the "basking" Palgrave as one who confronts wind and weather: like the old Ulysses who "with a frolic welcome took / The thunder and the sunshine" ("Ulysses," ll. 47-8), he is "tolerant of the colder time," though "frost is keen and days are brief" ("To Ulysses," ll. 13, 19). But if Palgrave, with his timeless ("summer-winter") warm weather ("tropic bower and brake") is like a latter-day lotos-eater, Tennyson himself is cast as a latter-day St. Simeon Stylites.

For there is a slightly ludicrous suggestion that he is purposely defying time and the elements to overcome him:

I soaking here in winter wet –
The century's three strong eights have met
To drag me down to seventy-nine. ("To Ulysses," ll. 6-8)

Yet the mildly paranoiac and self-aggrandizing phrasing of these lines (which recall Simeon as well in their obsessively precise numeration) does not render the speaker grotesque, but merely levels him with his addressee. By distributing the irony between the two men, Tennyson enables himself to respond to Palgrave's with genuine respect, even though the speaker's voice is technically no less monologic than in "Ulysses," where the absence of dialogue effectively undermined the respect expressed for Telemachus's "work."

A poem like "To Ulysses" bears the same relation to an earlier dramatic monologue as "Andrea del Sarto" does to an earlier Romantic lyric. Both use comic elements to ironize the speaker, and thus to expose some of the more hidden conflicts of the earlier poem. "To Ulysses" does not epitomize a new Victorian genre in the same way that "Andrea del Sarto" may be thought to do, but it is a fine representative of a type of poem to which Tennyson turned with frequent success in his later years. These "poems of social converse,"²³ based most directly on the Horatian verse epistle, manage to balance first and second-person discourse without claiming to speak for the addressee (like some lyrics) and without using him or her as a mere sounding board (like some monologues). It is the form that Tennyson used for the dedicatory poems of most of his later volumes, including two small masterpieces, "To Edward FitzGerald" (1883) and "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava" (1889) (the latter also written in the *In Memoriam* stanza). I do not mean to set up these poems as the end-point of

nineteenth-century lyric; but the movement from “conversation” to “social converse” is significant. These late poems are far more than occasional pieces, but they make use of their immediate occasion to implicate themselves in a dialogue – poem replying to poem, or to an act of kindness. The concentrated isolation of the single speaking voice thus comes to seem an incidental rather than an essential aspect of the poetry, as in conversation poems; and as a consequence, these poems manage to be personal lyrics which avoid almost entirely the egotism that is usually so inherent a part of first-person poetry.

¹ See Shaw, “Lyric Displacement in the Victorian Monologue: Naturalizing the Vocative,” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52 (1997): 302-325, especially p. 304: “Coleridge’s conversation poems naturalize the ode and lyric by substituting, for formal apostrophes to seasons, places, and natural phenomena, the dramatic monologue’s vocatives of direct address to a person.” The monologue’s debt to Romantic poetry received its first full-length critical consideration in Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton, 1957); notable additions to the critical tradition since then have included, among many others, Harold Bloom, *Poetry and Repression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), and the essays in the special issue of *Victorian Poetry* on “The Dramatic ‘I,’” ed. Linda Shires (Vol. 22, no. 2; Summer 1984), especially those by Herbert F. Tucker and U. C. Knoepfelmacher. See also Tucker’s sustainedly brilliant discussion of “Tithonus” in *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 239-264.

² Quoted in Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), p. xl.

³ William Hazlitt, “On Mr. Wordsworth’s Poem The Excursion,” *Complete Works*, ed. P. P. Howe, vol. IV (London: J. M. Dent, 1930), p. 113.

⁴ Keats to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), I, 387.

⁵ Bloom, *Poetry and Repression*, p. 136. Compare John Bayley’s essay, “Keats and Reality”: “Paradoxically, it is the renunciation of the self that strikes us as self-absorbed, even solipsistic” (*English Poets: British Academy Chatterton Lectures* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988], p. 189).

⁶ All quotations from “Andrea del Sarto” refer to *The Poetical Works of Robert Browning*, vol. V: *Men and Women*, ed. Ian Jack and Robert Inglesfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

⁷ William Shakespeare, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

⁸ Biron’s ability to rationalize is indeed so Browningsque that I think it probable that “Le Byron de Nos Jours,” the subtitle of “Dis Aliter Visum,” refers not only to Byron but to Biron.

⁹ Mario L. D'Avanzo, "Francis, Lucrezia, and the Figurative Language of 'Andrea del Sarto,'" *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 9 (1968): 527.

¹⁰ The similarity between Fontainebleau and Fiesole is visible in the near-tautology of "*frank French eyes*." Andrea the mediocre, the draftsman, the corrector of outlines, loves to have all things called by their right names, just as he loves to have outlines correctly sketched. This is why he takes delight in being able to tell Lucrezia, "There's what we painters call our harmony!" (l. 34); even more, he finds comfort in the fact that "The cue-owls speak the name we call them by" (l. 210). It seems therefore significant that his best memories of France should also involve such a pleasingly exact relation between signifier and signified.

¹¹ Both these categories are critical constructions, but not the less useful for that. For Susan Eilenberg the term "conversation poem" is not only useful but strangely appropriate: "[T]here is something about the language of the poems that seems to license the category and acknowledge the incongruity between the style and situation. For each of the conversation poems is based on the thwarted desire for response" (*Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Literary Possession* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992], p. 22). The two categories often run into each other; although part of my aim in this essay is to define a distinguishing feature, certain borderline cases ("Two in the Campagna," for example) defy categorization.

¹² All quotations from Coleridge's poetry refer to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912).

¹³ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 135.

¹⁴ Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 29.

¹⁵ I use the masculine pronoun throughout, because the speakers of all the poems I discuss happen to be male. I do not mean, however, to exclude lyrics or monologues written in a female voice; for an informative discussion of the latter, see Cynthia Scheinberg, "Recasting 'sympathy and judgment': Amy Levy, Women Poets, and the Victorian Dramatic Monologue," *VP* 35 (1997): 173-191.

¹⁶ In saying that the speaker of a Romantic lyric speaks universally, I am not disagreeing with, for instance, Jerome McGann, when he writes, "Shelley's ideology [in "Adonais"] is time and place specific.... Shelley's futurism is not a model for human life, then, it is an example of human life" (*The Romantic Ideology* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983], p. 123). But what is true of Shelley is not true of the speaker of "Adonais," who, like the speaker of "The Eolian Harp," is torn in different directions, but believes that he speaks truly and timelessly when he concludes on a note of what McGann calls "futurism."

¹⁷ This predilection has often been noted; see for example Eleanor Cook, *Browning's Lyrics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), pp. 126-7, and Lee Erickson, "The Self and Others in Browning's *Men and Women*," *VP* 21 (1983): 53.

¹⁸ I said at the start that Andrea asks nothing of his wife but smiles and hand-holding. This is appropriate, since the face and the hands are the two parts of the body that are visible in paintings of the Madonna – so that for Andrea, who sees Lucrezia only as a model, they are the only parts that need exist at all.

¹⁹ “St Simeon Stylites,” ll. 30-32, 172-3; “Frost at Midnight,” ll. 37-38. All quotations from Tennyson refer to *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). Simeon’s claim that his “bald brows in silent hours become / Unnaturally hoar with rime” (ll. 162-3) likewise suggests a parody of Coleridge, as does his final, ambiguous sighting of a heavenly stranger (whom he addresses as “blessèd brother”).

²⁰ Andrea too, as I have said, projects his own desires on others; what differentiates him from the Romantics is the lack of a universalizing impulse. We might adduce another dramatic monologist who imposes his own words on dumb objects – Tennyson’s “Northern Farmer, New Style,” who hears his horse’s legs repeating “Proputty, proputty, proputty.” But though his views on property, as expounded to his son, are meant to be convincing, they are not necessarily meant to be true: “Thim’s my noätions, Sammy, wheerby I means to stick; / But if thou marries a bad un, I’ll leäve the land to Dick” (ll. 57-8). The farmer wishes Sammy to believe only for his own good; agreement or disagreement does not affect the farmer himself one way or the other.

²¹ I agree with Dorothy Mermin’s reading of the role of the mariners as the main audience of “Ulysses” (*The Audience in the Poem* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983]), but I believe that the refusal to speak to Telemachus is nevertheless extraordinary. He is the natural addressee at this moment; and even if it is important that the final addressees should be the mariners whom Ulysses is leading to their deaths, there was nothing to prevent the use of direct second-person address to both Telemachus and the mariners in turn.

²² William N. Rogers II, “Tennyson’s Poetry of Social Converse: ‘To Ulysses,’” *VP* 19 (1981): 351-365, relates that Palgrave had been not only an energetic missionary but a secret agent, and that Tennyson (and at least some of his audience) would have known this about him. It is therefore all the more notable that none of Palgrave’s more adventurous work is mentioned in the poem.

²³ A. Dwight Culler, *The Poetry of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 249. Culler also mentions the Horatian inspiration of these poems, and discusses some of his favorites, pp. 249-253.