

THE MIND'S STAGE: MONODRAMA AS
HISTORICAL TREND AND INTERPRETIVE STRATEGY

by

KURT TAROFF

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Abstract

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Kurt Taroff

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This dissertation examines the concept of monodrama, a term often employed rather carelessly and without context, seeking a definition that takes into account the somewhat obscure history of the term, as well as the theoretical context in which the term often appears today. The first half of the study explores the history of monodrama, beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1766 music-theatre work, *Pygmalion*. While some have seen the form initiated by *Pygmalion* as disappearing by 1815, there is considerable evidence that monodrama was imported to England through the work of Robert Southey and Matthew "Monk" Lewis among others, and elements of monodrama have been identified by modern scholars in the dramatic work of the major English Romantics, such as Wordsworth's *The Borderers* and Byron's *Manfred*. Similar elements of monodrama appear in Romantic music, particularly Hector Berlioz's 1831-1832, which he referred to as a "*monodrame lyrique*" in 1855. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, monodrama came into its own as a fully theorized genre. In the theories of French symbolist Saint-Pol-Roux and Russian symbolist

Nikolai Evreinov, monodrama was cast as a form centrally concerned with the external expression of the internal experience of a single protagonist, an element that was always inherent in the form, but now the focus in its modern conception and definition. Monodrama, these theorists argue, aims to align the spectator as closely as possible to the protagonist, allowing the viewer to share the protagonist's experience at the moment it occurs. The second half of the dissertation looks at the continuing influence of these theories and of the form itself by analyzing three distinct types of monodrama: single-character monodrama, seen in works such as Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung*; divided-self monodrama, depicting the fragmented parts of an individual psyche at war within an individual, as seen in works by playwrights as varied as Evreinov, Beckett, and Shepard; and finally, multi-character monodrama, in which we see the world filtered through the consciousness of the protagonist, with all people, places and things on stage through the hero's subjective lens. The dissertation has three central aims: to set forth the history of monodrama; to arrive at a definition of monodrama that appropriately reflects that history as well as the contextual context in which the term is most often used; and finally, to demonstrate ways in which monodrama has been and can be utilized as an interpretative tool in the writing, production, and reading of dramatic texts.

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Introduction

In the following pages I trace the genealogy of monodrama, both as a consciously defined and theorized genre, and as a conceptual framework for the writing, performance, and interpretation of dramatic work that may or may not have been conceived with the term monodrama in mind, but that nevertheless show a demonstrable affinity with the conceptual basis of the form. There is a long history of plays that have attempted to depict life as it is subjectively experienced by the individual, and plays of this type have most often been associated with the word monodrama, and, conversely, these plays represent the type of work to which the term has most often been applied. This dissertation demonstrates how monodrama evolved from a musical experiment consisting of the alternation of music and spoken monologue to a dramatic form characterized by its ability to reveal a single consciousness.

This study is not the first to consider monodrama as a form. As we shall see, various critics have examined isolated aspects of monodrama's history: Kirsten Gram Holmström and J. van der Veen have produced comprehensive histories of the early musical monodrama form pioneered by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Georg Benda, while Laurence Senelick, Spencer Golub, and Sharon

Carnicke each examine the formulation of monodramatic theory in Russia in the early twentieth century, particularly that of Nikolai Evreinov. Several studies have also sought to tie together various strands of monodrama: A. Dwight Culler connects the Rousseau/Benda form to Tennyson's *Maud*; Diane Penney Holloway, among others, similarly connects the Rousseau/Benda form to Arnold Schoenberg's twentieth-century monodramas; and a number of critics connect Romantic poetic drama and music to modern manifestations of monodrama, while Jeffrey N. Cox ties those same Romantic dramas back to the Rousseau/Benda form. Alexei Pasuev, in a 2001 article for *Teatr*, traces the continued influence of Nikolai Evreinov's theory on productions at the Moscow Art Theatre 2.

Joseph Danan's 1995 book, *Le Théâtre de la Pensée* covers similar ground to that of this dissertation and uses many of the same examples. Danan, however, uses Edouard Dujardin's concept of the *monologue intérieur* (discussed here in chapter two) as the conceptual basis of his study, rather than any theory of monodrama. *La Théâtre de la Pensée* is therefore a study of the interior monologue as it appears on stage and in drama and not a study of monodrama—a subtle but significant difference.

The present study is the first to attempt to weave together the various threads of monodrama's history into a coherent whole. One of the findings in my research has been that commentators on individual strains or examples of monodrama are unaware of other aspects of the trend (i.e. Susan Youens, as we will see, tying Schubert's *Winterreise* to twentieth-century monodrama, but failing to consider, or even mention, the Rousseau/Benda form). This

disconnection may well be explained by the absence of any history of monodrama or generally agreed upon definition. I argue that when all of the various manifestations of monodrama are considered in the context in which they developed, a history of monodrama emerges as a genre with clear roots and continuing relevance and vitality. For many, the term exists in a vacuum without any critical history; it is this critical history that I attempt to supply.

The history of monodrama as a theatrical form is deeply intertwined with its development in music. Several works of music and music-theatre are discussed in this study. I have looked at these works primarily from a literary and dramatic, rather than a musicological perspective. Musicological studies are plentiful for most of the works discussed herein.

It must be noted that I have chosen not to examine in depth the concept of monodrama as a form of psychological therapy as pioneered by Jacob Moreno as part of his work in “psychodrama.”¹ In Moreno’s practice, a patient is asked to take the roles of family members or friends as a way of better understanding his or her relationships. Moreno’s monodrama is not wholly unrelated to the subject of the present study. Tian Dayton describes the possible benefit of the technique: “It offers the protagonist an opportunity actually to experience being that person, to understand her from the inside out, rather than the outside in.”² This

¹ “Psychodrama,” as we will later see, is a term that has often been associated with monodrama.

² Tian Dayton, *The Drama Within: Psychodrama and Experiential Therapy* (Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, Inc., 1994), 73.

description is not incompatible with twentieth-century theoretical statements about monodrama and its ability to allow the spectator to “co-experience” with the protagonist of a drama, to experience that character from the “inside out, rather than the outside in.” However, Moreno’s monodrama has no application outside of drama therapy. It cannot be used as a method of writing, performance, or interpretation, and there is no evidence that it had any influence on (or that it was even known by) any of the writers and theorists discussed herein. Its applicability to this study, therefore, is minimal.³

This project has three fundamental goals. First, I endeavor to lay out the history of monodrama in form and concept, from Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1766 music-theatre work *Pygmalion*, generally acknowledged as the first monodrama, to the theories of monodrama which began to appear in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by authors such as Saint-Pol-Roux and Nikolai Evreinov, to manifestations of the form in music and theatre that have appeared throughout the twentieth century. I examine the underlying concepts of the theories of monodrama and the dramatic works that bring those theories to life, pointing to parallel trends in philosophy and psychology and exploring their impact on monodrama. I aim to show that monodrama is a definable and distinct genre with its own formal and conceptual characteristics that has evolved over the

³ For more information on Moreno’s monodrama, see Dayton, above; also Robert Allen and Nina Krebs, *Psychotheatrics: The New Art of Self-Transformation* (New York: Garland, 1978).

last two hundred and forty years, subject to diverse influences according to the dominant aesthetic sensibilities and intellectual currents of the time.

Second, I seek a definition of monodrama that best accounts for the history and development of the form. The term monodrama, as I have already noted, has sometimes been used loosely and indiscriminately. In the introduction to part two of the dissertation, I consider the history and theoretical background of the form in the cultural and historical contexts in which the term appears in order to arrive at a definition that will be comprehensive and flexible enough to account for the variety of types and examples of the form.

Finally, after establishing the historical and theoretical background of the form, I examine the possibilities of monodrama as an interpretive strategy. Using plays that were initially intended to be monodrama as a starting point, I demonstrate the strong affinity of those works to later plays that may not have been designated by the term, but bear a demonstrable conceptual kinship with those earlier works. I show how monodrama has been used by scholars, critics, and theatre artists as a tool by which to re-interpret drama, both classic and modern, as, for example, in readings of *Hamlet* by Stéphane Mallarmé and Edward Gordon Craig.

Chapters one and two are essentially historical in nature, tracing the early history of monodrama and its evolution to the conscious theorizations that appear at the *fin de siècle*. The final three chapters are dedicated to the examination of three distinct “Varieties of the Monodramatic”: single-character monodramas,

monodramas of the divided self, and multi-character monodramas. The plays discussed are not intended as a definitive catalogue of monodramas, but have instead been chosen as representative works that demonstrate the potential of monodrama as a tool for dramatic analysis.

Chapter 1

It is indicative of (and perhaps, in part, a cause of) the terminological confusion surrounding monodrama that the work universally acknowledged as having initiated the form, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's 1766 music-theatre piece, *Pygmalion*, was never referred to as a monodrama by its author. It may thus come as some surprise that in referring to monodrama, Kirsten Gram Holmström proclaims, with great certainty, "We have here one of the rare cases where the origin and course of development of an art form are beyond argument."¹ Holmström refers here solely to the music-theatre form of which *Pygmalion* was the progenitor, and indeed, the two major studies of the form, Holmström's 1967 *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants* and J. van der Veen's 1955 *Le Mélodrame musical de Rousseau au Romantisme*, construct a convincing model for the form's history from *Pygmalion* up to approximately 1815. Both studies focus primarily on the formal aspects of musical construction as the basis for monodrama as a genre, a perspective that helps to explain the fact that both Holmström and van der Veen imply that monodrama as an independent form was essentially obsolete by 1817.

Accepting the impressive history catalogued by both Holmström and van der Veen, I would like to propose an alternate reading of the evidence. As we shall see, both of these studies, along with numerous other commentaries on the

¹ Kirsten Gram Holmström, *Monodrama, Attitudes, Tableaux Vivants* (Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 40.

form, identify elements of interiority and psychology in these early monodramas, but accord them no special significance. While conceding that these elements may not have been the initial impetus behind these works, I would like to suggest that interiority and psychology represent substantial aspects of the early musical monodramas, aspects that perpetuated monodrama's influence even after the musical genre fell out of favor.

Rousseau began work on *Pygmalion* in 1762, hoping to demonstrate the practicality of his theories regarding recitative in French opera. In his *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, Rousseau had asserted that the French language, for all its beauty, was ill-suited for song.² His solution was a separation and alternation of spoken dialogue and musical phrases, a concept that would first come to fruition in *Pygmalion*. According to Kirsten Gram Holmström, the theory implied that “When passion has reached such an intensity that the words no longer suffice, the declamation must be broken off and the violent emotion expressed pantomimically to the accompaniment of expressive music.”³ This format of the alternation of spoken words and music (and similar variations on it) constituted the foundation of what would become known as monodrama in its early stages.

Having completed the text of the piece, Rousseau begged Horace Coignet to compose the music. Coignet agreed, and by 1770, *Pygmalion* was complete

² J. van der Veen, *Le Mélodrame musical de Rousseau au Romantisme* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 19-21.

³ Holmström, 40.

and was performed for the first time in Lyons in November of that year.⁴ A. Dwight Culler has suggested that the work was first performed in Paris at the Opéra in 1772, but the Rousseau/Coignet *Pygmalion* does not appear in the catalog of works presented at the Opéra,⁵ and both van der Veen and Holmström agree that it was first seen in Paris at the Comédie-Française in 1775. Some light is shed on this discrepancy by Jacqueline Waeber, who suggests that *Pygmalion* was repeatedly performed at private gatherings in the French capital, achieving considerable notoriety, but that “it was only in October 1775 that *Pygmalion* was finally shown *to the public*, on the stage of the Comédie-Française.”⁶ When published in the *Mercure de France* in 1771, and in its early stage incarnations, *Pygmalion* was originally called a “scène lyrique” by Rousseau, but in his 1774-1775 “Observations sur l’*Alceste* Italien de M. le Chevalier Gluck” he designated it a “mélo-drame,” and the term seems to have stuck.⁷

Pygmalion was extremely simple in plot, as J. van der Veen notes, “Rousseau s’est abstenu de toute extravagance; son texte est sobre, sans complications extérieures; l’intérêt du dialogue reside exclusivement dans la

⁴ A. Dwight Culler, “Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue,” *PMLA* 90, no. 3 (May 1975): 369.

⁵ Spire Pitou, *The Paris Opéra: An Encyclopedia of Operas, Ballets, Composers, and Performers, Volume II—Rococo and Romantic, 1715-1815*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983).

⁶ Jacqueline Waeber, “Horace Coignet and the Musical Origins of *Pygmalion*,” in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Horace Coignet, *Pygmalion, scène lyrique* (Genève: Université-Conservatoire de Musique, 1997), 11. [Italics are Waebers’s.]

⁷ Jeffrey N. Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), 261 n.

façon vive et passionnée dont sont exprimés les sentiments du personnage. Le monologue de Pygmalion remplit la grande partie de la pièce; le rôle de Galathée est fort modeste. Le texte est pathétique, mais il n'est nullement dramatique.”⁸

The set represents Pygmalion's studio, with sculptures at various stages of completion spread across the stage. Among these, Galatée alone stands shrouded. Pygmalion wanders around the stage, wielding his chisel, decrying the world's inability to understand his artistry. These spoken laments alternate with periods of musical interludes that are accompanied by a pantomime in which Pygmalion chisels away at the various statues. Finally, he comes upon and unshrouds Galatée. He prepares to apply the chisel to Galatée when he is struck by the fear that in attempting to further refine his work, he will end up destroying it. Pygmalion's passion moves him to the point of madness until, suddenly, Galatée comes to life. Galatée points to herself, saying “C'est moi,” touches a nearby statue, saying, “Ce n'est plus moi,” and finally, places her hand on Pygmalion's heart, crying “C'est encore moi,” before falling into his arms. Overwhelmed by the animation of his creation, Pygmalion cries, “Je t'ai donné tout mon être, je ne vivrai plus que par toi,” and promptly dies.⁹

Galatée's assertion of unity with Pygmalion and the idea of the artist as life-giver are evidence of *Pygmalion* as proto-Romanticism. The piece also places considerable emphasis on the angst and struggle within the soul of the artist, and the solitude of the studio gives the artist (perhaps Rousseau in the guise

⁸ Van der Veen, 8.

⁹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Horace Coignet, *Pygmalion, scène lyrique* (Genève: Université-Conservatoire de Musique, 1997).

of *Pygmalion*) the opportunity to express his inmost feelings. Henriette Beese, seeing *Pygmalion* as a predecessor of Romantic lyric drama, as well as of the work of *fin de siècle* Symbolist poets such as Mallarmé and Maeterlinck, notes that Rousseau “utilizes the conjured motif solely in order to externalize subjectivity, to lend expression to inwardness.”¹⁰ Music, it seems, played a considerable role in the expression of interiority, as van der Veen suggests, “La musique doit peindre quelque chose, soit le monde extérieur, soit la vie intérieur.”¹¹ This attempt to exteriorize the internal even extended to the pantomime, according to Holmström: “The pantomimic directions are independent of the conventions of the dance and of declamation and can be regarded as an expression of the yearning of the 1760s and 1770s for a free, suggestive, corporal expression of emotion.”¹² And even as the individual aspects of *Pygmalion* work to convey a notion of interiority, so does the very structure of the piece, as van der Veen suggests that the constant alternation of speech and music was meant to indicate *Pygmalion*’s emotional instability.

Pygmalion appears to have caused little stir among the general public upon its initial performances in France. However, as A. Dwight Culler notes, “Though it was never a great success, it remained in repertory for the rest of the

¹⁰ Henriette Beese, “*Galathée à l’origine des langues: Comments on Rousseau’s Pygmalion as a Lyric Drama*,” *MLN* 93, no. 5 (December 1978): 848.

¹¹ Van der Veen, 24.

¹² Holmström, 44.

century and was widely imitated and translated.”¹³ The most significant of these translations, into German, was to result in a performance of the piece at Goethe’s Weimar theatre by Seyler’s troupe on May 13, 1772, with a new musical setting by Anton Schweitzer.¹⁴ It is unclear how Goethe came to know of the piece, but van der Veen suggests that his initial admiration was fundamentally related to the text and that he did not understand the musical aspects of the work.¹⁵

Nevertheless, *Pygmalion* proved popular at Weimar, and the production was repeated in Gotha on November 15, 1774.¹⁶ In attendance at this performance, the author and actor Johann Christian Brandes found himself inspired to create the text for his own monodrama, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, at least in part to provide a good role for his wife, Charlotte. Schweitzer was to have composed the music, but was called to duties at the Court, and the piece was finished by a Bohemian composer whose name would become intimately linked with monodrama, Georg Benda.

The plot of *Ariadne auf Naxos* is somewhat more complex than that of *Pygmalion*. Theseus comes upon the sleeping Ariadne at the edge of a promontory, intending to tell her of his impending departure for war. Instead, he laments his leaving his lover and “reproaches himself for leaving the woman who has so courageously rescued him from the labyrinth.”¹⁷ When Ariadne calls out

¹³ Culler, 369.

¹⁴ Holmström, 46.

¹⁵ Van der Veen, 36.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁷ Holmström, 48.

his name in her sleep he reconsiders his departure, but duty ultimately wins out, and Theseus leaves without saying goodbye. Ariadne soon awakens, and, as Arthur Simeon Winsor summarizes, “In her monologue . . . she first calls attention to the beautiful summer day. But gradually she begins to realize her fate, and loneliness descends upon her. She becomes progressively more frightened as a storm threatens, lightning flashes, and wild animals roar in the distance. Deliriously she reviews incidents in her relationship with Theseus, unable to distinguish fantasy from reality.”¹⁸ As Ariadne’s “incoherent laments”¹⁹ become increasingly violent, she is ultimately struck by a flash of lightning, sending her hurtling into the sea as she screams Theseus’s name.

While there is no question that the work was inspired by *Pygmalion* (of which Benda would also create a version in 1779), *Ariadne* deviated from its model in significant ways. First, while speech and music alternated in *Pygmalion*, in *Ariadne*, as well as Benda’s later monodramas, the music accompanied the speech, although it is important to note that the words were still spoken, rather than sung. And while Galatée plays only a very minor role in *Pygmalion*, Theseus plays a nearly equal role to Ariadne in Benda’s piece. It is for this reason that Benda, in the published score of *Ariadne*, called the work a “Duo Drama,”²⁰ as the work contains not one, but two monodramas, Theseus’s, with which the piece begins, and then Ariadne’s.

¹⁸ Arthur Simeon Winsor, “The Melodramas and Singspiels of Georg Benda,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Michigan, 1967), 27.

¹⁹ Holmström, 48.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

Ariadne auf Naxos was, by all accounts, a triumph for all involved.

Holmström notes that “It was a brilliant success for Benda, Charlotte Brandes, and the author,”²¹ while Culler calls the piece “the best and most famous of the German monodramas.”²² The success of *Ariadne auf Naxos* was such that Benda composed another monodrama, *Medée*, set to a text by Friedrich Wilhelm Gotter, that same year. *Medée*, containing four (albeit minor) speaking parts in addition to that of Medea, was designated a monodrama by Benda.

In *Medée*, we witness the mythological heroine much as she was presented by Euripides. Medea’s laments, similar in style to those of Ariadne, are interrupted by brief conversations with her children’s governess, the children themselves before she slays them, and finally Jason, before, as in Euripides, Medea flies off in her chariot. The other roles are small, but unlike the separation of Theseus and Ariadne, Medea actually interacts with each of these characters. Nevertheless, Medea remains the undeniable center of her monodrama, and while these conversations may seem to emphasize a surface externality, as Winsor notes, Benda’s composition “continues to offer external evidence of Medea’s inner conflict.”²³

Winsor notes a similar emphasis on interiority in *Ariadne auf Naxos*: “The violent nature of the subject and the extent to which the drama progresses on a psychological level justifies the scarcity of overt action. The primary focus of

²¹ Holmström, 46.

²² Culler, 371.

²³ Winsor, 49.

attention always centers on the inner conflicts of the principal characters. Everything else simply gives them cause to react.”²⁴ In light of Winsor’s commentaries on the two works, it is intriguing to consider the possibility that the minor characters of *Medée* exist primarily as a spur to Medea’s inner conflict. J. van der Veen, however, sees a gap between the conceptual bases of Benda’s two major monodramas: “Le conflit psychologique qui caractérise Médée, se reflète parfaitement dans la structure musicale de l’oeuvre, phénomène qui est beaucoup moins evident pour la musique d’*Ariadne auf Naxos*, où l’expression psychologique est un peu mêlée à la peinture musicale du monde extérieur.”²⁵ Indeed, echoing van der Veen’s words describing *Pygmalion*, Holmström says of *Ariadne*, “Its notes paint the sunrise and the storm that Ariadne depicts in words.”²⁶ And while van der Veen’s distinction between music reflecting psychological conflict as opposed to painting the landscape is a valid one, his assertion of a “monde extérieur” is worth interrogating further. For while the music of *Ariadne* may attempt to paint the landscape, the impending storm, lightning flashes and wild animals of the text seem more likely to suggest the landscape of Ariadne’s tortured psyche than that of an objective external reality. Ultimately, van der Veen concludes, “Surtout dans ces deux mélodrames Benda a

²⁴ Ibid., 28.

²⁵ Van der Veen, 65.

²⁶ Holmström, 48.

visé à une unité structurale comprenant des éléments des deux ordres tout à faits différents: l'ordre musical et l'ordre psychologique."²⁷

Unlike *Pygmalion* in France, Benda's monodramas, particularly *Ariadne auf Naxos*, attained considerable popularity of their own in Germany and spurred numerous imitations. Approximately thirty monodramas were written in Germany between 1775 and 1790.²⁸ One example of the reach of Benda's work comes from a letter dated November 12, 1778, from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart to his father, Leopold:

[The Seyler company] refuses to let me go until I have composed a duodrama for [them]; and indeed it did not take me long to make up my mind, for I have always wanted to write a drama of this kind. . . . The piece I saw was Benda's *Medea*. He has composed another one, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and both are really excellent. . . . I like those two works of his so much that I carry them about with me.²⁹

Mozart did indeed begin work on a monodrama, composing music for a text by Otto Heinrich von Gemmingen, *Semiramis*, based on Voltaire's play, but never completed the piece. In speaking of his prospective work as a "duodrama," Mozart is likely referring to Benda's appellation for *Ariadne auf Naxos*, but since

²⁷ Van der Veen, 67.

²⁸ Holmström, 52.

²⁹ Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, letter to Leopold Mozart, 12 November 1778, in *The Letters of Mozart and His Family*, ed. Emily Anderson (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 630-631.

there is no portion of *Semiramis* extant, it is difficult to know whether he intended there to be one or two speaking roles.

A monodrama was, however, completed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who, as I noted earlier, first brought Rousseau's *Pygmalion* to Germany. Goethe began work on the text of his monodrama, *Proserpina*, in 1776, initially, it seems, in response to a call by the composer Cristoph Willibald Gluck for the great poets of Germany to write poems in commemoration of the death of his daughter Marianne. The poem was never given to Gluck, but Goethe continued to work on the piece. In early 1778, *Proserpina* was published in the *Teutschen Merkur*, after having already appeared on stage as part of a larger work, *Der Triumph der Empfindsamkeit*.³⁰ The monodrama's appearance in this larger work is notable in that Goethe took the opportunity to poke fun at the form, suggesting, at the very least, that by 1778, the form was well-known enough to be mocked. However, Goethe does seem to have taken both the form itself, and his own monodrama, quite seriously, and *Proserpina* was finally performed on its own at Weimar in 1814. Goethe's monodrama, which portrays Proserpina's lament at her loss of the living world, her anger at Pluto, and her eating of the pomegranate, also demonstrates a concern with the idea of interiority. K.R. Eissler sees the piece as "strongly reminiscent of mechanisms observable in dream-work. . . . The whole

³⁰ Holmström, 88.

structure of the monodrama is reminiscent of a dream.”³¹ The link between monodrama and dreams, as we will see, has been an enduring one.

It is also worth considering the idea that monodrama may well have had an impact on Goethe’s later work. In *Goethe’s Faust: A Literary Analysis*, Stuart Atkins recognizes just such an influence in the first scene in which the hero appears in the play: “The scene Night exemplifies eighteenth-century monodrama, a lyric-dramatic theatrical form which, after winning favor through Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*, was highly fashionable for some years.”³² Jeffrey N. Cox concurs, arguing that *Faust* “begins as monodrama only to shatter the limits of that form in exploring Faust’s larger quest.”³³ The possibility of such a link is particularly intriguing in consideration of the fact that *Faust* (particularly Part II) has often been connected with multi-character monodramas in the twentieth century.

Monodrama had never truly taken hold in France, despite its birth there, and well before *Proserpina* left the stage, German critics too had been heralding the end of monodrama. Kirsten Gram Hölmstrom, using *Proserpina* as a guideline, sets 1815 as the date of decline for monodrama, noting, “For some years after this date there were sporadic performances of the old monodramas; but

³¹ K.R. Eissler, *Goethe: A Psychoanalytic Study, 1775-1786* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963), 276.

³² Stuart Atkins, *Goethe’s Faust: A Literary Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 26. Others have seen a similar influence. See Harold Jantz, “The Structure of Time in *Faust*,” *MLN* 92, no. 3 (April 1997): 494-508, and Benjamin Bennett, “Levels and Movements of Consciousness in Goethe’s *Faust*,” *Theatre Journal* 34, no. 1 (March 1982): 5-19.

³³ Cox, *Shadows of Romance*, 44.

when at the beginning of the present century the genre was again used as a medium for experiment the plays had no connection to the 18th-century monodramas; the tradition was broken.”³⁴ Insofar as Holmström is referring to the formal musical constructions initiated by Rousseau and Benda, we may accept her conclusion. At the same time, Holmström’s assertion that monodrama represented the best means of “visualizing the external signs of mental states”³⁵ isolates an aspect of the early form that will come to play an integral role in incarnations bearing the name for the next two centuries.

As his title indicates, J. van der Veen chooses to retain *mélodrame* to refer to the whole of the genre in question, although he does acknowledge the common German usage of monodrama. This choice has significant bearing upon van der Veen’s conclusions. Van der Veen essentially concurs that the genre as an independent entity dissipates around 1815, but rather than it simply disappearing, he sees the form as becoming swallowed by the much larger, more popular genre of *mélodrame* fathered by Pixérécourt in France—another form characterized (at least in part) by the combination of speech and music. However, van der Veen not only points to a reemergence of the genre in the work of Arnold Schoenberg, but, like Holmström, recognizes the element of interiority in the form, as he quotes Carl von Weber: “C’est en premier lieu l’affaire propre de la mélodie de rendre et de faire clairement ressortir la vie intérieure exprimée par la parole,”³⁶

³⁴ Holmström, 241.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁶ Van der Veen, 104.

and, in his own words, refers to monodrama as a genre in which “l’expression psychologique determine la structure musicale.”³⁷

By 1815, the musical monodrama form to which Rousseau had given birth may well have exhausted its initial burst of creative energy. But, as we will see, in its relatively brief lifespan of about fifty years, this fairly narrow form laid the seeds for a broad-based and long-lived genre. Indeed, in contrast to Holmström’s assertion that monodrama “never became the springboard for new theatrical developments,”³⁸ A. Dwight Culler opines that as of this date, “its influence on other forms was only beginning.”³⁹

While the initial incarnation of monodrama had already passed its peak by the turn of the nineteenth century in France and Germany, the English came late to the form. Despite (or perhaps because of) this lateness, England would provide the setting for the transition of monodrama into new forms.

The passage of monodrama to England is impressively catalogued by A. Dwight Culler in his article “Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue.” Culler asserts that while *Pygmalion* was known and even performed in England, Germany, not France, was the major source for English monodrama. The initial carriers of the form were William Taylor, known as England’s first German

³⁷ Ibid., 61.

³⁸ Holmström, 240.

³⁹ Culler, 372.

scholar, and Dr. Frank Sayers. After a journey abroad in 1788 piqued Sayers's interest in German literature, Taylor noted that Sayers "took some lessons of me in German," and that among the works they read together was "the *Proserpina* of Goethe."⁴⁰ This introduction had some impact on Sayers, as Taylor notes that in 1790, Sayers wrote "the admirable monodrama, entitled *Pandora*, which is not only the finest poem of the kind in our language, but may be confronted with advantage against the *Pygmalion* of Rousseau, or even the *Proserpina* of Goethe, which last had served in some degree as a model."⁴¹

Taylor's reference to *Pandora*, which had no musical accompaniment, as a poem, would seem to problematize his comparison of Sayers's work to that of Rousseau and Goethe, considering that those works were always conceived musically. This view would seem to be confirmed, if complicated, by Sayers's own comments on his second monodrama, *Oswald* (1791): "The Monodrama is a species of Play, which has not yet, as far as I am able to discover, been attempted by English writers. . . . We find many of these poems among the Germans, French, and Italians, which are exceedingly interesting both in the closet and the theatre.—When represented on stage, the Monodrama is usually declaimed with intervals of music."⁴² It is worth noting that Sayers refers to monodrama both as a "species of Play," but also as poetry. Perhaps more importantly, while monodrama in its original form *was* the combination of spoken declamation with

⁴⁰ William Taylor, quoted in Culler, 376.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Dr. Frank Sayers, quoted in Culler, 376. Culler asserts that this represents the first use of the word in print in the English language.

intervals of music, Sayers appears to believe that monodrama refers specifically to the text being performed, its formal musical structure nothing more than a mode (and not even the only possible mode) of its representation. This interpretation (some might say misinterpretation) provides a subtle but significant shift in the meaning of monodrama, in that it no longer refers to a musical structure, but rather a mode of writing.

Next to experiment with the form was Robert Southey. In the autumn of 1792, Southey purchased his first book, Sayers's *Dramatic Sketches*, which contained *Pandora* and *Oswald*.⁴³ While Culler asserts that Southey did not actually meet Sayers until at least 1798, George Whalley notes that "In June 1794 Southey wrote that Sayers was 'a man to whom I am more obliged for enlarging my views in poetry than to any author ancient or modern.' Sayers gave Southey the monodrama form."⁴⁴ Southey had already written two monodramas, *Sappho* and *Orthryades and Aristodemus*, by 1799, when he wrote to William Wynne, "You know I am fond of mono-dramas."⁴⁵ Southey went on to write five additional monodramas after this date, but it is worth noting that according to Culler, "Southey thinks of these pieces as a scene out of a drama rather than as an independent form."⁴⁶

⁴³ George Whalley, "Coleridge and Southey in Bristol, 1795," *The Review of English Studies*, New Series 1, no. 4 (October 1950), 333.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Southey, quoted in Culler, 376.

⁴⁶ Culler, 376.

A boyhood acquaintance of Southey's, Matthew "Monk" Lewis (who acquired his nickname after his 1796 gothic novel, *The Monk*, achieved enormous popularity) composed a monodrama in 1803 that was unquestionably intended as an independent work—*The Captive*. Despite his association with Southey, Culler notes that Lewis probably came to the form more directly from its original sources. In 1791, Lewis studied in Paris, and in the summer of 1792 was in Germany, where on July 27 in Weimar, he met Goethe.⁴⁷ The possibility of a direct influence of the original form on Lewis is evidenced in his request to Covent Garden's manager, Thomas Harris, to present the piece alongside his play *Alonzo, King of Castile*, which was running there. Lewis asked Harris "whether he would let Mrs. Litchfield speak some lines which I have written, between the play and the farce. . . . The lines . . . are called 'The Captive' and are to be spoken with accompaniments of music."⁴⁸ Unlike Sayers, Lewis, who subtitled the piece, "A Monodrama," appears to conceive of the form, like his French and German predecessors, as the combination of the spoken "lines" and musical accompaniment.

The Captive presents us with a woman, never named, held in a dungeon. As the scene opens, a jailer provides her with bread and water and prepares to leave. The woman piteously begs him not to leave, swearing that she is not mad (we now know that this is an insane asylum), and that this is the result of a plot by

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁴⁸ Matthew Lewis, quoted in Culler, 377.

her “tyrant husband.”⁴⁹ While we cannot know for sure whether or not the woman is mad as the play begins, solitude and fear soon drive her to insanity, as confirmed in the play’s final lines:

My brain, my brain!—I know, I know,

I *am* not mad. . . . but soon *shall* be!

Yes! Soon!—For Lo yon!. . . . while I speak. . . .

Mark, how yon Daemon’s eye-balls glare!—

He sees me!—Now with dreadful shriek

He whirls a serpent high in air!—

Horror!—The Reptile strikes his tooth

Deep in my heart so crush’d and sad!—

Aye, laugh, ye fiends!—I feel the truth!

Your task is done!—(*With a loud shriek.*) I’m mad! I’m mad!⁵⁰

A writer of proto-melodrama (his gothic drama, *The Castle Spectre* (1797), was a great success at Drury Lane), Lewis thought better of leaving his audience with such a horrifyingly unhappy ending. As the woman “*dashes herself in frenzy upon the ground*,”⁵¹ her family enters the cell wordlessly. She finally notices them, but reacts deliriously and disbelievingly, until her child enters and runs to

⁴⁹ Matthew Lewis, *The Captive*, in *Seven Gothic Dramas*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992), 226.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

her, at which point: “*She looks at him with a vacant stare, then, with an expression of excessive joy, exclaims “My child!” sinks on her knees, and clasps him to her bosom. The Father &c., raise their hands to heaven in gratitude for the return of her reason, and the curtain falls slowly to solemn music.*”⁵²

The Captive was performed at Covent Garden on March 22, 1803, and despite Lewis’s melodramatic ending, the play was a complete (albeit interesting) failure. The immediate response was intense: “Never did Covent Garden present such a picture of agitation and dismay. Ladies bathed in tears—others fainting—while such of the audience as were able to avoid demonstrations like these, sat aghast, with pale horror painted on their countenances. It is said, that the very box-keepers took fright, less, perhaps, at the occurrences on the stage than at the state of the theatre.”⁵³ Lewis wrote to his mother about the events of that night:

[*The Captive*] proved too terrible for representation, and two people went into hysterics during the performance and two more after the curtain dropped. . . . In fact the subject (which was merely a picture of Madness) was so uniformly distressing to the feelings, that at last I felt my own a little painful; and as to Mrs. Litchfield, she almost fainted away. I did not expect that it would succeed, and of course am not disappointed at its failure; the only chance was, whether Pity would make the audience weep;

⁵² Ibid., 230.

⁵³ Matthew Lewis, *The Life and Correspondence of Matthew G. Lewis*, quoted in Culler, 377.

but instead of that, Terror threw them into fits; and of course there was the end of my Monodrama.⁵⁴

Indeed, this was to be to only performance of *The Captive*, as Lewis immediately withdrew the piece. Lewis's descriptions of the night's events seem to suggest that the state of mind of the audience closely reflected that of the heroine, as Jeffrey N. Cox argues:

One reason for this extreme response lies in the form of the monodrama, which presented the character without any mediating pattern of judgment embodied in plot. The character's emotions—highlighted through stirring music, powerful pantomime, and affecting sets—are allowed to engage the audience directly with the play providing nothing else to distance us from our sympathy for this single, central figure.⁵⁵

Cox sees the genesis of *The Captive* and of monodrama in general as a result of “the period's interest in psychological portraiture and the investigation of the inner life; but beyond that, the monodrama seems to tap a deep fear in the audience, a fear of extreme subjectivity, of the inward turn beyond the reach of

⁵⁴ Matthew Lewis, letter to his mother, 15 March 1803, quoted in Jeffrey N. Cox, Introduction to *Seven Gothic Dramas*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992), 43.

⁵⁵ Jeffrey N. Cox, Introduction to *Seven Gothic Dramas*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1992), 43.

social mores and religious codes.”⁵⁶ Tying *The Captive* to the monodramas of Rousseau and Benda, Cox thus draws a link between monodrama in its earliest form and the conception of the term that would develop in later years.

While a vogue for dramatic poetry was a significant aspect of the English Romantic movement, the term monodrama was little associated with that trend. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had been introduced to the form by Robert Southey, seems to have considered attempting such a work—one of the notes in his *Gutch Memorandum Book* reads “Jonas—a monodrama”⁵⁷—but in a letter to Southey dated October 21, 1794, Coleridge seems considerably less enthused: “I detest monodramas, but I never wished to establish my judgment on the throne of critical despotism.”⁵⁸ Coleridge’s antipathy for monodrama (at least by name) appears to have been widely shared among the Romantic dramatic poets, who generally eschew the term.

Nevertheless, while the great English Romantic dramas of the first half of the nineteenth century were not called monodramas by their authors, over the past fifty years scholars and critics have identified significant aspects of monodrama in the works of such icons as Wordsworth, Byron, and Shelley. Robert Langbaum makes such an argument in his 1963 book, *The Poetry of Experience*:

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁷ Whalley, 333.

⁵⁸ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, Vol. 1, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), Letter no. 65.

[Romantic drama] pits the hero against opposite abstractions, thus opening the way for a new kind of allegory in which villain and heroine represent conflicting aspects of the hero's self with the hero's problem to reconcile his internal conflict through self-development. The allegory is operative, however, only to the extent that the play is, like *Faust*, *Cain*, or *Manfred*, a monodrama—to the extent that only one character is unequivocally actual, with the incidents and the other characters existing as occasions for his self-expression and self-development, as a means of objectifying an essentially internal action. . . . Such a drama is monodramatic in that it exists as the perception of a single observer.⁵⁹

Langbaum, emphasizing the autobiographical aspect of much of the Romantic “cult of the artist,” relates these monodramatic elements to earlier lyric poetry, in which, he suggests, the speaker of these poems was always assumed to be the poet himself. In consequence, Langbaum notes, “In borrowing the poet's eyes we also borrow the past experience behind them, we are ready to see what he sees right through to the ultimate vision. But the content and meaning of what he sees has existence and validity only within the limiting conditions of his gaze.”⁶⁰

Langbaum places particular emphasis on the idea that the goal of Romantic poetry is the development of an understanding of the self. In *The Central Self*, Patricia Ball elaborates on this idea, noting of the Romantic poetic

⁵⁹ Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963), 63-64.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

dramas, “The movement of their action is towards self-revelation on two levels: for the hero and possibly other characters, and also for the poet himself. He experiences the drama as a parable of his mental journeying even though he chooses to suppress his own voice in favor of his characters.”⁶¹ Langbaum, however, takes Ball’s assertion one step further: “The autobiographical illusion is nonetheless important as precisely the plot—a plot about the self-development of an individual with whom the reader can identify himself to make the poem an incident in his own self-development as well. For the poetry of experience is, in its meaning if not its events, autobiographical for both the writer and the reader.”⁶² The experience of reading the work, then, is for the reader an event in a personal history, just as the writing was for the author; and the reader projects his own ideas and history into the text while reading it, just as the author did while composing it.

As the above suggests, Langbaum and Ball see in English Romantic poetry and drama a complex interaction of the subjective and objective, with the author projecting himself onto the landscape, even as that landscape makes its own deep impression upon him, as Langbaum notes, “Each encounter with the external world gives us a chance to project ourselves sympathetically into the Other and, by identifying there another aspect of the spiritual Self, to evolve a

⁶¹ Patricia M. Ball, *The Central Self* (London: The Athlone Press, 1968), 25.

⁶² Langbaum, 52.

soul or identity. It is not extravagant to say that the ultimate subject of all poetry of experience is just such an evolution.”⁶³ Ball elaborates on this idea:

The whole principle [of Romantic creativity] is not self-expression, but self-exploration and discovery. The poems are the living substance of this inquiry, the one method of scrutinizing experience without loss of its subjective immediacy. The self is indeed the starting point of such poetry, but it is also its goal, only to be known by being imaginatively grasped as it weaves the complex web of its own experience. Romantic poetry begins from a perception of the essential marriage between objective and subjective, not merely in the relationship of the world and the observer, but in the effort of self-realization to which the poetry is committed and by which it is most stimulated. The poets are alert to the complexity of the experiencing self, they regard identity not as an evident fact but as an ultimate achievement, its realized possession both the motive and the reward for creative exertion.⁶⁴

Romantic poetry and drama, according to Langbaum and Ball, presents a vision of a self very much akin to that of modern philosophy, in which the self is never stable, but is constantly formed and re-formed as a result of its experiences.

⁶³ Ibid., 50.

⁶⁴ Ball, 64.

This concept of subjectivity has its roots in the eighteenth-century subjectivist philosophy of George Berkeley and David Hume. Berkeley, in his 1707-08 *Philosophical Commentaries* (also known as the *Commonplace Book*), argued that “Nothing properly but persons i.e. conscious things do exist, all other things are not so much existences as manners of [the] existence of persons.”⁶⁵ Representations of the world, then, according to Alain Renaut, “refer not to things in themselves (of which they are reflections) but to minds (which are their source).”⁶⁶ Berkeley’s radical skepticism, undoubtedly indebted to (but even more skeptical, in its rejection of essences, than) Descartes, posits the individual human mind and the plethora of images and sensations it receives (and, perhaps, creates) as the only gateway to a knowledge of reality, with that knowledge necessarily relegated only to the single experiencing individual mind.

David Hume, similarly, believed that any idea of a self could only be understood on the basis of the perception of experience in the individual mind. Hume took this a step further, however, by suggesting that we must be skeptical even of our own interpretation of that perception, as self-consciousness blurs our comprehension. As a result, Renaut notes, “If, *like Descartes*, Hume indeed seeks a first experience as the foundation of any certitude, he locates it, *unlike Descartes*, not in the self-evidence of the subject, but in the absolute immanence

⁶⁵ George Berkeley, quoted in Alain Renaut, *The Era of the Individual*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise and Franklin Philip (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 91.

⁶⁶ Alain Renaut, *The Era of the Individual*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise and Franklin Philip (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 91-92.

of the impression.”⁶⁷ But if immediate experience forms the subject, any such subject would be maddeningly unstable, as Hume notes: “If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro’ the whole course of our lives, since self is suppos’d to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable.”⁶⁸ Instead, Hume posits a self whose identity is formed as a result of the accumulation of impression and experience, as Renault explains, “The identity of the self becomes an ‘effect’ of that uninterruptedness that characterizes the succession of impressional individualities.”⁶⁹ Hume’s philosophy of the self is of interest not only as a possible influence on the vision of (and search for) the self presented in Romantic poetry, but also in light of Hume’s close connection to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for whom he secured a pension of £100 per year from King George III in 1766 (just as Rousseau was working on *Pygmalion*).⁷⁰

One particularly salient characteristic of the English Romantic poetic drama is that so little of it was ever performed, and even less performed successfully. The ambivalence of the Romantic poets (in particular, Byron) to the stage is discussed in detail in David V. Erdman’s 1939 article, “Byron’s Stage

⁶⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁶⁸ Hume, quoted in Renault, 111.

⁶⁹ Renault, 111.

⁷⁰ Horace Walpole, “A Narrative of what passed relative to the quarrel of Mr. David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, as far as Mr. Horace Walpole was concerned in it,” from Horace Walpole, *Works* (London, 1798), Vol. 4, pp. 249-256, http://wso.williams.edu/~banderso/hume_rousseau.htm (accessed 17 June 2005).

Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage.” Erdman notes that Byron swore to write plays that would “reform the stage,”⁷¹ but then “violently protest[ed] against their being staged,”⁷² instead opting for a “mental drama”⁷³ to be staged only in the mind of the reader.

Some of Byron’s reticence to stage his work, Erdman asserts, was a fear of failure—Byron didn’t have to watch his readers as they formed an opinion of his work, but would have to bear the scorn of an audience if he was to fail on the stage. However, it is clear that a considerable part of the English Romantics’ rejection of the stage was connected to an idea that the stage could not possibly represent the breadth and scale of the fruits of the imagination. Rather than simply finding that works originally intended for the stage were too unwieldy for production, it was often the case that the Romantics intentionally composed works that would, in Byron’s words, be “quite impossible for the stage.”⁷⁴ As Patricia Ball notes, the work of the English Romantics “is not a drama put before the reader but a dramatically vivid experience offered to him as it is enacted in the poet’s mind.”⁷⁵

⁷¹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, quoted in David V. Erdman, “Byron’s Stage Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage,” *ELH* 6, no. 3 (September 1939): 219.

⁷² David V. Erdman, “Byron’s Stage Fright: The History of His Ambition and Fear of Writing for the Stage,” *ELH* 6, no. 3 (September 1939): 219.

⁷³ Byron, quoted in Erdman, 231.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁷⁵ Ball, 67.

Such suspicion of the stage is reflected in the attitude toward Shakespeare's work in England during the Romantic period. The major spokesman in the Romantic period for the idea that Shakespeare was better read than performed was Charles Lamb. Marvin Carlson offers an explanation of Lamb's reasoning: "Lamb considers tragedy the highest poetic genre, thanks to the emotional identification it inspired, and Shakespeare the supreme tragic poet, thanks to his ability to lose himself entirely in his creations. A similar annihilation of self should ideally occur in the spectator . . . but the physical reality of the stage constantly works against this."⁷⁶ For the Romantics, then, closet drama offers the best opportunity to link the mind of the spectator with that of the author.

One of the early Romantic works in which critics have recognized elements of monodrama is William Wordsworth's 1795-96 *The Borderers*. Alan Richardson, in his book, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age*, notes that *The Borderers* is usually received "as static monodrama."⁷⁷ The plot of Wordsworth's unstaged drama is as follows: Marmaduke, the leader of a band of noble outlaws on the Scottish/English border, is in love with Idonea, whose father, Herbert, is a blind, dispossessed Baron.

⁷⁶ Marvin Carlson, *Theories of the Theatre* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 224-225. It is worth noting that Jeffrey N. Cox has identified "monodramatic traits" in Lamb's 1802 play, *John Woodvil*. Cox, *Shadows of Romance*, 43.

⁷⁷ Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 4.

Marmaduke's frequent companion, Oswald, is very much an Iago figure—he befriends Herbert, only to convince him to fear and detest Marmaduke, all the while telling Marmaduke that the only way that he will win Idonea is by killing Herbert. Oswald, we later learn, committed a similar crime (the murder of an innocent man) in his youth, and has determined to make of Marmaduke a sort of protégé in evil.

Monodramatic readings of *The Borderers* have posited Oswald as an extension of Marmaduke's own psyche, as a competitor for his soul. Donald Hayden suggests that this reading reflects Wordsworth's own divided self at the time he was writing the play: "He speaks of this time as one of conflicting moods of joy and melancholy co-existing, competing for dominance as though there were 'two spirits then at strife.' This dualism, this ambivalence, would naturally appear in the play he was writing."⁷⁸ This idea is confirmed by Masao Miyoshi, who more pointedly argues, "For Wordsworth, *The Borderers* provided a stage for the performance of his own moral dilemma, the moral doubles Oswald and Marmaduke being the two possibilities that seemed available to him in his struggle to escape the general sense of apathy and guilt that had been dominating his life."⁷⁹

This sense of a division within the self is typical of Romantic poetic drama, according to Richardson: "The protagonist's internalization of the struggle

⁷⁸ Donald Hayden, "Toward an Understanding of Wordsworth's *The Borderers*," *Modern Language Notes* 66, no. 1 (January 1951): 4.

⁷⁹ Masao Miyoshi, *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), 53.

of contrary natures, precipitated by his seducer's literal influence, forms [another] characteristic motif, that of a divided self-consciousness."⁸⁰ Miyoshi concurs with Richardson's assessment, once again focusing on the interiority suggested by this depiction of duality: "The agon of the Renaissance drama, acted out in the world by identifiable villains and heroes, is played in a new setting: Reason and passion here contend *within* the main characters."⁸¹ This idea of a divided self as a grounds for monodrama differs in significant ways from the experience of and interaction with the outside world suggested by Robert Langbaum. And yet, there is still an outside world in *The Borderers*, and characters such as Idonea and Herbert may be assumed to exist outside of the Marmaduke/Oswald psyche, even in a monodramatic interpretation. Nevertheless, as Gerald B. Kauvar notes, "The soul of Marmaduke in torment is the true subject of Wordsworth's drama."⁸² This division between what takes place wholly in the mind of the protagonist, and that which is gleaned from an outside world is reflective of "the essential marriage between objective and subjective" of which Ball speaks. In either case, for the English Romantics, the final product reflects a vision of "the complexity of the experiencing self."⁸³

⁸⁰ Richardson, 8.

⁸¹ Miyoshi, 7. [Italics are Miyoshi's.]

⁸² Gerald B. Kauvar, Introduction to *The Borderers*, in *Nineteenth-Century English Verse Drama*, ed. Gerald B. Kauvar and Gerald C. Sorenson (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), 15.

⁸³ Ball, 64.

Perhaps no Romantic drama has been more frequently cited as monodramatic than Byron's 1816 *Manfred*. Gerald B. Kauvar, in an introduction to the play, notes, "*Manfred* has long been considered an interior drama; the characters other than Manfred are most readily conceived of as parts of Manfred's mind."⁸⁴ Patricia Ball sees a similar process at work: "In *Manfred* and *Cain*, Byron uses the dramatic form to prosecute the conflict of forces within a single mind. The plays are wholly conditioned by this central consciousness."⁸⁵ Jeffrey N. Cox somewhat more directly asserts *Manfred*'s monodramatic nature when he opines that it "comes close to being a monodrama by delineating the inner development of Manfred, the other characters serving mainly as sounding-boards to his self-analysis."⁸⁶ These assessments seem to jibe with Byron's own idea of the play, which he called "very wild, metaphysical, and inexplicable," noting that "almost all the persons—but two or three—are spirits of the earth and air, or the water, [and] the hero is a kind of magician [who] wanders about invoking spirits who appear to him."⁸⁷ Manfred's quest for forgiveness and personal knowledge of a crime that is never named (but is, in all likelihood, the sin of incest with his sister Astarte, who has since died), leads him to call forth this panoply of spirits,

⁸⁴ Gerald B. Kauvar, "Introduction to *Manfred*," in *Nineteenth-Century English Verse Drama*, ed. Gerald B. Kauvar and Gerald C. Sorenson (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), 103.

⁸⁵ Ball, 24.

⁸⁶ Cox, *Shadows of Romance*, 127.

⁸⁷ George Gordon, Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, 15 February 1817, quoted in James Twitchell, "The Supernatural Structure of Byron's *Manfred*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 602.

but for all their power, they cannot grant him what he most wants—to forget his past sins.

Manfred's ability to conjure and command the spirits has, since the play's first appearance, invited comparisons with Goethe's *Faust*, with many claiming that Goethe's play was the genesis of *Manfred*. Byron angrily rebutted this idea: "An American who came the other day from Germany told Mr. Hobhouse that *Manfred* was taken from Goethe's *Faust*. The devil may take both the Faustuses, German and English,—I have taken neither."⁸⁸ Three years later, Byron, still fighting off the charge, noted that he could not have read *Faust*, "for I don't know German," but he noted that he was familiar with the work, and from a telling source: "Matthew Monk Lewis, in 1816, at Coligny, translated most of it, *viva voce*, and I was naturally much struck with it."⁸⁹ Masao Miyoshi asserts that it was this very reading that provided the source material for *Manfred*.⁹⁰ Whether this is true or not, the nexus of monodramatic influence here is difficult to ignore—I have noted Goethe's interest in and composition of monodrama, as well as the possibility of a monodramatic element in *Faust*, and that Lewis's vocal translation was Byron's direct source can only reinforce the likelihood of this chain of influence.

⁸⁸ George Gordon, Lord Byron, Letter to John Murray, 23 October 1817, quoted in Bertrand Evans, "Manfred's Remorse and Dramatic Tradition," *PMLA* 62, no. 3 (September 1947): 752.

⁸⁹ Byron, Letter to John Murray, 7 June 1820, quoted in Evans, 752.

⁹⁰ Miyoshi, 37.

Just as Oswald, in Wordsworth's *Borderers*, has been seen by many as reflective of the turmoil within Marmaduke's soul, so critics have seen the spirits of *Manfred* as the symbolic representation of the struggle within Manfred himself. James Twitchell notes, "To understand Manfred, it is necessary to understand what is above him. For what Byron has done . . . is to create a world above his protagonist that mirrors the psychological world within. . . . This is most obvious with Arimanes, where Manfred is dealing not so much with the power behind external evil as with the personification of deeply buried evil within himself."⁹¹ Indeed, that *Manfred* depicts a tortured soul lost in self-contemplation is confirmed in the play's opening lines, as Manfred soliloquizes:

My slumbers—if I slumber—are not sleep,
 But a continuance of enduring thought,
 Which then I can resist not: in my heart
 There is a vigil, and these eyes but close
 To look within.⁹²

This "look within," Gerald B. Kauvar notes, is typical of Byron's work: "A drama in form, ostensibly a closet drama, *Manfred's* lyric intensity is like that in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, for the characters are profitably understood as

⁹¹ James Twitchell, "The Supernatural Structure of Byron's *Manfred*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 602.

⁹² George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Manfred*, I.i.3-7, in *Nineteenth-Century English Verse Drama*, ed. Gerald B. Kauvar and Gerald C. Sorenson (Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973), 105.

expressionistic manifestations of the mind of the eponymous hero. This attempt to discover reality by objectifying different voices to express different attitudes or the various constituents of the personality is generally characteristic of Byron's work."⁹³ Patricia Ball echoes this perspective, and once again ties it to the reader's own experience of the work: "The poet has felt the need for different voices and settings because he is making an attempt to enact fully and precisely a state of mind, the world of Manfred's inner experience. . . . This is mental theatre in every sense, in its visionary conceptions, its ranging spheres of action, and in its appeal to the reader who must re-enact it within himself."⁹⁴

Like *The Borderers*, *Manfred* has also been seen as offering a thin veil for the author's own tortured conscience. William J. Calvert suggests that Manfred, "was at bottom Byron. His sufferings, his regrets, his doubts, and his questionings are those, in the main, of his creator."⁹⁵ Thus, as Robert Langbaum suggested was true of a significant number of Romantic poetic and dramatic works, *Manfred* stands as a journey of experiential self-discovery and self-formation for Byron, his hero Manfred, and the reader, who, as Ball suggests, "re-enact[s] it within himself."

In a final example from the major Romantic poets, as alluded to earlier, Percy Bysshe Shelley's work has also been seen by critics as bearing elements of monodrama. His *Prometheus Unbound*, as noted in Kauvar's commentary on

⁹³ Kauvar, Introduction to *Manfred*, 97.

⁹⁴ Ball, 40-41.

⁹⁵ William J. Calvert, *Byron: Romantic Paradox* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 140.

Manfred, above, has been seen as akin to Byron's work in its metaphorical use of other characters to represent aspects of the central figure's personality. Patricia Ball sees a similar concept at work, although she sees that central figure as Shelley himself, rather than Prometheus: "In *Prometheus Unbound*, setting, changes of scene, 'choruses of spirits' as well as the named personages all speak for the mind of Shelley, illuminating its thought."⁹⁶ While the autobiographical bent of much Romantic work has tended, as we have seen, to lead critics to identify the protagonists of these works with their authors, it is not at all clear that Shelley intended to identify himself with Prometheus. Nevertheless, a concern with interiority is unquestionably a feature of *Prometheus Unbound*. Shelley himself, in a preface to the piece, noted, "The imagery which I have employed will be found, in many instances, to have been drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed."⁹⁷

Indeed, Shelley's concern with the portrayal of the experience of inner life is not only artistic, but also philosophical, as Ball notes:

In his *Speculations on Metaphysics* he speaks of the arduous and thwarted effort of thinking to wind back on itself in those "intricate chambers" it inhabits, the "caverns of the mind." He goes on: "if it were possible to be where we have been vitally and indeed—if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience—if the passage from

⁹⁶ Ball, 24.

⁹⁷ Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Author's Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*," at *Bartleby.com*, <http://www.bartleby.com/139/shel1161.html>, (accessed June 11, 2005).

sensation to reflection—from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation, were not so dizzying and so tumultuous . . .”⁹⁸

It might well be argued that the very project of the Romantic dramatic poetry, as I have catalogued here, was to capture the “results of our experience,” “at the moment of our presence there,” before the “passage from sensation to reflection” muddles that experience.

While a complete discussion of monodramatic elements in the Romantic novel would be beyond the scope of this study, it is worth briefly noting the conclusions of David Seed in his 1984 essay, “Mystery and Monodrama in Shelley’s *Zastrozzi*.” Seed argues that in his 1810 novel, “Shelley rules out any narrative devices which might distance the reader and thus locates the narrative within Verezzi’s self. In that sense the romance becomes a monodrama of conflicting impulses.”⁹⁹ Seed notes Matthew Lewis’s considerable influence on Shelley and suggests that Shelley, “places his narrative focus purely on the mind of the protagonist,”¹⁰⁰ and “internalizes the landscape so that it becomes an expression of Verezzi’s self. Within that landscape the four main characters function as personifications of his own impulses.”¹⁰¹ The fact that *Zastrozzi* is a

⁹⁸ Ball, 13.

⁹⁹ David Seed, “Mystery and Monodrama in Shelley’s *Zastrozzi*,” *Dutch Quarterly Review of Anglo-American Letters* 14, no. 1 (1984): 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

novel may problematize a monodramatic reading, but Seed sees the theatre as part of Shelley's conception of the work: "Shelley's use of epigraphs from *Macbeth* for Chapters IX and XV indicate that the theatrical analogy may well have been in his mind when writing the romance."¹⁰² In this light, Shelley's *Zastrozzi* may be seen as typifying two tendencies of the English Romantics that never quite came to fruition: towards theatre and towards monodrama.

My inclusion of Romantic poetic drama in the history of monodrama is not only based on applications of the term to it more than a hundred and fifty years after the fact. Critics such as Langbaum, Ball, and Richardson, who have applied the term to the Romantics, generally seem unaware of the Rousseau/Benda musical form, and they almost certainly have taken the term out of a contemporary critical context, which we will soon trace, in which monodrama is frequently used to refer to work that attempts to represent the interior drama of a single central protagonist. Such usage can hardly be taken independently as evidence that the Romantic poetic dramas represent a significant link in the chain of influence that, as I will argue in the proceeding chapters, comes to form the basis of the very usage that these critics have employed.

However, as I have noted, this modern critical usage is not the only evidence at hand from which to situate English Romanticism in the timeline of monodrama's development. The Romantics may have eschewed the term because of their very proximity to and knowledge of the form in its original incarnation.

¹⁰² Ibid., 10.

The English Romantics, who were acquainted with monodrama through the work of Matthew Lewis and Robert Southey (if not their earlier forbears), did not consider their complex poetic dramas to be part of that trend, even if their conceptual goals were similar. They disclaimed a predecessor that in fact they had absorbed. This would help explain why although Coleridge writes to Southey, “I detest monodramas,”¹⁰³ George Whalley can assert that “The point of greatest interest” in an examination of the friendship between Southey and Coleridge “is their concern with that crucial problem for the poet—the symbolic transmutation of experience.”¹⁰⁴

Jeffrey N. Cox, whose 1987 book *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France* is the most explicit attempt to connect the Rousseau/Benda form to the English Romantic drama (and thus also to connect the Rousseau/Benda form to the modern definition of monodrama), suggests that “The romantics were interested in the monodrama as a means of staging extreme states of consciousness; they worked to transform it into a tragedy of the self.”¹⁰⁵

Patricia Ball’s assessment, that in the Romantic era, the poet “now finds he needs a stage—though not necessarily a theatre—peopled with spirits and demons, located anywhere in the cosmos, and dominated by one central consciousness, his own, causing all else to be, and throwing around it the unifying

¹⁰³ Whalley, 333.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

¹⁰⁵ Cox, *Shadows of Romance*, 43.

illumination which is its awareness of its complex self,” provides a bridge to monodrama as defined in the twentieth century. The confluence of the original musical trend and the use of monodrama as an interpretive strategy by twentieth-century scholars in regard to these works is difficult to ignore, and unlikely to be mere coincidence.

While the application of the term monodrama to English Romantic drama is the result of twentieth-century elaboration of the term, at least one celebrated mid-nineteenth-century English poem actually did employ the term at the time. Lord Alfred Tennyson’s long 1855 poem, *Maud*, was not called a monodrama when first published; instead its full title was *Maud, or the Madness*.¹⁰⁶ When a new edition of the poem was published in 1875, Tennyson altered the title, which now read *Maud; A Monodrama*. While it is not entirely clear where Tennyson found the term, A. Dwight Culler has suggested that one likely candidate was an early review of *Maud*, which defended it from the largely negative response it had received. Robert J. Mann, a physician from Norwich (where the early discussions of monodrama between Taylor and Sayers had occurred), penned a pamphlet a year after *Maud*’s initial publication (1856) entitled *Maud Vindicated*. Culler asserts that it is in Mann’s essay that the term was first applied to *Maud*, but Mann calls little attention to his passing use of the term (“The opening stanzas of

¹⁰⁶ Culler, 378. Culler wonders whether Tennyson was familiar with the production of Lewis’s *The Captive* when formulating the poem and its original title.

the mono-drama . . .”¹⁰⁷), much less does he define it. Nevertheless, Mann does describe the piece in terms that are close to those used in discussions of twentieth century monodrama:

Maud is a drama;—that is, an action; . . . The *dramatis persona* of the action, for there is but one individual who is ever brought forward in it *in person*,—exhibits his story through the mental influences its several incidents work in himself, and this exhibition is made, not directly and connectedly, but, as it were, inferentially and interruptedly. . . . Every utterance, whether it be of sentiment, passion, or reflection, is an impulsive outburst. . . . The syllables and lines of the several stanzas actually trip and halt with abrupt fervor, tremble with passion, swell with emotion, and dance with joy, as each separate phase of mental experience comes on the scene. The power of language to symbolize in sound mental states and perceptions, has never before been so magically proved.¹⁰⁸

Mann further discusses how the structure of Tennyson’s poem reflects “The augmented flow of mental life”¹⁰⁹ and “the train of associations.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Robert J. Mann, *Tennyson’s Maud Vindicated: An Explanatory Essay*, excerpted in *Tennyson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John D. Jump (London: Routledge, 1967), 210.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 206.

Culler notes that it is possible that it was from Mann that Tennyson got the term monodrama, but that it was also possible that the path of influence was actually reversed, as Tennyson saw the proof of Mann's pamphlet and made suggestions to him before its publication.¹¹¹ In either case, Tennyson clearly approved of Mann's interpretation, writing to Mann after its publication: "No one with this essay before him can in future pretend to misunderstand my dramatic poem, *Maud*: your commentary is as true as it is full."¹¹² Tennyson's approval of Mann's monodramatic interpretation of *Maud* is reflected in his own commentary on the poem: "It should be called *Maud, or the Madness*. It is slightly akin to *Hamlet*. No other poem (a monotone with plenty of change and no weariness) has been made into a drama where successive phases of passion in one person take the place of successive persons."¹¹³ As Culler notes, "One may venture to suggest that the word 'monotone' here is a mistake for 'monodrama,' since a monotone with plenty of change and no weariness would be a contradiction in terms."¹¹⁴ "A drama where successive phases of passion in one person take the place of successive persons," may well be seen as a reverse corollary to those earlier dramas in which, according to twentieth-century interpretations, different

¹¹¹ Culler, 385, n.

¹¹² Alfred Lord Tennyson, quoted in Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., "The Critical Reception of Tennyson's *Maud*," *PMLA* 68 (1953): 400, n.

¹¹³ Tennyson, quoted by W.J. Rolfe, in Culler, 369.

¹¹⁴ Culler, 369.

characters (successive persons) take the place of internal thought processes and struggles.

The close link that many critics have drawn between Tennyson and Robert Browning has led to a conflation of monodrama and the dramatic monologue. This conflation is one of the central concerns of Culler's article, "Monodrama and the Dramatic Monologue," and his grounds for distinguishing between the two forms is instructive. Culler quotes Stopford Brooke, who in 1894 said that the "trick" of the dramatic monologue was that "one man or woman speaks, telling a tale of the past or of the present. Another person—and here the dramatic element enters—is supposed to be near at hand."¹¹⁵ No such listener is apparent in *Maud*. Furthermore, Culler notes that Browning placed great emphasis on the fact that the speakers in his dramatic monologues were not Browning himself, but rather Browning attempting to enter into other subjectivities. This concept, Culler suggests, would not apply to Tennyson: "Far from having any inclination to enter into the experience of others, [he] tended to shrink from experience, and the characters [he] created are largely versions of the self."¹¹⁶ Culler believes that the distance between Browning and his speakers is of great significance in that "he remains sufficiently detached from his subject that, simply by manipulation of tone, he is able to pass judgment upon it."¹¹⁷ This position of judgment is similarly assumed by the reader. Finally, Culler asserts that the dramatic

¹¹⁵ Stopford Brooke, quoted in Culler, 366.

¹¹⁶ Culler, 367.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

monologue, unlike monodrama, “is retrospective rather than being enacted in a continuous present.”¹¹⁸

To demonstrate the variance between the monodrama and the dramatic monologue, Culler examines one of Browning’s most famous works:

It is obvious that if Browning had written “My Last Duchess” as a monodrama, it would have been spoken not by the Duke but by the Duchess, presumably in the moments just before her death in the prison in which she had been incarcerated. . . . The point of the poem would have been the varied passions of the lady as modulated by music and her varied language. But for this Browning substitutes a painting in which the Duke has fixed her in a single moment. The Duke stops time, puts an end to motion, and fixes her in the stasis of a work of art. In so doing he fixes himself, in a posture of cold pride and esthetic detachment, and he also fixes the envoy. . . . The reader is in the same position as the envoy: he too must listen, view, understand, and make his choice. He is a “wise man,” not, certainly, in his imperturbability—he is deeply disturbed—but in his ironic detachment.¹¹⁹

No such ironic detachment, Culler suggests, is possible in *Maud*, where the reader does not place himself in the position of a nonexistent listener, but rather in full

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 380.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 383.

sympathy with the speaker himself. Rather than acting as spectator at a drama played out before us, monodrama asks us to take part in this drama along with its protagonist. Monodrama, Culler ultimately suggests, offered a solution to a problem central to the nineteenth-century concern with interiority, “how to gain access to this inner world of psychic motion and how to represent it externally.”¹²⁰

In light of the monodramatic elements found in Romantic poetry, it is only natural that there was a reunion of monodrama with music in the compositions of the Romantic period. Like their creative peers in poetry, the Romantic composers rarely utilized the term when referring to their works, but twentieth century critics have not hesitated to do so.

A prime example of the twentieth-century application of monodrama to Romantic music appears in Susan Youens’s analysis of the collaboration between poet Wilhelm Müller (who was sometimes called “the German Byron”) and composer Franz Schubert. Speaking of *Winterreise*, Schubert’s 1827 musical setting of the cycle of poems written by Müller between 1794 and 1824, Youens states, emphatically:

Winterreise . . . is a monodrama, a predecessor of Expressionist interior monologues. In such works as Marie Pappenheim’s and Arnold Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*, a single character investigates the labyrinth of

¹²⁰ Ibid., 381. Culler notes a similar movement in nineteenth-century fiction: “It became critical dogma that it was better for the novelist to ‘show’ than to ‘tell’ his story. If he were a serious artist he would eliminate his own voice and allow his characters to speak for themselves, or he would tell the whole story from the point of view of a single consciousness” (367).

her or his own psyche in search of self-knowledge, escape, or surcease from pain, a flight inward into the hothouse of imagination rather than outward into the real world. The later monodramas have their roots in Romantic soul-searching and in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century fascination with lunacy, genius, outcasts, and the inner life of creatures *in extremis*.¹²¹

As with the commentators on the English Romantic poets, Youens ignores the Rousseau/Benda form, which in this case is somewhat more surprising considering the fact that she comes to the material as a musicologist. Nevertheless, Youens's analysis of *Winterreise*, as the above passage suggests, integrates an examination of Schubert and Müller with the concept of monodrama as it has developed through the twentieth century.

Early in her study, Youens confirms that interiority will be a central concern in her interpretation of *Winterreise*: "The cycle traces thought processes and emotional states of being rather than a conventional narrative of actions and reactions."¹²² She begins by examining Müller's method: "In order to trace what the poet Novalis called 'the path inward,' Müller does not invent a third-person narrator or any other speaker for this monodrama in twenty-four episodes. When the poet omits didactic explanations and answers to the wanderer's questions, he

¹²¹ Susan Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey: Schubert's Winterreise* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 51-52.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 23.

admits us into a fictive consciousness and its mysteries.”¹²³ This admission to a “fictive consciousness” means that “Whatever we know, we know entirely from the wanderer’s point of view. . . . In the geography of the psyche, a consciousness shocked into awareness of alienation probes for information of the unmapped regions within.”¹²⁴ The narrowness of this perspective has led Richard Capell to complain that Müller fails to fully acquaint us with his hero:

We do not truly know [him], though we hear the tale of his soliloquy from the ironical farewell, through storms of reproaches, regrets, and complaints, to the final fancies of the unhinged mind. We guess at a character more mature, more introspective and egoistic than the young miller [of the 1823 Müller/Schubert collaboration *Die schöne Müllerin*]. But we could see the miller. Here only an outline is visible of the form that goes off staggering into the snowstorm.¹²⁵

Capell’s concern is very much akin, as we shall later see, to criticisms leveled against the theory and practice of monodrama in the twentieth century. Youens

¹²³ *Ibid.*, xii.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²⁵ Richard Capell, quoted in Susan Youens, “Retracing a Winter Journey: Reflections on Schubert’s *Winterreise*,” *19th-Century Music* 9, no. 2 (Fall 1985): 128-129. It is worth noting that Youens, in this article and the corresponding book (already cited), as well as in her book *Schubert, Müller and Die schöne Müllerin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), argues that the earlier Müller/Schubert collaboration was, similarly, a monodrama. Her discussion of this idea, however, is not nearly as complete as that of the same idea in *Winterreise*, and I have therefore focused on the latter.

acknowledges Capell's point, "If he seems shadowy, it is because we learn very little about his appearance and past history," but notes that this lack of perspective is compensated for by a different type of knowledge about the traveler: "Of his inner life, we learn much more."¹²⁶

Like the work of the English Romantic poets, Müller's text reflects a complex interaction of the speaker and the outside world, as Youens notes: "The passionate self-observation in *Die Winterreise* is intertwined with observation of the external world—aspects of the landscape and the towns catch the wanderer's eye and impel wonderment about who he really is and why he acts as he does. The progression is one from outward to inward reference, in which impressions of the self are either corroborated or questioned in Nature's mirror."¹²⁷ While Youens focuses on the impression the landscape makes on the hero, that impression is also influenced by the pain of unrequited love, the lament of which is the speaker's constant refrain.

Youens again draws a parallel between *Winterreise* and the Romantic poets in the element of autobiography she sees in the work. Youens sees Schubert's own experience and misery reflected in the music of the piece. Youens quotes the poet Johann Mayrhofer (who lived with Schubert for two years and was also the author of texts set by the composer) who writes of Schubert's composition of *Winterreise*: "He had been long and seriously ill, had gone through disheartening experiences, and life had shed its rosy color; winter had

¹²⁶ Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey*, 57.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

come for him. The poet's irony, rooted in despair, appealed to him: he expressed it in cutting tones."¹²⁸ Similarly, Youens sees Müller as a kindred Romantic temperament, stressing his "desire to write rapidly and spontaneously, as if seized by a Romantic muse. . . . He writes of being an 'improvisator' from whom poems and streams of words flow without lengthy labors."¹²⁹ Such an image of the poet is certainly in line with the Romantic vision of the artist, but also anticipates the ideas of Arnold Schoenberg and others in the early twentieth-century avant-garde movements who sought a direct expression of self. In 1909, Schoenberg wrote, "My only intention is to have *no* intentions! No formal, architectural or other artistic intentions (except perhaps of capturing the mood of a poem), no aesthetic intentions—none of any kind; at the most this: to place nothing inhibiting in the stream of my unconscious sensations."¹³⁰

This idea of a spontaneous expression of the poet's inner thoughts is but one of the parallels that Youens draws between *Winterreise* and later incarnations of monodrama. Another aspect of this parallel is the conception of time in Schubert's song cycle. Just as the perspective in *Winterreise* is narrowed to the hero's vision and thoughts, so also is the passage of time conditioned by the hero's consciousness: "Time in *Winterreise* is inner time, not the temporal

¹²⁸ Johann Mayrhofer, "Recollections of Franz Schubert," quoted in Youens, *Retracing A Winter's Journey*, 24-25.

¹²⁹ Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey*, 23.

¹³⁰ Arnold Schoenberg, Letter to Ferruccio Busoni, 24 August 1909, quoted in Esther da Costa Meyer, "Schoenberg's Echo: The Composer as Painter," in *Schoenberg, Kandinsky, and the Blue Rider*, ed. Esther da Costa Meyer and Fred Wasserman (London: Scala Publishers, 2003), 50.

ordering of a clock or calendar, but a poetically crafted simulation of ontological thought processes. . . . This is surely a major determinant of the cycle's musicality, since music reorders chronological, measured time in a manner roughly analogous to the temporal flow of subjective experience."¹³¹ This idea of time as relative to subjective experience and consciousness will become a major feature of modern monodrama, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Also presaging later manifestations of monodrama is the presence of a *Doppelgänger*, a double for the hero who reflects his fears and aspects of his self-image. Youens sees just such a figure as *Die Winterreise* comes to a close: "At the end, the wanderer sees the vision of a hurdy-gurdy player, a solitary beggar, and asks, 'Will you grind your hurdy-gurdy to my songs?' The elderly beggar is his *Doppelgänger*, the self divided, the image of what he will become and a projection of his worst nightmares of the future."¹³² Youens makes a similar assertion as she catalogues the variety of interpretations that have been applied to the song cycle's hero:

Different commentators have seen him variously as a whining and slightly contemptuous jilted lover—a dated and two-dimensional cardboard cut-out of a bereaved Romantic, an atheist, a secular Christ-figure whose journey parallels the Stations of the Cross, someone haunted by *Doppelgänger* at every bend of the road, an alienated being who

¹³¹ Youens, *Retracing a Winter's Journey*, 57.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 62.

undergoes an existential death of the soul, and an enigmatic, tragic creature who eventually goes mad and dies.¹³³

As these descriptions suggest, the traveler of *Die Winterreise* can be seen as a precursor of the heroes of twentieth century monodramas.

In 1830, a few years after the composition of *Die Winterreise*, Hector Berlioz completed the composition of his most famous work, the *Symphonie Fantastique*. The composition had no libretto, and was without words, sung or spoken, but Berlioz nevertheless saw the work as dramatic, and wrote a “Program” that revealed the plot of the composition:

The composer’s intention has been to treat of various states in the life of an artist, insofar as they have musical quality. Since this instrumental drama lacks the assistance of words, an advance explanation of its plan is necessary. The following program, therefore, should be thought of as if it were the spoken text of an opera, serving to introduce the musical movements and to explain their character and expression.¹³⁴

The program goes on to tell the story of a young musician who falls madly in love with a woman. At first he muses on his love, seeing her everywhere he goes, and

¹³³ Youens, “Retracing a Winter Journey,” 128.

¹³⁴ Hector Berlioz, “Program to the *Symphonie Fantastique*,” reprinted in Nicholas Temperley, “The *Symphonie Fantastique* and Its Program,” *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (October 1971): 597.

hoping that she will return his love. But this is not to be, and this unrequited love (not unlike that seen in *Die Winterreise*) leads him to despair. In the symphony's fourth movement: "The artist, now knowing beyond all doubt that his love is not returned, poisons himself with opium. The dose of the narcotic, too weak to take his life, plunges him into a sleep accompanied by the most horrible visions. He dreams that he has killed the woman he loved, and that he is condemned to death, brought to the scaffold, and witnesses *his own execution*."¹³⁵ In the symphony's fifth and final movement, the musician finds himself at a witches' sabbath, "assembled for his funeral," where a cry of joy erupts when his beloved arrives, seemingly mocking him in death, and the piece ends with "Funeral knell, ludicrous parody of the *Dies irae*, sabbath dance. The sabbath dance and the *Dies irae* in combination."¹³⁶

The *Symphonie Fantastique*'s concern with interiority and connections to monodrama can best be explored through an examination of its relation to a sequel that Berlioz composed in 1831-32, originally entitled *Le Retour à la Vie*. Peter Bloom gives the following brief summary:

Waking from the savage visions of the opium dream and warming to life by degrees, the artist-hero recalls the image of his beloved leading an infernal dance around his tomb; he wonders if his friend Horatio heard the cries of his fitful nightmare; he hears Horatio singing his favorite ballad

¹³⁵ Ibid., 598. [Italics are Berlioz's.]

¹³⁶ Ibid.

(No. 1, *Le Pêcheur*). The artist compares his dubious fate to Hamlet's and imagines a music for the ghost scene of that play (No. 2, *Choeur d'ombres*). He deplores the "crime" committed against the works of sublime artists such as Shakespeare and Beethoven, and cries that in such a society he would prefer to be an outlaw (No. 3, *Scène de la vie de brigand*). Returned to calm, he imagines himself crowned by love, happiness, and peace (No. 4, *Chant de bonheur*; No. 5 *Les Derniers soupirs de la harpe*). Finally, descending from sublime heights and abandoning poetic illusions, he expresses ultimate faith in his own dramatic art (No. 6, *Fantasie sur la Tempête*).¹³⁷

Le Retour à la Vie, which in its original form was referred to by Berlioz as a *mélologue*, consisted, like Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, of spoken passages alternating with musical interludes. The underlying concept, as Jean-Pierre Barricelli describes, in an echo of Holmström's commentary on Rousseau's method, is that "music begins where the word ends."¹³⁸

While the *Symphonie Fantastique* achieved great success, *Le Retour à la Vie* fared poorly, and was eliminated from performances of the symphony. Unhappy with this outcome, Berlioz revisited the latter piece, and on February 21, 1855, the two works were performed together. The sequel, now retitled *Lélio ou*

¹³⁷ Peter Bloom, "A Return to Berlioz's *Retour à la Vie*," *The Musical Quarterly* 64, no. 3 (July 1978): 357.

¹³⁸ Jean-Pierre Barricelli, quoted in Bloom, 360.

le Retour à la Vie, was staged dramatically for the first time at this performance, and the work's designation of *Mélologue* was now changed to *Monodrame lyrique*.

The use of monodrama as a designation for *Lélio* stands as something of a minor mystery. Although Peter Bloom cites *Pygmalion* in his discussion of Berlioz's work in terms of the musical structure of the piece, he does not attribute the work's 1855 designation to that source. Jacques Barzun offers the tantalizing possibility that Berlioz's source for the term was Tennyson's *Maud*.¹³⁹ However, as Bloom notes, the term "was not applied to *Maud* until 1856, and then not by Tennyson,"¹⁴⁰ but, as noted earlier, by critic Robert J. Mann. Bloom nevertheless asserts that "One may assume Berlioz came upon the word from his readings in English literature."¹⁴¹

While *Maud* may or may not have been the source for Berlioz's use of monodrama, the kinship between the two works extends beyond the fact that they are bound by the year 1855—in *Maud*'s first appearance, and *Lélio*'s reappearance. Recalling Tennyson's statement that *Maud* was a work in which "successive phases of passion in one person take the place of successive persons," Bloom asserts that "this is the defining feature of the monodrama, and the ordering of these passions is the essence of its structure. Hamlet, Tennyson's *Maud*, and Rousseau's *Pygmalion*, all run a gamut of emotions in a relatively

¹³⁹ Jacques Barzun, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1950), II, 88, n.

¹⁴⁰ Bloom, 369.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

short span of time; Berlioz's artist-hero, too, evinces violent shifts of emotion."¹⁴² Bloom is here referring specifically to *Lélio*, but a similar trait can be found in the Program for the *Symphonie Fantastique*, where Berlioz speaks of the hero undergoing "The transition from a state of dreamy melancholy, interrupted by several fits of aimless joy, to one of delirious passion, with its impulses of rage and jealousy, its returning moments of tenderness, its tears, and its religious solace."¹⁴³ This, along with the opium hallucination, which, in the 1855 version, starts at the beginning of the symphony rather than in the third movement, suggests that while, unlike *Lélio*, it was never called a monodrama, the *Symphonie Fantastique* might also be seen as such.

The possibility of seeing the entire work, which Berlioz referred to by the title *Episode de la vie d'un artiste*, as a monodrama is bolstered by its 1855 performance as a whole. Berlioz, as mentioned above, altered the program of the symphony at this point, moving the opium-eating to the beginning of the symphony. As a result, Nicholas Temperley notes, "By making the entire symphony represent a dream, Berlioz turned it into a gigantic overture to the monodrama, throwing maximum dramatic emphasis on the beginning of *Lélio*—the moment at which the artist first wakes up and the stage action begins."¹⁴⁴ For this "dramatic" performance of the symphony, as Berlioz called it, Temperley

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Berlioz, "Program," in Temperley, 597.

¹⁴⁴ Nicholas Temperley, "The *Symphonie Fantastique* and Its Program," *The Musical Quarterly* 57, no. 4 (October 1971): 600.

suggests that L lio probably would have been seen asleep in front of the curtain, though it is also possible to imagine the dream-vision described in the program as being performed in pantomime. And while Temperley asserts that the symphony ultimately served as an “overture to the monodrama,” rather than part of it, it is clear that the *Symphony Fantastique* shares the concern with interiority so central to monodrama. Reinforcing this notion of interiority in both parts of the work, Peter Bloom speaks of “its interior monologues and sharp contrasts of dream and reality,”¹⁴⁵ elements that would become major features of later monodrama.

While the action of *Symphonie Fantastique* may or may not have been intended for representation, that of *L lio* certainly was. L lio, as Berlioz’s text describes, was to stand at the front of the stage, speaking his part, the end of which was always to call a song or scene to his mind that would then be played out behind him. In the first scene, as L lio thinks of Horatio singing, Horatio suddenly appears behind him and sings, though L lio does not turn to look at him. In Part IV, as “The Song of Happiness” is sung by “The Imaginary Voice of L lio,” L lio sits at a table downstage, “lost in a reverie.”¹⁴⁶ As A. Dwight Culler explains, “In every case the piece is actually sung or played by secondary performers who are hidden from view, but it is apparent from L lio’s gestures and interspersed comments that the music is actually to be thought of as occurring in

¹⁴⁵ Bloom, 374.

¹⁴⁶ Hector Berlioz, Libretto to *L lio ou le retour   la vie*, in Liner notes to *Symphonie, Fantastique, L lio, Les Nuits d’ t , La Mort de Cleopatra* (Sound recording), (New York: Sony Classics, 1994), 33-34.

his mind.”¹⁴⁷ As in the Romantic poetic dramas, while many characters are involved in the action portrayed, the entire dramatic world is conceived as having a single source in the mind of the protagonist.

Also like many of the works of the Romantic poets, autobiography has been seen as a major feature of Berlioz’s work. Berlioz himself was said to have a preference for works in which “the character of the author was reflected most directly.”¹⁴⁸ This may well have been the case with Berlioz’s own work, and the *Episode de la vie d’un artiste* has been seen by many critics as the composer’s direct response to his relationship with Harriet Smithson.¹⁴⁹ David Cox argues that “There can be no doubt that the artist was Berlioz,” and “The actor plays Léo (Berlioz).”¹⁵⁰ Nicholas Temperley finds autobiography and interiority closely linked in the *Symphonie Fantastique*: “The Program was autobiographical. It forced the listener to go through the same sequence of emotional experiences that the composer had undergone.”¹⁵¹ Temperley therefore concludes, “We need

¹⁴⁷ Culler, 372.

¹⁴⁸ Bloom, 355.

¹⁴⁹ See Bloom, 379-382, and Temperley, 602-603. While Berlioz’s love for Smithson went unrequited before he composed the piece, it seems that seeing the piece in performance sparked a new interest in Berlioz on Smithson’s part, and the two were ultimately married on October 3, 1833, less than a year after she attended a performance. Temperley suggests that this fact is responsible for Berlioz’s removal of any criticism of the lover by Léo by the time of the 1855 performance.

¹⁵⁰ David Cox, Introductory essay to *Léo*, in Libretto to *Léo ou le retour à la vie*, in Liner notes to *Symphonie, Fantastique, Léo, Les Nuits d’Été, La Mort de Cleopatra* (Sound recording), (New York: Sony Classics, 1994), 7, 9.

¹⁵¹ Temperley, 603.

feel no qualms about interpreting the *Symphonie Fantastique* as a frankly subjective expression of Berlioz's own emotional experience.¹⁵² While Temperley here refers specifically to the symphony, it seems clear that *Lélio* is equally autobiographical, and equally subjective.

Despite Berlioz's reworking of the *Episode de la vie d'un artiste*, *Lélio* remained a failure. Temperley notes that "No further performances of *Lélio* have been traced in Berlioz's lifetime, and very few since his death."¹⁵³ Nevertheless, as Bloom suggests, "The music lives, the program lives, the libretto lives,"¹⁵⁴ and, I would suggest, all stand as powerful evidence of the continuing impact of monodramatic ideas in the nineteenth century.

Robert Schumann's 1848 *Manfred* warrants consideration as monodrama, not only because it sets Byron's work music, but also because it reverts to the original musical structure set forth by Rousseau and Benda. Elizabeth Paley begins her essay, "'The Voice Which Was My Music': Narrative and Nonnarrative Musical Discourse in Schumann's *Manfred*," with the following sentence: "Of all the late-eighteenth-century musical genres, melodrama—with its coupling of declaimed speech and musical accompaniment—is surely the

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 600.

¹⁵⁴ Bloom, 384.

strangest.”¹⁵⁵ Paley notes, “Robert Schumann’s 1848 music to Lord Byron’s dramatic poem *Manfred* is remarkable for its reliance on melodrama, featured in nine of the fifteen incidental pieces.”¹⁵⁶ Paley confirms that in her use of “melodrama” she refers to the trend initiated by Rousseau’s *Pygmalion*, and, following van der Veen’s practice, she also refers to Benda’s work by that term, but never refers to monodrama in her essay. Indeed, just as the commentators on the Romantic dramatic poets seemed unaware of the earlier form of monodrama, so Paley seems completely unaware that previous twentieth-century essayists on Byron’s *Manfred* had referred to it as monodrama. Nevertheless, she does speak of the piece at one point as “psychodrama”¹⁵⁷ (a term that will sometimes be applied to later monodramas) and speaks of “interpretations of the poem in which the supernatural characters are merely projections of a single deranged man’s mind.”¹⁵⁸ The subjective element of the work is confirmed again by Paley when she suggests that the work is “about the way [Manfred] internally works through the mental turmoil caused by his repressed guilt, . . . both Nemesis and Arimanes are symptoms of his psychological state, imaginative projections within Manfred’s own mind.”¹⁵⁹ Finally, Paley concludes by integrating the formal

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Paley, “‘The Voice Which Was My Music’: Narrative and Nonnarrative Musical Discourse in Schumann’s *Manfred*,” *19th-Century Music* 24, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

element of melodrama/monodrama with the work's subjective nature, arguing, "The act II melodramas of *Manfred* demonstrate melodrama's capacity for otherworldly communication as the outcast hero enters into an inner *Geisterwelt* of his own."¹⁶⁰ Paley thus reconfirms the enduring link between the formal and conceptual aspects of monodrama, and situates Schumann's *Manfred* as significant evidence of monodrama's development in the mid-nineteenth century.

In its early history, monodrama developed by fits and starts. Although after the initial creation of the form in the late eighteenth century, the term would not be consistently applied again until the end of the nineteenth century, evidence of its continuation as an original form and as the impetus for the development of new genres abounds, as we have seen in the many works of poetry, song, drama, music, and music-theatre cited in this chapter. Over the course of the nineteenth century the concept of monodrama as a form primarily concerned with representing interiority was developed. This largely organic development would be followed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by a theorization of the form that would draw upon many of the concepts and practices we have discussed here. Those theories are the subject of chapter two.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

Chapter 2

*And now I must ask the reader to make my interests his own for quite a while,
and to plunge, along with me, into the minutest details of my life.*
-Sigmund Freud,
The Interpretation of Dreams

While the examples of early monodrama cited in chapter one had been accompanied by little in the way of theoretical explanation, either by the authors of those works or by the critics of the time, the manifestations of monodrama that appear in the late nineteenth century and beyond are replete with explicit conceptualizations and abstruse statements as to the importance of each newly theorized form. This turn to a more self-conscious exploration of monodramatic concepts can be seen as initiating what I will refer to as “modern” monodrama. The burgeoning of these ideas in French and later Russian symbolism does not necessarily indicate a coherent movement (indeed, even theorists proposing nearly identical ideas generally seem to have been unaware of the contributions of their precursors), but the theoretical treatises that emerge from this period share certain basic assumptions, particularly in regard to the relationship between spectator and performance and the subjective nature of monodramatic theatrical and literary works. The theories that emerge in this period not only extend and solidify the ideas that grew through the forms discussed in chapter one, but show an increasing kinship with philosophical and psychological ideas that were

developing both concurrently to and following their articulation. I argue that the emergence of both monodrama and the psychological and philosophical concepts underlying it is intimately tied to the cultural and intellectual *zeitgeist* of *fin de siècle* Europe.

The earliest articulations of monodramatic theory arise out of the French symbolist movement. In 1887, Edmond Picard attached an essay entitled “La Lettre sur le Monodrame” to his play *Le Juré*. The essay was reprinted in an 1897 collection of essays by Picard, proposing a new direction for the theatre, *Discours sur le Renouveau au Théâtre*. Picard, a Belgian lawyer and writer involved in the Belgian art scene and symbolist movement, began his musings on monodrama by proposing a merging of the forms of the conference, the lecture, and the monologue with that of dramatic literature, in the belief that all were in dire need of renovation. Picard’s most serious concerns with the state of theatre in Belgium in the late nineteenth century were focused on the question of scenery. Like many of the symbolists, Picard felt that the increased focus on spectacle and realistic detail had actually diminished the appeal and wonder of theatrical performance. Using Goethe’s *Faust* and the tragedies of Shakespeare as examples, Picard asserted that the great works of these two men could not possibly be rendered in the theatres of the day, so obsessed with reproducing every last detail of each scene: “Assurément, voilà des observations qui rendent perplexe: elles ne tendent à rien moins qu’à proclamer injouables, à moins d’une mutilation sacrilège, des chefs-d’oeuvre d’art dramatique incomparablement au-dessus de tout ce qu’on

représente aujourd'hui."¹ Not only, Picard believed, did the obsession with scenery render some of the great works of dramatic art practically impossible to produce, but the very dependence upon visual representation of every aspect of the scene served to alienate the spectator from the performance. Picard proposed a solution:

Mais imaginez qu'une seule personne, comme dans les Conférences, les Monologues, les Lectures, tiende la redoutable estrade. L'absence du décor ne choque plus. Imaginez que, déclamant un drame, au lieu de dire seulement: *le théâtre représente une forêt,—le théâtre représente la salle du trône*, elle lise, avant de commencer le dialogue, une description vraiment littéraire, mais à l'emporte-pièce, faisant *tableau* dans l'esprit des auditeurs, avec une intensité qui les transporte au lieu où il faut être. Imaginez qu'alors le livret à la main, debout, avec une mimique sobre mais saisissante, avec une accentuation pénétrante elle rende la scène. Est-ce qu'il n'y aura pas là un genre littéraire nouveau, masquant la banalité des Lectures, des Monologues, des Conférences, sous l'action se développant dans le décor évoqué par l'imagination.²

Picard maintains that the suggestion of the décor by the speaker would force the spectator to become involved in the action in that everything that took place in the

¹ Edmond Picard, *Discours sur le Renouveau au Théâtre* (Bruxelles: Veuve Ferd. Larcier, 1897), 112.

² *Ibid.*, 116-117.

action would develop in a world that had been formed in the mind of the individual spectator (not unlike the idea behind much of the Romantic closet drama). And while for several reasons Picard's vision would ultimately conflict with later manifestations of monodrama and monodramatic theory, this idea of spectator involvement in the articulation of the dramatic world carries over to those later conceptions.

Picard's proposal for the renovation of theatre did not stop with spoken scenery. Indeed, Picard imagined the entire play being read by a single speaker: "Pas de troupe: ce sera le role du lecteur de varier juste assez le ton, l'accentuation, et de mimer autant qu'il le faudra pour donner l'illusion du jeu. Pas s'asseoir, pas se masquer à moitié derrière une table: debout, le manuscrit à la main, la face bien visible, le geste modéré, un va-et-vient circonscrit, rien d'excessif, une action constante et concentrée."³ Picard does not insist that the single speaker of the play must be the author, but it is worth noting that when *Le Juré* received a public reading in 1887, Picard, following the method laid out in this essay, performed the piece himself.⁴ This idea of a single speaker reading the play, changing voice and tone to represent multiple characters, ultimately has little in common with the conception of monodrama that we are exploring here, but it does raise several interesting issues.

³ Ibid., 118-119.

⁴ Although Picard seems to call for a complete lack of setting, or at the very least a completely generalized setting in the essay, the 1887 reading was performed before a backdrop of several lithographs by symbolist painter Odilon Redon.

Picard never does explain his use of the term, neither giving it a history, nor staking any strong claim to the term as integrally connected to the form he is promoting. In fact, Picard seems less than settled on the nomenclature: “Nos écrivains inauguraient *le Théâtre pour lecture à haute voix* que je viens d’esquisser: *le Monodrame* (on dit bien Monologue).”⁵ From this perspective, Picard’s choice of the term might well be viewed in the most simplistic way, simply as denoting a production involving a single performer (a connotation the term has often carried, particularly with the rise of solo performance as a genre).

It is possible, however, to look at Picard’s monodrama as more akin to the subjectivity-centered art form that is the basis of this study. To do so, we must imagine that the hero of Picard’s play is in fact Picard himself. In this idea of an author-centered monodrama, the performance of the work is a depiction of the ideas that flow from the author’s psyche as he composes the work, the characters and settings mere visions of the author’s imagination, presented to us through that singular, controlling psyche. Although the idea of the author as center of the dramatic world has significant implications that will be revisited throughout this study, it also proves problematic to an understanding of monodrama as a unique genre. The most glaring problem of such an author-centered monodrama is that it could be used to designate any play ever written. Every play is, on some level, a projection of the author’s psyche, but to include all plays that could be performed according to Picard’s theory in a definition of monodrama would render the term essentially meaningless. The possibility of an integration of the author into the

⁵ Picard, *Discours*, 121.

dramatic work will be discussed later, but Picard's theory, on its own merits, stands apart from the solidification of monodrama as a literary and dramatic trend marked by its central focus on the subjectivity of the protagonist.

Regardless of its conceptual kinship with later manifestations of monodrama, Picard's theory is important in its use of the term, the time in which it arose and the circle with which Picard was intimate. It is certainly significant that while Picard's theory can hardly be said to have given rise to a movement, one can rather easily find analogues to his theory in the public readings of Charles Dickens (which predate Picard's work) as well as Karl Kraus's public readings of his 1918 play *The Last Days of Mankind*. Picard's connections to the French symbolist movement, evidenced by Odilon Redon's illustrations for the 1887 publication of *Le Juré*, which also served as the backdrop for Picard's reading of the play that same year, are symptomatic of the currency of both the term and the conceptual elements of monodrama that began to take hold at the time. Further indications of Picard's symbolist connections are his intimate involvement in the avant-garde art group, "Les XX" in Brussels, and the fact that Maurice Maeterlinck, whose *The Blue Bird* will be discussed later, dedicated his play *The Intruder* to Picard in 1892.

In 1887, the same year as Picard wrote and produced *Le Juré*, another somewhat marginal figure in the French symbolist movement, Edouard Dujardin, published a novel entitled *Les Lauriers sont Coupés*, which explored the unraveling of a love affair through the mind and memories of the male

protagonist. Anthony Suter, in his preface to his English translation of the novel, describes its method:

Duration is limited to six hours (which we have already seen as a mental telescoping of one day). The action is limited to what can conceivably be experienced, remembered and recounted by a single human mind during that time. The place (or space) of the dramatic action is less Paris (even though the way in which the city glimmeringly impinges itself on the narrator's consciousness is very evocative) than the narrator's mind, through which all the information is presented, even if this entails the dramatic trick of having the narrator reread Léa's letters to himself. The book consists, therefore, of a kind of artificial 'staging' introduced by restriction to an interior point of view.⁶

Although Dujardin's work is a novel and not a play, the description that Suter offers here not only utilizes theatrical terms ('staging'), but also sets forth several traits that we shall later see are typical of monodramatic works, such as the telescoping of time, a subjective experience of exterior conditions, and a focus on interiority. The novel was mostly either ignored or denigrated by critics, but did find a small group of admirers, including symbolist poet Stephen Mallarmé, who in a letter to Dujardin dated April 8, 1888, wrote:

⁶ Edouard Dujardin, *The Bays Are Sere; and, Interior Monologue*, trans. Anthony Suter (London: Libris, 1991), 1.

I can see you have set down a cursory method of notation that turns upon itself, whose sole aim, independent of large-scale literary structures, poetry or decoratively convoluted phraseology, is to express, without misapplication of the sublime means involved, everyday experience which is so difficult to grasp. So there is here less a happy result of chance than one of those discoveries we are all tending towards in our different ways.⁷

Mallarmé's interest in Dujardin's novel shows the extent to which the concepts of interiority and subjectivity were in vogue among the French symbolists.

Furthermore, Mallarmé's mention of "everyday experience" is indicative of the symbolist rejection of realist art as only depicting a surface reality and not the true experience of life. What Mallarmé seems to be pointing to in Dujardin is an attempt to depict life as we experience it subjectively, as opposed to the realist desire for scientific objectivity.

Despite the admiration of Mallarmé and several other symbolist writers for *Les Lauriers sont Coupés*, the work seemed to have faded into obscurity until the publication of James Joyce's *Ulysses* in 1922. Joyce's masterwork sparked a flurry of interest in what was considered the new and revolutionary concept of "interior monologue." Joyce acknowledged a debt to Dujardin and arranged for a translation of *Les Lauriers sont Coupés* into English. For his part, Dujardin utilized the reflected glow of *Ulysses*'s success to trumpet his invention of the *monologue intérieur* and to advance a theory for the form he had initiated thirty-

⁷ Ibid., 87-88.

five years earlier. Dujardin's lengthy 1931 essay, *Le Monologue Intérieur*, is many things at once: a theory of the form, a compendium of ungrateful poachers who have utilized the idea but refused to give him credit, a survey of where interior monologue has appeared in the years since he invented it, and a warning against misuse of the term in which he takes several critics to task.

In setting forth the goals of *monologue intérieur*, Dujardin very tellingly turns to the language of the drama:

The primary object of interior monologue is, while remaining within the conditions of the framework imposed by the novel, to suppress authorial intervention (or at least apparent authorial intervention) and to allow the character to express himself directly, as traditional monologue does in drama.

Interior monologue is therefore, before anything else, a monologue . . . I mean that it has the same basis as traditional monologue in drama, that is to say it is first of all speech through which the character himself, in front of us, directly sets out his thoughts.⁸

Dujardin's concept of a direct expression of interiority cannot but remind us of the direct self-expression of the heroes of musical monodrama. Dujardin often appeals to the theatre as the basis of his ideas. The very term monologue, he readily concedes, is borrowed from the theatre, and the idea has its root in the

⁸ Ibid., 101.

theatrical soliloquy, where a character is permitted to directly confess his inner thoughts to the audience. Dujardin takes this idea further, in suggesting that the analogy between his concept of interior monologue and the theatre goes beyond the theatrical monologue:

Such, finally, is the interest, in the theatre, not merely of the monologues one occasionally comes across there, which are fairly few and far between, but of the passages of dialogue in which the character speaks as if he were speaking to himself, either in lines he seems to be addressing to an interlocutor when in fact he isn't, or in a sentence inserted into the speech, or merely in a clause where the cry of the subconscious gushes up, all being nothing more or less than scraps of concealed monologue. . . . The beauty of the dramatic genre does not, as certain realists have felt, consist in faithfully reproducing the conversation that two people might really have had; it consists in bringing to the surface the things that are locked in their subconscious and which in reality would never have been on their lips.⁹

Again, Dujardin's concepts closely approximate the form of monodrama. However, as Dujardin moves to directly confront the idea of the possibility of interior monologue in the theatre, his narrative mindset becomes apparent:

⁹ Ibid., 100-101.

One can wonder whether, after having taken up such a place in the novel, interior monologue is not destined to go into the theatre, in order to renew it, so to speak. We can well imagine, in the course of a dialogue, a series of ‘disguised’ monologues which would differ from the ‘disguised’ monologues of Racine in that, instead of being the translation into rational terms of the character’s thoughts, the latter would be expressed anterior to their logical organization, that is to say as they come into being and in an apparently ‘raw’ state – in other words, in which the character would let the intertwined voices of his heart speak directly during the dialogue.¹⁰

Considering the fact that Dujardin is writing in 1931 there is a certain irony to his words, in that between the time he wrote *Les Lauriers sont Coupés* and this essay, major theories on monodrama (which I will soon discuss) and many monodramatic works had been written. These differ from Dujardin’s theory in significant ways, largely, as we shall see, in that Dujardin (unsurprisingly, considering his grounding in the novel) looks to words to express interiority, while the more theatrically based theories of monodrama call upon images to a much greater extent. Still, even if the goals of monodrama and the *monologue intérieur* are necessarily achieved by different means, a kinship between the two concepts is clear.

It is interesting to consider the possibility that Dujardin’s ideas on the employment of interior monologue may well have been realized three years

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

earlier, in 1928, by Eugene O'Neill in *Strange Interlude*.¹¹ Bearing more directly on our current deliberations, Dujardin's very desire to "renew" the theatre must remind us of the title of Edmond Picard's book and his similar desire to see a renewal of the theatre. More importantly, Dujardin's vision of interior monologue may well be seen as directly analogous to the visions of the musical monodramas of Rousseau and Benda, as well as many of the single-character monodramas we will later explore. In many of these plays a non-speaking character (i.e. Galatea in *Pygmalion*, The Wayfarer in Valerii Bryusov's *The Wayfarer*) presents the protagonist with an opportunity to "let the intertwined voices of his heart speak directly."

Further evidence of the currency of monodramatic ideas in France during this period comes from symbolist poet Saint-Pol-Roux. In 1893, under the assumed identity of American playwright Daniel Harcoland, Saint-Pol-Roux published the play *Les Personnages de l'Individu*. The play was introduced in Paris as having been translated from the English by Arthur-Thomas Sheffield.¹² To briefly summarize the play (which we will examine in more detail in chapter four), two characters, the Young Man and the Old Man, confront each other at the middle of a bridge from which they are both determined to jump to their deaths. In the lengthy dialogue that follows, the two establish themselves as opposites in

¹¹ Peter Szondi has also remarked on the possibility of *Strange Interlude* as a manifestation of the theory of *Monologue Intérieur*. See *Theory of the Modern Drama*, ed. and trans. Michael Hays (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 81-83.

¹² Jacques Goorma, Postface to Saint-Pol-Roux, *Le Tragique dans l'Homme, II* (Paris: Rougerie, 1984), 132.

all things but suffering. Through the guiding vision of characters such as “The Phantom,” “The Hours of Joy,” “The Hours of Pain,” and the continual beckoning of “The Torrent,” the Old and Young Man are reconciled, and are together thrown from the bridge by the Phantom.

Saint-Pol-Roux’s only confidant in his pseudonymous publication was his friend, poet Charles Gillet, who furthered the ruse by writing, under the anagrammatic pseudonym Carolus Tigell, a study of the work of Daniel Harcoland, entitled simply “Daniel Harcoland,” in which he actually presented Saint-Pol-Roux’s dramatic theories. Published in the March 1895 issue of the *Mercure de France*, Tigell’s essay announces, “Au théâtre, Daniel Harcoland apporte la suprême formule de l’*Unité par le personnage*, originale formule qu’on ne trouve dans aucune littérature ancienne ou moderne de la France ou de l’étranger.”¹³ Tigell asserts that the individual may be seen as a microcosm for all people, and that for this reason, Harcoland (whom he describes in the first sentence of the essay as a *monodramaturge*) takes the individual as the center of his work. Tigell raises some important issues in his study. He summarizes Harcoland’s work, “L’harcolandisme, c’est, en résumé, l’expansion simultanée des tragédies internes, l’irradiation psychique du protagoniste.”¹⁴ Harcolandism, as Tigell calls it, therefore closely approximates Dujardin’s concepts of the novel, as well as remaining in spirit with the earlier manifestations of monodrama. Tigell takes this idea a step further when he suggests, “Appliquant au héros les

¹³ Carolus Tigell (Charles Gillet), “Daniel Harcoland,” *Mercure de France* 63 (March 1895): 287.

¹⁴ Ibid.

phénomènes physiques de l'endosmose et de l'exosmose, il lui fait en quelque sorte exorber le monde absorbé."¹⁵ Tigell seems to suggest that in at least some of Harcoland's plays, the hero is involved in a complex interchange with the world around him, giving to it some of his own being, while at the same time assimilating the world's energy into his being. This conception of the psychophysical interplay between man and the world presages a strong trend in monodramatic theory and practice, even as it recalls the work of the English Romantics as interpreted by Robert Langbaum. Although Saint-Pol-Roux was, ironically, or perhaps insightfully, accused by the Paris press of plagiarizing Harcoland's ideas, it was not until twenty years later, when he published his plays in a collection entitled *Le Tragique dans l'Homme*, a collection accompanied by a second title—*Monodrames*, that Saint-Pol-Roux acknowledged that he was himself Daniel Harcoland. In explaining his deception, Saint-Pol-Roux remarked, "Pour agir en prophète, il fallait ne pas être de son pays."¹⁶

But just what was the nature of Saint-Pol-Roux's prophecy? Some idea of the grandiosity of his vision can be perceived from the opening line of his "Dramaturgie," originally published in *La Revue d'Art Dramatique* in 1901 and included in the 1913 publication of *Le Tragique dans l'Homme*: "Le Théâtre est l'art par quoi l'homme s'égale à Dieu."¹⁷ The ideas that he lays forth in the pages that follow do not always reach the lofty abstraction of this initial thrust, but

¹⁵ Ibid. 288.

¹⁶ Goorma, 132.

¹⁷ Saint-Pol-Roux, "Dramaturgie," in *Le Tragique dans l'Homme, I* (Paris: Rougerie, 1984), 12.

Saint-Pol-Roux does see his project as an attempt to elevate a theatrical world that he feels is trapped in “les barrières de son insuffisance et de ses conventions.”¹⁸

Interestingly, early in his essay, Saint-Pol-Roux echoes Edmond Picard’s desire for generalized settings, shared by many of the symbolists,¹⁹ asserting, “Le théâtre . . . fait triompher les aspects de l’univers dans le verbe d’un Shakespeare davantage que dans les matérialités du décorateur.”²⁰ This link takes on added weight considering the fact that Saint-Pol-Roux’s stage directions seem utterly impossible to render on stage through any other method than by speaking the words—consider, for example, the opening stage direction of *Les Personnages de l’Individu*:

Un très vieux pont de pierre sur un torrent tragique et profond, au centre de la vallée de misère. Après qu’un prélude symphonique (flûtes, harpes, violes . . .) a traduit l’appel des roseaux des bords en jets vers l’arche, la pression de la brise sur les joncs d’alentour et l’attirance du scabreux miroir qui passe, le torrent gronde en ces termes:

Mon suaire de larmes
 Vêt d’éternelle paix,
 Pèlerins des alarmes
 Qu’endolorit le faix,

¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹⁹ For example, see Alfred Jarry’s 1896 essay, “De l’inutilité du théâtre au théâtre.”

²⁰ Saint-Pol-Roux, “Dramaturgie,” 12.

Mon suaire de larmes

Vêt d'éternelle paix.

*Durant le premier tiers du spectacle le soleil à l'horizon quitte ses rayons un à un, avec une pudeur grandiose.*²¹

Despite the seeming necessity of a narrator for the stage directions, Saint-Pol-Roux makes no indication of an acceptance (or, for that matter, even an acknowledgement) of Picard's ideas, other than their shared use of the term, *monodrame*.

The purple prose of Saint-Pol-Roux's stage directions is easily matched by that of his "Dramaturgie." Though it consists, for the most part, more of literary flourishes than concrete theoretical statements, "Dramaturgie" does give some indication as to the author's ideas on monodrama, focusing, much like Dujardin, on the idea of interiority: "Et comme le problème s'élargit si les merveilles enfouies dans les ténèbres du monde couvent aussi dans l'homme, microcosme de chair, et si ces merveilles ne sont, en un mot, que les exteriorisations de la pensée humaine!"²² Having suggested that the world on stage (and perhaps even off stage) is an exteriorization of human thought, Saint-Pol-Roux goes on to invite

²¹ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de la Individu*, in *Le Tragique dans l'Homme, I* (Paris: Rougerie, 1984), 12.

²² Saint-Pol-Roux, "Dramaturgie," 13.

the spectator “des ‘lointains’ à proximité sinon intérieurs.”²³ In his desire to depict the exteriorization of human thought, Roux cites the very symbolist idea that the poet is uniquely able to see through the veneer of “reality,” “celui-ci ne fait que reconnaître des biens trop longtemps ignorés.”²⁴

Saint-Pol-Roux does, rather briefly, near the end of the essay, touch upon the role of the audience in his theory, in terms that recall Picard and presage the theories of monodrama that would follow: “La foule exultera, elle-même jouant en quelque sorte les rôles par la projection de son émotion. Ce sera du théâtre *par indivis*.”²⁵ Though the nature of much of his work makes it difficult to identify a strong central protagonist (a problem particular to the divided-self monodramas, discussed in chapter four), Saint-Pol-Roux’s assertion that the audience will become so emotionally involved in the characters that they will come to play somehow the roles themselves is a central point in monodramatic theory, representing a model for the relationship between audience and character.

While Saint-Pol-Roux’s ornate prose sometimes renders his theories unclear, Jacques Goorma works to elucidate those ideas in his Postface to the 1984 edition of *Le Tragique dans l’Homme*. Goorma, interpreting and restating many of the concepts raised in Tigell’s study of Harcoland, sees Saint-Pol-Roux’s theory and plays as a continuing struggle to find unity and self-identity: “La théorie du monodrame, celle du héros central, et la théorie des miroirs, celle qui

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 15.

multiplie ce héros, relève de cette problématique du Même qui se propage à travers les innombrables variations de son identité.”²⁶ More specifically, Goorma points to the process in individual plays: “Le héros cherche son identité à travers la diversité de ses manifestations (comme c’est le cas du Prince Lorédan), à moins que cela ne soit les personnages qui, par leur confrontation, convoquent l’entité surnaturelle dont ils sont les reflets partiels (comme c’est le cas des *Personnages de l’Individu*).”²⁷ Goorma’s explanation of Saint-Pol-Roux’s work strikingly recalls the concerns of the Romantic dramatic poets, as well as demonstrating a dramatic structure that comes to be seen repeatedly in modern drama.

Finally, Goorma discusses idéoréalisme, Saint-Pol-Roux’s own term for his overall project as a poet. Goorma asserts, “La recherché idéoréaliste est une quête d’unité,” aligning it closely with his description of monodrama. This affinity between the terms is bolstered as Goorma reviews other appellations for the form: “Autre formulation de l’idéoréalisme ‘Intériorité extériorisée,’ ‘idée sensifiée,’ ‘infini cristallisé,’ ‘pensée solidifiée,’ ‘abstrait coagulé,’ ‘Métamphysicochimie,’ ‘idée corporisée, matérialisée, réalisée’ . . . Saint-Pol-Roux multiplie sans fin les définitions de cette ‘Idée des idées’ émanée du ‘Seul,’ du ‘Même.’”²⁸ The bulk of the terms that Goorma utilizes here could quite easily be employed in describing monodrama, above and beyond those of Roux himself. But perhaps more strikingly, in discussing Roux’s drama *La Dame à la Faulx*,

²⁶ Goorma, 143.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

Goorma calls it “une tragédie intérieure,” a term that cannot but recall Dujardin’s *monologue intérieure*.²⁹ The common terms may indeed be accidental, but the commonalities that run through these concepts, all bound by the common thread of French symbolist thought, are difficult, if not impossible, to dismiss.

Though the respective movements were separated by several decades, it should come as little surprise that the Russian symbolist movement, like its French namesake, was a fertile breeding ground for monodramatic thought and practice. Similarly convinced that realism failed utterly to convey the truth of life, the Russian symbolists set forth a number of theories in a search for new forms, eager to revolutionize the art of the theatre.

Several such theories on the possible future of the theatre were contained in the collection *Theatre: A Book on the New Theatre*, published in St. Petersburg in 1908. Among the essays in this volume, which were composed by many of the major figures in the Russian symbolist movement, was Fyodor Sologub’s “The Theatre of a Single Will.” Sologub’s essay strikingly mirrors Edmond Picard’s ideas concerning the author as the center of the dramatic universe on stage. Like Picard’s work, Sologub’s theory seems difficult to accept as a theory of monodrama in its own right, but it contains ideas that prove significant both in their influence on later theory as well as in establishing that concerns about subjectivity were in the air at the time.

²⁹ Ibid.

The desire to alter the relationship between audience and production, so clearly seen in the French symbolist theories, provides the opening thrust of Sologub's argument: "A theatrical spectacle, which people attend in search of amusement or distraction, will shortly cease to be merely a spectacle in our eyes. Ere long the spectator, wearied by the alternation of spectacles alien to him, wants to become the participant in a mysterium, as he once was the participant in playacting."³⁰ The notion of spectator as participant, rather than simply spectator, was clear in the work of both Picard and Saint-Pol-Roux, and as I noted earlier, is central to the goals of monodrama. But how to achieve this participation? Sologub sees an overemphasis on diversity of character as an obstacle: "The modern theater presents a sorry spectacle of fragmented will and therefore disunited action."³¹ He also has a proposal for a solution:

No assortment of people—there is only one man, only one I in the entire universe, willing, acting, suffering, burning in the inextinguishable fire and fleeing from the frenzy of a ghastly and hideous life to the cooling and consoling embraces of the eternal comforter—Death.

If the spectator has come to the theater as the simpleminded gaper steps outside to 'see the sun,' I, the poet, create a drama in order to recreate the world in accord with the new concept of I. Just as the unique

³⁰ Fyodor Sologub, "The Theater of a Single Will," in *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 134. See also translation by Daniel Gerould in *TDR* 21, no. 4 (December 1997): 85-99.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 136.

will of I reigns supreme in the macrocosm, so in the little circle of the theater spectacle only one unique will should reign supreme—the will of the poet.³²

Sologub's words here must remind us of Saint-Pol-Roux's assertion that "Le Théâtre est l'art par quoi l'homme s'égale à Dieu," as, like Saint-Pol-Roux, Sologub is arguing that in the theatre, the poet is the creator of a world.³³

But while Saint-Pol-Roux's poet-creator is content to rule from the anonymity of the page, Sologub lays out his vision of the theatre with a considerably more present author:

Here is how I envisage the theatrical spectacle: the author or the reader who stands in for him—or best of all, a reader, impassive and calm and unruffled by an author's shyness in the presence of spectators who may shout praise or blame at him (both equally unpleasant) and have perhaps brought their latchkeys for high-spirited whistling—a reader sits near the stage, somewhat to one side. Before him a table, on the table the play which is imminently to be presented. The reader begins at the beginning:

He reads the title of the drama. The author's name.

The epigraph, if there is one. . . .

Next the cast list.

³² Ibid., 137.

³³ Saint-Pol-Roux, "Dramaturgie," 12.

The author's preface or commentary if there is any.

Act I. Setting. Names of the characters discovered on stage.

Entrances and exits of the actors, as they are designated in the play script.

All stage directions, not omitting even the slightest, be it but a single word.

And even as the reader reads beside the stage, the curtain parts, on stage the setting indicated by the author is revealed and lighted, the actors come on stage and do what the author's stage directions prompt them to, as they are read aloud, and speak what the play script sets down. If an actor forgets his lines—and when do they not forget them!—the reader reads them, as calmly and as loudly as all the rest.³⁴

Sologub's model for theatrical production is but a small step from Edmond Picard's (and, to some extent, is reminiscent of those scenes in Berlioz's *Lélio* where the hero sat at the front of the stage lost in reverie while the fruits of his imagination came to life on stage behind him). While Picard's author/reader moves about and mimics the actions of his characters, Sologub allows for actors, but keeps the reader onstage reading along with them. While Picard calls for spoken, instead of material scenery, Sologub claims that whatever scenery there is "must be one-dimensional," and "it is also best that all dramas be played in a

³⁴ Sologub, 138-139.

single setting.”³⁵ These minor differences only highlight the extent to which Sologub, although he likely was completely unaware of the Frenchman’s work, clearly shared many of his concerns.

As remarkable as Sologub’s affinity with Picard is, it returns us to the problems that Picard’s theory presented from a monodramatic perspective. While the subjective aspects of the theory might be interesting, it provides no basis for a theory of dramatic literature, as any play could conceivably be performed this way and in all cases the poet may well be seen as the single consciousness from which the play springs. But while Picard’s theory essentially ends at this point, Sologub’s demand for a unity born out of the chaos of multiplicity (a concern considerably less pronounced in Picard) leads him to go a step further:

A striving toward the one, the I, can result only from the polar opposite to I—the many, the non-I. But all streams must flow together in a single sea and not trickle away in the quicksands of individuated multiplicity. The unique Visage, hidden behind disguises, must be made lucid for the spectator over the course of the theatrical action. Hence the dramatic requirement of only one hero, one character who essentially consummates the action—only one point at which the spectator’s attention is concentrated. All rays of stage action must coincide in a single focus, so that the bright flame of ecstasy can flare up all at once . . .

³⁵ Ibid., 145.

Other characters in the drama ought merely to be necessary steps leading up to the unique Visage. Their meaning in the drama depends entirely on the degree of their proximity to the unity of willed aspiration in the drama, revealed through the hero. The only rationale for their individual distinctions, their differing temperaments, which would otherwise be totally unnecessary to the drama, inheres in this, their arrangement along the descending steps of the one staircase of dramatic action.³⁶

These two paragraphs, standing alone, provide a rallying call and the beginning of a definition that would fit monodrama perfectly were it not for the fact that they appear in the course of an essay that repeatedly insists that that one hero is to be the author himself. Nevertheless, Sologub's ideas in "The Theater of a Single Will," undoubtedly provided important concepts and a further link in the chain of monodramatic thought that would soon be picked up by its most vociferous and enduring advocate, Nikolai Evreinov.

On December 16, 1908 at the Circle of Art and Literature in Moscow, Nikolai Evreinov delivered a lecture entitled, "Introduction to Monodrama." The lecture was repeated in St. Petersburg two months later, both at the Theatrical Club (February 21, 1909) and at the V.F. Kommissarzhevskaya Theatre (March 4, 1909). It was published in pamphlet form in 1908 and in a shortened version, both in the journal *Teatr i Iskusstvo*, and as the introduction to Evreinov's first

³⁶ Ibid., 145.

monodrama, *The Representation of Love*.³⁷ Laurence Senelick notes that Evreinov was well aware that the concepts of which he spoke were in the air at the time, but that he “definitely wanted credit for distilling them.”³⁸ And indeed, no existing document comes close to giving as coherent, descriptive, and purposeful an argument in advocacy of monodrama as does “Introduction to Monodrama,” and Evreinov has indeed come to be seen as the spokesman and originator of monodramatic theory. This being the case, with all due deference to the theorists whose work preceded Evreinov’s and the pre-existence of strains of monodramatic thought in Russia when Evreinov formulated his theory, Evreinov’s essay will form the fundamental theoretical statement of this study, a frame of reference to which we will often return. Therefore, we embark upon a thorough examination of “Introduction to Monodrama,” even at the risk of practically reproducing the essay in full.

Evreinov begins his essay by restating Sologub’s desire for spectator involvement in strikingly similar terms:

When some event unfolds before me on the theatrical boards that stand for the world, I regard it as drama in the highest sense of that word only when I myself become, as it were, a participant in what is transpiring on stage, when I myself share the illusion of becoming an active participant, and not

³⁷ Laurence Senelick, Introductory note to “Introduction to Monodrama” by Nikolai Evreinov, in *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 183.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

a secondary one at that. . . . I accept as drama only such ‘action’ as I can, without violence to my imagination, call ‘my drama.’

The rest which I am unable to accept as my own drama I consider the spectacle of someone else’s drama, no matter how beautiful, amusing or absurd it may be, only ‘spectacle’ and not drama.³⁹

Like Sologub, Evreinov draws a distinction between spectacle, which both define as a performance that keeps the spectator distanced from the action onstage, and true drama, which draws the spectator into the dramatic world, making the audience feel that they are playing a role in and through the theatrical experience. When this is successfully achieved, more than just feeling for the characters on stage, “the spectator ‘co-experiences’ along with the active participants.”⁴⁰

The notion of co-experiencing, central to Evreinov’s theory, leads him to another issue that was of great importance to Sologub—the problem of disunity in theatrical production:

Can we simultaneously share experience with even two active participants who are not attuned to one another at a given moment? . . . Naturally, when the villain and his victim, say, stand before us, out of an innate penchant toward the relatively good, we put ourselves in the place of the

³⁹ Nikolai Evreinov, “Introduction to Monodrama,” in *Russian Dramatic Theory from Pushkin to the Symbolists: An Anthology*, ed. Laurence Senelick (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 183.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

victim who appeals to our sympathy and we will co-experience only with her. But what if both ‘active participants’ are equally sympathetic, near and dear to us, and yet their dramatic conflict stirs up in each of them emotions which are different not only in nuance but in their very essence? Whose experience are we to share? . . . The question is more serious than it may seem. After all, if it is impossible to co-experience the emotions of two active participants with all possible completeness, isn’t the playwright, the culprit in this case, relegating us to mere spectacle, to the status of mere curious eyewitness?⁴¹

Evreinov, like Sologub, sees it as essential that the spectator’s attention be focused:

Our mind is limited in its capacity for perception; the basis of aesthetic contemplation is the concentration of attention on a specific, individual object; moreover, a readjustment in the objects of our concentration provokes mental fatigue and consequently a weakening of the ability to perceive. So the true object of a dramatic performance must be seen to be an emotional experience, and, in the hope of facilitating perception, it should be the emotional experience of a single mind, not of several.⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 186.

Perception, as may be easily seen in these quotes, is key to Evreinov's theory, both in terms of the spectator and the "active participant." Evreinov, paradoxically, demands a unity that has several dimensions: a unity of dramatic vision through the author's eyes, a unity of dramatic interest, focused on the protagonist, and finally (although there may certainly be said to be other "unities" to be found here) a unity born out of the previous dichotomy between character and spectator, now inextricably linked together.

Having established his fundamental goal of engendering in the spectator an emotional experience shared with a single protagonist, Evreinov is prepared to offer a basic definition of his idea of monodrama: "Now by 'monodrama' I mean to denote the kind of dramatic presentation which, while attempting to communicate to the spectator as fully as it can the active participant's state of mind, displays the world around him on stage just as the active participant perceives the world at any given moment of his existence on stage."⁴³ Though such a definition can be considerably elaborated upon (and it is perhaps the point of this study to do just that), this statement succinctly presents the central concept of monodramatic performance.

The only substantial difference, up to this point, between Evreinov's theory and Sologub's is that while Sologub calls for the author to be the single mind whose experience is to be shared, Evreinov makes no such claim, and seems to posit a wholly fictional central character. But even this might not be quite as

⁴³ Ibid., 187.

great a difference as it seems, as Spencer Golub argues that Evreinov too works from an author-centered model in his conception of monodrama:

Evreinov [claimed] that in any play, we are essentially seeing the character from a single, subjective point of view, the author's. He cited as [an] example Griboedov's *Woe from Wit*. All of the characters in Griboedov's play, with the exception of Čackij, who represents the author, are filtered through the creative 'I' of the author/hero and made to seem as grotesque to us as they do to him. So why not accept this as a condition of art in general and allow the artist free rein to explore the power of this impulse in conscious agreement with his audience?⁴⁴

Evreinov, in this analysis, rather than differing in any fundamental way from Sologub, is instead taking his theory one step further. Accepting the author as the primary moving force of the theatre, Evreinov merges the author figure with the protagonist of the dramatic world.

Acknowledging the rejection of elaborate scenery by Sologub and other Russian symbolists (as well as Picard and the French symbolists, as we saw earlier), Evreinov notes, "Lately there has been much clamor in favor of abolishing scenery. And indeed it ought to be abolished in drama as soon as it hinders more than it helps. But can it not develop into something else? For

⁴⁴ Spencer Golub, *Evreinov: The Theatre of Paradox and Transformation* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1984), 37.

monodrama this is almost a question of life and death.”⁴⁵ Citing improvements in scenic elements and lighting (including what he calls “magic lanterns”), Evreinov suggests that the method of staging in monodrama is absolutely essential to the concept. “The basic principle of monodrama,” Evreinov opines, “is the principle of the stage representation’s coalescence with the active participant’s representation. In other words, the external spectacle must be an expression of the internal spectacle.”⁴⁶ It is worth noting that one of Evreinov’s main proposals for scenically aligning the spectator with the protagonist is borrowed directly from Sologub: “How candid those lines in [Sologub’s] ‘Theater of a Single Will’ sound when he speaks of the expediency of designing the lighting so that the spectator sees only what he ought to see at any given moment, and all the rest is submerged in darkness ‘just as in our consciousness, everything impending that does not immediately catch our attention falls outside the threshold of consciousness.’”⁴⁷ Not only does this quote make it clear that Evreinov was familiar with, and at least to some extent influenced by Sologub’s essay, but it reinforces the idea that the concepts of the two men are not as far apart as it might at first seem.

Evreinov’s debt to Sologub is clear in his first attempt at composing a monodrama, *The Presentation of Love*. As Spencer Golub notes, Evreinov stressed that the play, published in 1910, “preceded the theory; indeed, the theory

⁴⁵ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 192.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 191-192.

developed as a *consequence* of the play. Evreinov felt it was necessary to emphasize this in order to forestall accusations that the play was cooked up according to a recipe.”⁴⁸ The play begins with two characters, the Catarrhal Subject (C.S.) and the Hemorrhoidal Type (H.T.) sitting on a bench by the sea.⁴⁹ As C.S. recounts to H.T. a memory from his youth, the scene materializes before us, and C.S.’s younger self enters the stage in the character of “I.” C.S. narrates the scene for us: “My appearance transforms the entire scene. The sky becomes deep blue, clear. The sea livens up and becomes extraordinarily beautiful. Exceptionally brilliant sunlight illuminates the dark pine trees, etc.”⁵⁰ Characters appear and disappear as they are of interest to “I,” and when “I” covers his eyes, there is darkness. Spencer Golub describes the action of the play in further detail:

“I” describes the princess [named as “She”] in ideal terms, and once described, she appears. When “My Rival” appears for the first time, the stage grows dark. He is a military officer of colossal height, almost a giant. His attire is dark and his face red with a black moustache and a huge lower lip. He has a well-muscled body, a “brutal and indescribably banal face, a hoarse raucous, disgusting voice. He smokes a large cigarette which makes him look like a steam engine.” When he leaves, all again becomes clear and bright. When “I” closes his eyes after receiving a

⁴⁸ Golub, 39. [Italics are Golub’s.]

⁴⁹ For this and the following details, I borrow extensively from Golub, 39-42.

⁵⁰ Golub, 40.

kiss from She, “there is a heavenly-pink light like the kind you see when you close your eyes from happiness after looking into the bright, midday sun.”⁵¹

Ultimately, the story ends with the disillusionment of “I,” and we are returned to the older C.S. and H.T. staring out at the sea.

Clearly, the play embodies much of Evreinov’s theory: we experience all things through the psyche of the central character named “I.” His emotions determine how everything is interpreted on stage, from the color of joy flooding the stage, to the gargantuan and ugly image of his rival, threatening to destroy his happiness. And yet, there are some notable differences between the play and the complete realization of monodrama as Evreinov explains it in “Introduction to Monodrama.” For one thing, the idea of there being one central character is undercut by the fact that that central character is doubled here—Is this the monodrama of C.S. now, or that of his younger “I” many years before?

Furthermore, as Golub notes, “An interesting feature of this play is that all of the stage directions for ‘I’ are written in the first person as if he were to read them aloud. The stage directions for ‘She’ are written in the third person. This produces a narrative effect, the sense of having an additional angle of perception on the action.”⁵² Of course, in Evreinov’s monodrama, we are supposed to have only a single perspective, the protagonist’s, whose angle the spectator will share.

⁵¹ Ibid., 41.

⁵² Ibid., 40.

But in the narrated stage directions, we must be reminded of the minimalist staging ideas of Sologub and Picard.

Indeed, Christopher Collins notes, “Evreinov was never regisseur at any theatre suitable for *The Theatre of Love* and other producers shied away from it.”⁵³ The problem, Collins continues, was likely that “the ‘constantly changing set’—at least until the advent of modern projection techniques—is financially and even technically beyond the capabilities of the theatre.”⁵⁴ While Evreinov believed the theatre was indeed capable of such scenic marvels, it is certainly possible that his solution of the narrated stage directions was intended, in the tradition of Picard and Sologub, to provoke the spectator to imagine whatever could not be produced on stage. Furthermore, the Catarrhal Self standing outside the action, narrating his own past, suggests the very strong influence of Sologub and his author-narrator, except for the fact that Evreinov has integrated the author-narrator into the scene in the guise of the character-narrator. This leaves Evreinov but one step away from the full integration that his theory calls for; a step he would soon take with *The Theatre of the Soul*, which we will discuss in Chapter Four.

To explain his desire for a theatre that depicts the way the world appears to our consciousness, it is essential that Evreinov explain his concept of just how the world does, in fact, appear in our consciousness:

⁵³ Christopher Collins, Introduction to *Life as Theatre: Five Modern Plays by Nikolai Evreinov* (Ann Arbor, MI: Ardis, 1973), xiv.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Any psychologist takes it to be elementary that the world around us inevitably undergoes transmutations, due to sense impressions; and the notion that the object of an impression inherently is what it in fact borrows from the subject of an impression is not an exclusively psychological phenomenon. All our sensory activity undergoes the process of projecting purely subjective transmutations onto an extrinsic object. . . .

The world around us borrows, as it were, its character from the subjective, individual ‘ego.’ . . . And it is modified as we modify, as our mental mood alters: the cheerful glen, the cornfield and the forest that I admire as I sit carefree with my beloved will become nothing more than a bright green patch, yellow stripes and a dark border, if at that moment I am brought news of a misfortune befalling someone close to me.⁵⁵

It is the job of the set designer, Evreinov claims, to depict not only the individual moments described here, but also to effectively represent the smooth transition between them: “The author of a modern drama, in my interpretation, will fix both these moments in the character’s environment in a stage direction; he will pedantically demand of the set-designer an instantaneous transformation of the cheerful landscape into a meaningless medley of a clamorous green, unnerving yellow and sullen olive, and he will be right in his pedantry.”⁵⁶ Certainly,

⁵⁵ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 192-193.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 193.

Evreinov's theory presents tremendous challenges to a designer, but he is convinced that the new era of stage design will prove equal to the challenge. It should come as little surprise that Evreinov speaks approvingly of Edward Gordon Craig in "Introduction to Monodrama."

Just as Evreinov's concept calls for a completely subjective vision of objects and environment, that same subjectivity is expected in the representation of other characters:

The spectator of monodrama perceives the rest of the participants in the drama only as they are reflected by the subject of the action, and consequently, their emotional experiences, having no independent significance, are presented as theatrically important insofar as the perceiving 'ego' of the subject as the action is projected onto them. . . . They are good-looking, intelligent and kind, if the participant imagines them to be so at the moment, and they will stand forth as hideously ugly if the participant is disappointed in them and perceives them from a different angle of vision.⁵⁷

Again, the affinity to Sologub is clear, but more importantly, Evreinov here explicitly states what has already been made implicit by the rest of his theory: that the other characters on the monodramatic stage have no independent existence

⁵⁷ Ibid., 196-197.

separate from the protagonist. This is just one point on which Evreinov's theory would be attacked by critics.

Despite the fact that a great deal of Evreinov's theory is dedicated to the development of a monodramatic *mise-en-scène* and a suggestion that staging is of the utmost importance to the success of the monodramatic venture, there can be little question as to the central role of the dramatist in monodrama. In addition to the reference to "the author of a modern drama," and his belief in the centrality of the author/hero, Evreinov also cited several monodramas that had already been written: "The greatest similarity to monodrama as I interpret it can be seen in those plays which represent a dream or a lingering hallucination, such as Hauptmann's *Hannele*, Maeterlinck's *Blue Bird*, L. Andreev's *Black Masks* and others."⁵⁸ In addition to establishing that the thread of monodrama is present in dramatic works being written by his contemporaries, Evreinov also suggests here that a play may be considered as a monodrama even if the author did not set out to write one. This assumption is particularly important considering that plays have been *interpreted* as monodramatic, both in critical analysis and in staging, even if not originally intended as such.

A major example of a monodramatic interpretation of an older work that was not initially intended as such can be seen in Edward Gordon Craig's production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1912. Laurence Senelick, whose *Gordon Craig's Moscow Hamlet: A Reconstruction* provides a detailed account of the production, suggests that part of the reason for Craig's invitation to

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

MKhAT (besides the dogged insistence of Isadora Duncan) was Stanislavsky's sensitivity to symbolist charges (particularly those of Valerii Briusov) that the Art Theatre's dogmatic realism had become stale. The early interactions between Craig and Stanislavsky offer some tantalizing indications of a monodramatic undertone. In April 1908, Duncan, acting as intermediary for Stanislavsky, wrote to offer Craig two productions, one of which was to be *Peer Gynt*, the monodramatic aspects of which we will discuss in chapter five.⁵⁹ Later that year, during his first visit to Moscow, Craig saw a production at the Moscow Art Theatre of Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird*, cited by Evreinov as an example in "Introduction to Monodrama," and suggested that Stanislavsky bring the production to Drury Lane.⁶⁰ These may be little more than coincidences, but they certainly would seem to suggest the cross-pollination of ideas in Russia and perhaps throughout Europe at the time.

Craig would ultimately prevail in his insistence to Stanislavsky that he direct *Hamlet* during his visit to MKhAT. Although Senelick argues that Craig was unaware of any of the theatrical trends taking place in Russia outside MKhAT,⁶¹ there are reasons to question this assertion. During early rehearsals of *Hamlet*, in April 1909, four months after Evreinov first gave his lecture in Moscow and exactly at the time that it was first being published, Stanislavsky

⁵⁹ Laurence Senelick, *Gordon Craig's Moscow Hamlet: A Reconstruction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

wrote in a letter, “Craig is staging *Hamlet* as a monodrama. He looks at everything through Hamlet’s eyes.”⁶² It is certainly quite possible that Stanislavsky is applying the term to Craig’s concept after the fact, without Craig himself having thought of it specifically at this point. Nevertheless, as Senelick describes it, in Craig’s production, “*Hamlet* was a mystery play, a monodrama about the conflict between spirit and matter. . . . The tragedy took place within Hamlet’s soul, and the other characters were to be psychic emanations of his loves and hates.”⁶³

Craig’s conception of Hamlet was not his only flirtation with monodrama. Craig also seems to have pondered a monodramatic interpretation of *Macbeth*. In a 1960 interview with BBC radio, Craig said that he had reimagined the opening scene of the play, with the witches moved from the center of the scene, and instead, Lady Macbeth foregrounded asleep in bed, as the witches play out their scene behind a scrim. Craig posits this as the witches charming Lady Macbeth,

⁶² Constantin Stanislavsky, quoted in Aleksei Pasuev, “The Metamorphosis of ‘Monodrama’: MXAT 2’s New Type of Directorial Structure for a Play,” trans. Daniel Gerould (unpublished), *Teatr 2* (2001): 31. Pasuev goes on to point out that in the past several decades, the Moscow Art Theatre has been the site of a number of attempts by Russian directors to stage monodramatic interpretations of traditional drama.

⁶³ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 45. It is notable that Stéphane Mallarmé seems to have had a similar vision of the play. According to René Taupin, “*Hamlet* was for Mallarmé the play par excellence. At the mere mention of that name, he says, everything fades away. The world is replaced by a stage; a name begets a soul. About him there are bit-players, and, among them, the only ones whose brief apparition one can recall are those whom the hero creates. René Taupin, “The Myth of Hamlet in Mallarmé’s Generation,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 14, no. 4. (December 1953): 436.

who will then set into motion the action of the play.⁶⁴ Craig actually took part in a production of *Macbeth* in New York in 1928, the first presentation of his work in the United States. In a letter to Ms. Margaret Anglin, who was to play Lady Macbeth (ultimately, Florence Reed played the role, and Craig, rather than directing, designed the production), dated September 6, 1928, Craig wrote:

To me it seems that Lady M could not be in a room with a group of people without they all began to live with 8 times their usual intensity everyone when she came in glowed—and as she went, they went out like electric lights dying down. . . . It seemed to me that although the centre of it all, she never appeared in the centre—she hugged the sides, her eyes along [likely meant to be “alone”] focus the centre and there, she saw to it, stood husband—a man with some poetic fancy in his speech, but quite a dull and awkward melancholy sort of creature—with a knack of strength—physical.⁶⁵

Craig continued, “The play seems to me always to suffer in representation because we see two centre forms. I would have it—if possible—one centre dull and the other always hugging the walls vivid.”⁶⁶ Certainly, this seems to be in

⁶⁴ Edward Gordon Craig, interview with BBC radio, British Broadcasting Company, 25 December 1960.

⁶⁵ Edward Gordon Craig, letter to Ms. Margaret Anglin, 6 September 1928, Donald Oenslager Collection of Edward Gordon Craig, Yale University. [Punctuation is Craig’s.]

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

perfect accord with Evreinov's theory, though the issue remains as to whether this kinship was a result of specific knowledge Craig may have had of Evreinov's work, or of the intellectual trends so deeply present at the time.

This mystery is complicated by the fact that Craig appears to have owned a copy of "Introduction to Monodrama." The catalog from an exhibit on Evreinov at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris in 1981 cites a copy of "Introduction to Monodrama" along with an image of the cover page (it is likely from the pamphlet version) in Russian. The caption reads, "Exemplaire annoté par Edward Gordon Craig. Collection Craig."⁶⁷ The apparent smoking-gun of Craig's ownership of this document is hampered by two factors. First and foremost, Senelick makes it very clear that Craig did not know Russian. Secondly, it is difficult to know when, how, or from whom Craig received the essay. While the prospect of a direct link between Craig and Evreinov is tantalizing, as with so many other aspects in the history of monodrama, the absence of any direct link sends us back once again to the *Zeitgeist* in European culture at the turn of the century, when the concept of the world viewed subjectively through the eyes of a protagonist becomes widespread.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ *Nicolas Evreinoff, 1873-1953*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Bibliothèque Nationale, 1981), 45-46.

⁶⁸ Although it may be little more than coincidental, it is interesting to note that Craig's sister, Edith Craig, directed Evreinov's monodrama *The Theatre of the Soul*, at least four times between 1915 and 1931. See Katharine Cockin, "The Pioneer Players: Plays of/with Identity," in *Difference in View: Women and Modernism*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 142-154.

Although “Introduction to Monodrama” cannot be said to encompass all of the nuances and varieties of monodrama as a genre (we will later discuss how Evreinov’s own dramatic writing, although monodramatic, differs considerably from his theoretical model), it is important to note the significant aspects of Evreinov’s theory that lay a foundation for the form. First and foremost, drawing upon Sologub, Evreinov insists upon the establishment of the single protagonist as sole focus and source of all action on stage as the fundamental basis of monodrama. Secondly, Evreinov’s call for “co-experiencing” with the protagonist establishes the importance of the direct, indivisible link between spectator and protagonist. Finally, Evreinov’s theory, in close relation to its roots in the symbolist movement, establishes the idea that what we see on stage in monodrama is an exterior representation of an interior reality—“the life of the mind,” as Evreinov puts it.⁶⁹

In examining the formation of symbolist, and by extension monodramatic thought in Russia, Laurence Senelick cites two major figures as foundational in the development of Russian writers and thinkers of the time: “They came under the influence of Nietzsche and Maeterlinck: from the former they derived a notion of Dionysiac drama in which the spectator and the performer become one; from the latter, they derived the notion of ‘the tragedy of everyday life,’ transpiring within a man’s soul without the need for external action.”⁷⁰ Maeterlinck’s

⁶⁹Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 195.

⁷⁰ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 29.

practice of monodrama will be discussed further in chapter five. Here I wish to call attention to Friedrich Nietzsche's argument in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), which anticipates certain aspects of monodrama:

This process of the tragic chorus is the *dramatic* proto-phenomenon: to see oneself transformed before one's own eyes and begin to act as if one had actually entered into another body, another character. This process stands at the beginning of the origin of drama. Here we have something different from the rhapsodist who does not become fused with his images but, like a painter, sees them outside himself as objects of contemplation. Here we have a surrender of individuality and a way of entering into another character. And this phenomenon is encountered epidemically: a whole throng experiences the magic of this transformation.⁷¹

Nietzsche presents us with a prototype for Evreinov's co-experiencing spectator. Although his model of the birth of tragedy may have been discredited as history, as theory, Nietzsche's ideas will echo in the words of Sologub and Evreinov years later. This is particularly true with regards to Nietzsche's vision of a drama emanating from a single source: "The images of the *lyrist* are nothing but *his very* self and, as it were, only different projections of himself, so he, as the moving

⁷¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy in The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 64. [Italics are Nietzsche's.]

center of this world, may say ‘I’: of course, this self is not the same as that of the waking, empirically real man, but the only truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things, through whose images the lyric genius sees this very basis.”⁷² Nietzsche’s vision presages not only Sologub’s model of the world projected from the “I” of the author, but also, in his differentiation between the man and the lyricist, Evreinov’s fusing of the author and protagonist into the active participant through whom the dramatic world is seen.

Nietzsche’s influence on Russian monodrama can be traced back to Vyacheslav Ivanov, to whom *Theatre: A Book on the New Theatre*, in which “The Theater of a Single Will” appeared, was dedicated. Ivanov, a major symbolist poet and theorist, was the conduit through which many of the Russian symbolists became acquainted with Nietzsche. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, in the introduction to her collection *Nietzsche in Russia*, notes, “Ivanov’s reinterpretation of Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* and his revision of the Nietzsche/Wagner model of the theater had far-reaching implications.”⁷³ Among these implications, she argues, was that, “to enhance the feeling of unity, the spectators would also be actors.”⁷⁴ The influence of Nietzsche should be seen in the light of the fact that Wagner, who in *The Birth of Tragedy* appears as the new incarnation of Greek tragedy, served as an inspiration to both French and Russian symbolists. This was keenly felt by Edouard Dujardin, who noted:

⁷² Ibid., 50. [Italics are Nietzsche’s.]

⁷³ Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal, introduction to *Nietzsche in Russia*, ed. Bernice Glatzer Rosenthal (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 20.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 22.

Les Lauriers sont Coupés was undertaken with the wild ambition of transposing into the literary field Wagnerian procedures which I defined for myself as follows: the life of the soul expressed through the incessant eruption of musical motifs, coming up to speak, one after the other, undefined and in succession, the “states” of thought, feeling, impressions, brought into existence, in an undefined succession of short phrases, each rendering one of these states of thought, in no logical order, in the form of bursts of thought rising from the depths of the self, from what we today would call the unconscious or the subconscious . . .⁷⁵

Dujardin’s discussion of Wagner is reminiscent of the use of music in early musical monodrama. And although the use of the motifs in Wagner carries through multiple characters, rather than a monodramatic protagonist, the aspect of interior expression Dujardin cites is clearly in line with the intellectual undercurrents of monodrama.

With Evreinov’s formulation of the first comprehensive theory of monodrama came the first criticisms of monodrama as a genre. Evgeni Znosko-Borovski, secretary of the literary revue *Apollo* and author of the 1924 book, *Russian Theatre at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, complained that by limiting us to the protagonist’s perspective monodrama makes it impossible to

⁷⁵ Dujardin, 134-135.

know the protagonist himself, as we normally come to know such a character through his interactions with other characters and their opinions of him.⁷⁶ Znosko-Borovski's position, reminiscent of Richard Capell's critique of *Winterreise*, is based on the following assumptions. We normally enter monodramatic dramas late in the story, with the protagonist immersed in his world. As the only interactions we see come directly from the protagonist's perspective, we can never come to an objective concept of who the protagonist really is. From Evreinov's point of view, however, this is precisely the type of objectivity he would like to banish from the stage—after all, in our own individual experiences of reality, we are never able to get an objective picture of who we are. Furthermore, the more specifically the protagonist is defined, the more likely we are to see the character as different from ourselves, limiting our ability to fully connect ourselves to the character. Znosko-Borovski's criticism seems to ignore that there often are other characters present in monodrama, and even if we only see these characters through the protagonist's psyche, we nevertheless learn about the protagonist through these interactions. Evreinov ultimately suggested that such a concern was irrelevant, as all drama has always informed us about characters from a single perspective—that of the author.

A significant and enduring criticism of monodrama was voiced by Aleksandr Kugel, who was the editor of *Teatr i Iskusstvo* at the time “Introduction to Monodrama” was published therein, and also a partner of Evreinov's at the Crooked Mirror Theatre, but a strong believer in realism and an ally of

⁷⁶ Sharon Carnicke, *The Theatrical Instinct: Nikolai Evreinov and the Russian Theatre of the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 76.

Stanislavsky. Kugel asserted that lacking the opinion and force of other, fully fleshed-out characters, monodrama would be devoid of conflict and ultimately simply dull.⁷⁷ The charge of a lack of conflict has remained with monodrama through the years. But while monodrama does indeed often lack the clash of equal forces that Hegel calls for, monodramatic authors have engendered conflict in varied and creative ways. The notion of a conflict within the self is central to monodrama, and has been represented through the personification of warring aspects of the psyche, as Evreinov himself did (this type will be discussed in chapter four). Alternatively, the idea of conflict as the central driving force of drama is often replaced in monodrama by a journey to self-discovery, already seen at work in Romantic dramatic poetry and a major feature of many multi-character monodramas.

Of all the criticisms against monodrama, there was one in particular that Evreinov himself seemed determined to refute: “I have one more request to make, a request of a demanding sort!—do not attempt to read signs of naturalism, so ruinous to art, between the lines of my theory of monodrama, even a naturalism of a purely subjective hue!”⁷⁸ But, Evreinov’s request notwithstanding, what is the theory of monodrama if not a proposal for a subjective realism? In his appeal to psychology as justification of his goals, and his desire that the play depict the world precisely as the protagonist sees it, Evreinov is, undeniably, asking us to see the world, at least theoretically, as we truly experience it in our everyday

⁷⁷ Ibid., 77.

⁷⁸ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 198-199.

lives. Certainly, monodrama demands a high level of (if not complete) illusionism in presentation. Any breaking of the theatrical frame will only distance us from the protagonist, precisely the opposite of what Evreinov is seeking.

Indeed, the realistic/illusionistic nature of Evreinov's theory has led to some criticism along similar lines to the critical response to realism. Spencer Golub notes that "It was the opinion of some that such an arrangement between character and spectator would destroy the latter's aesthetic distance."⁷⁹ Such criticism calls to mind Brecht's anti-realist assertion that realist theatre, in leading the spectator to identify so completely with the characters of the drama, rendered him incapable of observing the action critically. Monodramatic identification and the alienation effect would seem to place Evreinov and Brecht at opposite ends of the spectrum.

Sharon Carnicke also focuses upon the limits of monodrama as a political tool when she asserts that the possibility of identification between spectator and protagonist is inherently limited:

For female readers, identifying with the traditionally male hero is problematic, especially when the work embodies a hostile attitude toward women. . . . As Elaine Reuben quipped, "An historical imagination which allows one to imagine what it is like to be the Lone Ranger can be

⁷⁹ Golub, 36.

enriching, but it can similarly be dangerous to forget that one is actually Tonto.” Certainly, most of Evreinov’s plays embody a hostile attitude toward women. . . . Evreinov makes it difficult for the women in his audience to call his monodramas “mine.”⁸⁰

Even without a “hostile attitude toward women,” the problem of cross-gender (or, as Reuben’s quote suggests, cross-racial) identification remains. Certainly, a spectator of a different gender or race than the protagonist is likely to resist the complete identification monodrama seeks.

This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that monodrama offers only a single character with whom to identify, the other characters (if there are any) being merely reflections of (or at least interpreted by) the protagonist’s psyche. This aspect of monodrama, already seen as problematic in the barrier it presents to dramatic conflict, also denies the presentation of any meaningful differing viewpoints in the drama. Any debate or discussion of issues, political or otherwise, is compromised by the fact that the views expressed are, necessarily, merely the views of one single psyche.

Monodrama also faced the charge that it failed to deliver fully on one of its own central tenets, the complete involvement of the audience in the theatrical production. On a theoretical level, Spencer Golub notes, “It was said . . . that Evreinov’s eagerness to mingle stage and audience abnegated responsibility for

⁸⁰ Carnicke, 76.

creation to the spectator.”⁸¹ However, Golub’s presentation of Evreinov’s answer to this concern reveals the actual depth of this problem:

Evreinov answered that monodramas were to be fully scripted, carefully staged and scrupulously rehearsed performances in which the audience would play an important but limited role. It seems ironic that the perceptions of the audience, the nominal co-creator of the theatrical event, were more carefully manipulated in monodrama than in a standard stage piece. Ultimately, increased audience involvement is not really synonymous with audience freedom or creativity.⁸²

Evreinov seems here almost to contradict his own ideas in regard to the audience’s involvement in monodrama. Sharon Carnicke echoes these concerns:

At least one [problem with monodrama] ironically recapitulates a criticism which Evreinov had hurled at his arch-enemy, Stanislavsky. Evreinov had complained that realism on stage left little to the imagination, and hence, cut the audience out of the creative process of theatre. Rather than co-creating the world of the play, spectators at the Moscow Art Theatre were at the mercy of the director by being presented with ready-made choices in

⁸¹ Golub, 36.

⁸² Ibid.

the most minute details of the set and environment of the play. In all but its non-realistic style, the same could be said for monodrama. Evreinov tried to create all the variations of the protagonist's perceptions for his audience, again leaving nothing to the imagination. Monodrama was far from a suggestive theatre which freed the imagination of the audience. Indeed it manipulated the audience far more than a standard realistic production.⁸³

There can be little doubt that Evreinov's theory, as Golub and Carnicke argue, ultimately works to limit the freedom afforded the spectator in what he or she may choose to see in a performance, as evidenced in part by Evreinov's own instructions (borrowed from Sologub) as to how closely the lighting should be focused. However, it is worth noting that while both Golub and Carnicke speak of the audience as co-creators of the play, Evreinov made no such claim. Evreinov expected the spectator to "co-experience" with the protagonist, rather than co-creating with the writer/director.

The absolute primacy of the protagonist of monodrama is mirrored by the dominance of a single driving force in production. Just as the unquestioned centrality of the active participant relegates secondary characters to a position of near-non-existence, so Evreinov's theory seems to undermine the collaborative basis of theatrical production. On the one hand, this issue may be seen as

⁸³ Carnicke, 77-78.

rendering the project of monodrama impossible. This is the opinion of Katharine Cockin, who argues:

Evreinov's attempts to control the audience in this monodrama [*The Theatre of the Soul*] are ultimately thwarted by the nature of theatre which is at odds with the notion of a single self (even if presented as fragmented and comprised of several conflicting components). Any performance is open to other transgressive selves in the forms of the audience, the backstage workers, the theatre building, and even the rebellious scenery.⁸⁴

Certainly, as Cockin suggests, the collaborative nature of theatre would seem to pose significant, if not insurmountable obstacles to any attempt to provide a truly singular vision on stage. Evreinov's solution, however, only recasts the problem from another angle. Despite his appeal to new advancements in scenery and lighting, it seems clear that Evreinov's author/director (Evreinov did direct his own work) was meant to dominate the process, with the respective designers (like the characters of the plays) becoming mere extensions of the Sologubian "single will" of the author/director. As Carnicke notes, "In monodrama, Evreinov seems to deny the independent creativity of all the various artists that collaborate to create a single production, including actors, especially those who play supporting

⁸⁴ Katharine Cockin, "The Pioneer Players: Plays of/with Identity," in *Difference in View: Women and Modernism*, ed. Gabriele Griffin (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994), 149.

roles, directors, designers, who subject their creativity to the vision of the playwright.”⁸⁵

The strong role of the author/director is but one of several ways in which Evreinov’s theory can be seen as relevant to film. Both Spencer Golub and Sharon Carnicke have argued that monodrama was ultimately more suited to the cinema than the theatre. Golub claims, “Monodrama as a form was ultimately outstripped by the cinema (especially the German expressionist cinema) which it anticipated,”⁸⁶ while Carnicke opines, “Cinema has been more successful than the stage in handling such extreme subjectivity.”⁸⁷ Laurence Senelick, speaking of Craig’s production of *Hamlet*, again raises the idea of author/hero conflation, but also asserts the superiority of film for monodramatic purposes when he says, “The monodramatic eye of the designer/director fusing with Hamlet’s mind’s eye might best be portrayed by a camera lens.”⁸⁸

Film undeniably provides a rich medium for the type of dramatic experience that Evreinov seeks, and there are numerous examples of monodrama in film. However, these objections seem to focus too narrowly on the scenic aspects of Evreinov’s theory to the detriment of the dramaturgical innovations that monodrama embodies. It is possible to acknowledge that the dramatic experience that Evreinov describes is feasible in other media (as we have already

⁸⁵ Carnicke, 79.

⁸⁶ Golub, *Evreinov*, 46.

⁸⁷ Carnicke, 78.

⁸⁸ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 190.

seen in literature), without insisting that this forecloses its viability for the stage. Indeed, monodrama has flourished in the theatre and in the cinema at the same time.

The debate on the relative merits of film or theatre for monodramatic purposes highlights both the importance of and the inherent difficulties of respective media in representing the metaphysical concept behind monodrama. We have already noted that the collaborative nature of the theatre presents an obstacle to monodrama. In addition, a further difficulty in the process is apparent in the presence of the protagonist on stage. In our own consciousness, we do not witness ourselves physically interacting with the world, and yet, monodrama makes no attempt to remove the corporal body of the protagonist from the stage, ensuring that if we are to align ourselves with the protagonist's psyche, we must make the mental leap to put ourselves in his place onstage. Here is where film would seem to come to the rescue and establish itself as the proper home for such an exercise in subjectivity, as the point-of-view shot would seem to be a perfect way to align audience with character. But, as the eminent Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman has written, point-of-view perspective is not the panacea it might seem:

Many experiments have proved that shooting long sequences of film from the viewpoint of one of the characters results in a loss in the sense of subjective focus rather than a gain, since the audience starts to interpret the shots as normal scenic filming. In order to present a sequence of film

as embodying the point of view of a particular character, it is necessary (through montage) to alternate the shots taken from his point in space with shots which fix his position from somewhere outside him, from the audience's (i.e. 'nobody's') point of view or that of other characters.⁸⁹

In addition, it would seem that the disembodied voice of the protagonist is likely to distract the viewer and even further distance the spectator, who, even if he is seduced into identification through point-of-view, knows that the voice that he hears is not his own. Film, then, is subject to largely the same problem as theatre to the extent that it must physically represent the character through whom we are supposed to be experiencing the drama.

If both theatre and film fail to provide a medium which can completely represent subjective reality, might not literature offer a solution, with Dujardin's *monologue intérieur* showing the way? Certainly the novel's recourse to first-person narration offers a tantalizing possibility. Evreinov, in fact, wanted to try to borrow the novel's magical first-person "I" by suggesting that the "active participant" of monodrama "be designated by the simple but expressive first-person pronoun 'I,' . . . I should prefer this not only . . . because in that form, as [Przybyszewski] asserts, 'the most intimate pulse can best be felt,' but simply out of practical considerations."⁹⁰ Evreinov actually utilized this strategy in his first

⁸⁹ J.M. Lotman, "Point of View in a Text," trans. L.M. O'Toole, *New Literary History* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 351-352.

⁹⁰ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 197.

attempt at monodrama, *The Representation of Love*, whose hero was named, simply, “I.”

But it is noteworthy that Dujardin himself remarks that it would not be necessary to write in the first person to achieve the effect of *monologue intérieur*, as long as the absent narrator is recounting the inner workings of the protagonist’s mind.⁹¹ Dujardin goes on to note that Louis Gillet, in speaking of Joyce’s attempt to recreate consciousness in *Ulysses*, labeled it, “An illusory project, because no language exists which can translate what is beyond language.”⁹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty would seem to strongly concur with this idea when he argues, “Here, as everywhere, it seems at first sight true that consciousness can find in its experience only what it has itself put there. Thus the experience of communication would appear to be an illusion. A consciousness constructs—for *x*—that linguistic mechanism which will provide another consciousness with the chance of having the same thoughts, but nothing really passes between them.”⁹³

Indeed, the problem of representing thought in language proves a greater obstacle to the novel than it is for film or theatre. For while film and theatre may visually portray the world as it is perceived by the protagonist, the novel must resort to words if it is to attempt to describe that same landscape, and though we may often articulate thoughts to ourselves, our impressions of the scenery around

⁹¹ Dujardin, 102.

⁹² Louis Gillet, quoted in Dujardin, 115.

⁹³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 207.

us rarely express themselves linguistically. Dujardin, likely aware of this problem, set limitations to his project: “Total reproduction, real ‘reproduction of the film of consciousness’ is something almost impossible to imagine. And that is why we have several times made clear that interior monologue must not render thought ‘raw,’ but give the impression of it. And in this way it proves itself to be a work of art much more than the logical analysis of the psychological novel.”⁹⁴ Dujardin’s caveat is worth keeping in mind as we turn to explore the philosophical and psychological underpinnings of monodrama. It is surely the case that what we see in monodrama and comparable forms, such as interior monologue, is not meant as an absolute representation of the life of the mind, but as an artistic rendering of the subjective vision that these thinkers have explored.

Any investigation into the philosophical underpinnings of monodrama must necessarily begin with the question of subjectivity. Monodrama clearly accords with a view of the world in which the individual experience of life is seen as the sole measure of reality. That is to say, there is no objective reality, but only our individual and subjective interpretations of it. George Berkeley’s version of radical skepticism, which I discussed in regard to the Romantics in chapter one—questioning the very existence of all things outside the mind—has usually been tempered by a more moderate view that sees the individual human conception of the world as formed by a complex interaction between the individual and his surroundings. For Nietzsche, absolute knowledge was an impossibility; the only

⁹⁴ Dujardin, 116.

possible knowledge was accessible by an act of seeing the world through the greatest possible number of eyes and coming to an agreement among them. Nevertheless, whatever insight we would gain would still be less than absolute: “Facts is precisely what there is not, only impressions.”⁹⁵

This subjective vision of the world found further voice in the *fin de siècle* philosophy and psychology of Henri Bergson and William James. Bergson and James were both in great vogue in European intellectual circles in the early years of the twentieth century, just as monodrama began to flower. Henri Bergson argues that the individual’s unique perception of the world is a necessary result of the experiences of that individual: “The greater number of emotions are instinct with a thousand sensations, feelings or ideas which pervade them: each one is then a state unique of its kind and indefinable, and it seems that we should have to re-live the life of the subject who experiences it if we wished to grasp it in its original complexity.”⁹⁶ This idea of thought as a function of a experience is echoed by William James, who sees all thought as inherent to the individual thinker: “The only states of consciousness that we naturally deal with are found in personal consciousnesses, minds, selves, concrete particular I’s and you’s. Each of these minds keeps its own thoughts to itself. There is no giving or bartering

⁹⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 267.

⁹⁶ Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, trans. F.L. Pogson (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2001), 17-18.

between them.”⁹⁷ The singularity of experience and thought forms a foundation on which the very possibility of monodrama rests.

The notion of subjectivity advanced by the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the middle years of the twentieth century continues along the trajectory of philosophical and psychological thought of the *fin de siècle* and contributes significantly to an understanding of the lasting appeal of monodrama and its methods, as well as providing a basis for understanding plays that we will discuss in later chapters as monodrama, even when they occur years later and are unlikely to be directly connected to the dramatic theories presented here.

In a central point of his theory of phenomenology, presented in a draft of his essay, “Phenomenology,” for the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1927, Edmund Husserl clearly echoes William James when he remarks, “Whatever is experienced, whatever is thought, and whatever is seen as the truth are given and are only possible within [the corresponding acts of] experiencing, thinking, and insight.”⁹⁸ Along the same lines, Husserl is in accord with Nietzsche in regard to the idea of an objectivity predicated upon intersubjectivity: “The task is to pursue the at first plethora of modes in which the respective ‘intentional objectivities’

⁹⁷ William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 221.

⁹⁸ Edmund Husserl, “Draft A of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* Article,” in *Edmund Husserl, Collected Works, Vol. 6*, ed. and trans. Thomas Sheehan and Richard E. Palmer (New York: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1997), 239. [Brackets are Husserl’s.]

(the perceived as such, the remembered as such, the valued as such, etc.) are gradually constituted as synthetic unities of multiplicities of consciousness.”⁹⁹

Although Nietzsche and Husserl both seek a basis for a common understanding of what might approach objectivity, they both assert subjectivity as the primary foundation of individual knowledge. In *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945), Maurice Merleau-Ponty concurs with Husserl and Nietzsche when he notes, “All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view.”¹⁰⁰

The philosophical arguments concerning the subjective perception of reality are often echoed in psychology. Indeed, it is hardly a coincidence that Freud’s theories of psychoanalysis emerge concurrently with the growing popularity of Bergson and James. Freud’s work, and the work of his disciples, presents subjectivity as the result of the interaction between the individual mind and the world. Jacques Lacan, for example, recasts the points raised by Husserl, Nietzsche, and Merleau-Ponty when he argues, “All the objects of [the individual’s] world are always structured around the wandering shadow of his ego,”¹⁰¹ and “All the objects are considered from the standpoint of the ego.”¹⁰² Indeed, from the psychological perspective, our immediate vision of reality is conditioned not only by the way our eyes and brain receive objects in the world,

⁹⁹ Ibid., 244.

¹⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, ix.

¹⁰¹ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 166.

¹⁰² Ibid., 177.

but by our own contribution to that world. As Carl Jung notes, “All the contents of our unconscious are constantly being projected into our surroundings.”¹⁰³

Objectivity is thus dealt a double blow in that not only can we not necessarily trust the reality of what we perceive, but we must also wonder whether things in the world are there because our mind has placed them there.

The idea of the subjective interpretation of reality is of fundamental importance to monodrama. Clearly, Evreinov’s theory is based on an ontology in which each individual sees the world in a different way, and attempts to directly convey that individual impression of the world. It is this individual reception of reality that, for Evreinov, makes realism a meaningless venture.

While one aspect of philosophical and psychological thought emphasizes the formation of the world through the subject’s interpretation and projection of his own personal vision, the same theorists, and others, argue that the subject itself is formed during a process of change and development through its interactions in the world. Like David Hume’s vision of a self formed through the “theater of impressions,”¹⁰⁴ Bergson, arguing against the idea of a fixed, unchanging self, declares, “The truth is that the self, by the mere fact of experiencing the first feeling, has already changed to a slight extent when the second supervenes.”¹⁰⁵ It follows from this that the second experience will

¹⁰³ C.G. Jung, *Dreams*, trans. R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 50.

¹⁰⁴ David Hume, quoted in Alain Renaut, *The Era of the Individual*, trans. M.B. DeBevoise and Franklin Philip (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press), 111.

¹⁰⁵ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 171.

change the self by the time a third arrives, and so on, so that the self is constantly altered and re-formed by its experiences. In a similar vein, Lacan, again harkening back to Freud, notes, “The ego is the sum of the identifications of the subject. . . . If you allow me to give an image of it, the ego is like the superimposition of various coats borrowed from what I would call the bric-a-brac of its props department.”¹⁰⁶ Bergson, Lacan, and Hume before them, present a model of the individual in which the subjective perceptions that one has of the world accumulate and in the process continually contribute to the formation of the self.

Just as the self is consistently re-formed by the accumulation of its experiences and perceptions, so that newly formed self comes, in turn, to interpret the world through that history of accumulated experiences. Henri Bergson elucidates this concept in regard to the experience of living in a neighborhood over time: “It seems that these objects [the houses of his neighborhood], continually perceived by me and continually impressing themselves on my mind, have ended by borrowing from me something of my own conscious existence.”¹⁰⁷ (The similarity to Evreinov’s remark that, “The world around us borrows, as it were, its character from the subjective, individual ‘ego’”¹⁰⁸ supports the notion of a direct influence of Bergson on Evreinov.)

¹⁰⁶ Lacan, 155.

¹⁰⁷ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 130.

¹⁰⁸ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 193.

Merleau-Ponty seems to be in accord with this conclusion when he suggests of the perception of objects, “What is given is not the thing on its own, but the experience of the thing, or something transcendent standing in the wake of one’s subjectivity, some kind of natural entity of which a glimpse is afforded through a personal history.”¹⁰⁹ While the previous examples of the subjective experience may have seemed content to rest on the basis of pure perception—what the eyes see or what is immediately received by the brain—we see here the idea that the way we perceive the world at any given moment is inevitably influenced by the accumulation of our past experiences and perceptions. Lacan perhaps summarizes this interchange best when he says, “The subject enters and mixes in with things.”¹¹⁰ This “inmixing,” as Lacan calls it, works to alter both the things, and the subject himself.

The development of notions of a clearly defined subject from Berkeley to Lacan has come under intense scrutiny (and indeed outright rejection) by postmodern theorists such as Michel Foucault, Slavoj Žižek, Judith Butler and others. The basis of the rejection of the subject has been a belief that the posited “subject” of humanism and modernism represents a universalized epistemological position—one that can see, know, and even do all that he or she (although essentially always, historically, he) desires. That position, it is argued, is presented as fixed and essential.

¹⁰⁹ Merleau-Ponty, 379.

¹¹⁰ Lacan, 160.

In response to this, Alain Renaut remarks, “The assault mounted against the idea of the subject . . . was based on unusually simplistic premises—as though any mention of subjectivity inevitably implied the notion of the subject as entirely transparent to itself, sovereign, master of itself and the universe; as though the undeniable collapse of this older model of the subject had to translate into a complete abandonment of any reference whatsoever to subjectivity.”¹¹¹ In the debate between the subjective and anti-subjective theorists as to the nature of the subject (or lack thereof) in the world at large, the terms introduced by Renaut are helpful in any consideration of monodrama. The heroes (or, if you will, subjects) of monodrama (or at least what I have referred to as “modern” monodrama) are rarely, if ever, transparent to themselves, sovereign, or masters of anything, let alone themselves or the universe. Rather, they are most often ineffectual, subject to the whims and vagaries of a world over which they have little control, even when that world exists inside themselves.

Sigmund Freud, writing more than half a century before the postmodern questioning of the subject, sheds light on the idea of the subject as something considerably less than completely autonomous when, in *The Ego and the Id*, he approvingly quotes George Groddeck, who insists “that what we call our ego behaves essentially passively in life, and that, as he expresses it, we are ‘lived’ by unknown and uncontrollable forces.”¹¹² Though Groddeck’s belief sounds as though it verges on the mystical, Freud clearly saw it in a more analytical sense.

¹¹¹ Renaut, xxv.

¹¹² Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), 17.

Freud himself, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, argues that the ego is divided into two parts—perception and consciousness. This division, although often couched in other terms, becomes a recurring feature in twentieth-century thought. Alain Renaut argues, “In short, there is a whole subterranean existence of perceptions or representations that, by definition, escapes the self-reflexive grasp—the subject, understood as the capacity for self-reflection, emerges only on the surface or periphery of a representational process that for the most part unfolds in the subject’s absence, as it were.”¹¹³ Renaut’s observation posits a world that is received in the mind without immediately being consciously examined, once again invoking Freud’s division. Merleau-Ponty effectively encapsulates the issue when he says, “Between the self that analyzes perception and the self which perceives, there is always a distance.”¹¹⁴ Elaborating upon this, Merleau-Ponty presents exactly the order of subject we most frequently witness in monodrama:

If I cannot see the object except by distancing it in the past, this is because, like the first attack launched by the object upon my senses, the succeeding perception equally occupies and expunges my consciousness; it is because this perception will in turn pass away, the subject of perception never being an absolute subjectivity, but destined to become an

¹¹³ Renaut, 76.

¹¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 49.

object for an ulterior 'I.' Perception is always in the mode of the impersonal 'One.'¹¹⁵

The gap between the self which perceives and the self which analyzes perception is the ground of monodrama. It is in this space, in the guise of the "impersonal 'One'" that Merleau-Ponty proposes, that the "subject" of monodrama is portrayed.

If, under "normal" circumstances, subjectivity is fractured, how much more must this take place in more extreme states of consciousness? This process can be seen at work rather readily in the dream state. Although Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* stands as the foundational document on the psychology of dreams, it is somewhat surprising that Freud does little to investigate the status of the figure of the dreamer within the dream. This analysis is instead provided by several of his disciples, who, for the most part, posit a considerable shift (and often fragmentation) in the subjectivity of the dreamer from that of the waking subject. Jacques Lacan, speaking in 1954 of Freud's interpretation of his own dreams, remarks, "The relations of the subject change completely. He becomes something totally different, there's no Freud any longer, there is no longer anyone who can say *I*."¹¹⁶

Gaston Bachelard, in his *The Poetics of Reverie* (1960), draws a sharp distinction between the dream and daydream (or reverie), and clearly feels that the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 279.

¹¹⁶ Lacan, 164.

daydream is the superior state. Referring to Descartes's formulation of *cogito ergo sum*, Bachelard writes, "That happy man [Descartes] was sure that it was he, really he, and he alone who had passions and wisdom. But is a dreamer, a real dreamer, who crosses the madnesses of the night, so sure of being himself? We doubt it. . . . The night dreamer cannot articulate a *cogito*. The night dream is a dream without a dreamer."¹¹⁷ And yet, every dream interpreted by both Freud, in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, and Jung, in *Dreams*, seems to contain the dreamer as a central figure in the dream.

If we accept that the sense of an "I" is weakened in the dream, then perhaps that weakening can be explained by a diffusion, rather than a loss, of the subject. Lacan, again reinterpreting Freud's own dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, works to locate the dreamer among the figures of his dream:

We see the subject substituted for by the polycephalic subject—this crowd I was speaking about last time, a crowd in the Freudian sense, . . . made up of the imaginary plurality of the subject, of the fanning out, the blossoming of the different identifications of the *ego*. At first this seems to us like an abolition, a destruction of the subject as such. The subject transformed into this polycephalic image seems to us to be somewhat acephalic. If there is an image which could represent for us the Freudian notion of the unconscious, it is indeed that of the acephalic subject, of a subject who no longer has an *ego*, who doesn't belong to the ego. And yet

¹¹⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, trans. Daniel Russell (New York: The Orion Press, 1969), 22.

he is the subject who speaks, for that's who gives all the characters in the dream their nonsensical lines—which precisely derive their meaning from their nonsensical character.¹¹⁸

Lacan's assertion as to the fracturing of the subject in the dream mirrors Carl Jung's earlier observation, from his 1916 essay "General Aspects of Dream Psychology," that "The whole dream-work is essentially subjective, and a dream is a theatre in which the dreamer is himself the scene, the player, the prompter, the producer, the author, the public, and the critic. . . . Such an interpretation . . . conceives all the figures in the dream as personified features of the dreamer's own personality."¹¹⁹ These models of the dream have a clear relevance to the monodramas—to be discussed in chapter four—that attempt to represent and personify the divided elements of a single psyche. In keeping with the idea that monodrama attempts to represent the world of the individual as it is subjectively experienced, Jung's conception of the nature of dreams may serve as a key by which monodrama may be said to directly represent the dream state: "As against Freud's view that the dream is essentially a wish-fulfillment, I hold . . . that the dream is a *spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious.*"¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Lacan, 167.

¹¹⁹ Jung, 52.

¹²⁰ Jung, 49. [Italics are Jung's.]

Indeed, the possibility of presenting the dream on stage in monodramatic fashion is raised by August Strindberg in his introduction to *A Dream Play*:

In this dream play, as in his earlier dream play *To Damascus*, the author has attempted to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and plausible. Time and space do not exist. . . . The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all: that of the dreamer.¹²¹

We will look at *To Damascus* as an example of monodrama in chapter five, and it is, in several ways, a particularly important example. *A Dream Play*, however, proves more difficult to interpret as monodrama. Christopher Innes has noted that, “unlike *To Damascus* there is no dominating ‘consciousness’ in the play itself.”¹²² As Innes points out, Strindberg’s introduction to *A Dream Play*, a rather good description of the operating principle of many monodramas, is more relevant to *To Damascus* than to the play it actually prefaces.

It is often the case that dreams, be they represented on stage or recounted for a friend, are dismissed with the flippant rejoinder, “It was only a dream.” But

¹²¹ August Strindberg, “Author’s Note to *A Dream Play*,” trans. Harry G. Carlson in *Strindberg: Five Plays*, ed. Harry G. Carlson (New York: Signet Classic, 1984), 209.

¹²² Christopher Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre, 1892-1992* (London: Routledge, 1993), 34.

since Freud, commentators on the nature of dreams have stressed the importance of the dream-state, which they feel has been unfairly relegated to a lesser status than that of waking reality. Freud insisted that “dreams possess a value of their own as psychological acts,” and that “any other theory of dreams, which . . . represents dreams as a useless and puzzling psychological reaction to somatic stimuli, stands condemned without there being any necessity for specific criticisms.”¹²³ Lacan asks, rhetorically, “Why isn’t the experience one has in sleep just as important, as authentic, as that of the previous day?”¹²⁴ Or, one may well ask, of the present moment? Jung, in his consideration of the psychological impact of dreams, remarks, “Dreams occasionally exert a remarkable influence on the conscious mental life even of persons who cannot be considered superstitious or particularly abnormal.”¹²⁵ Taking this point further, Jung offers a strong argument for the equal consideration of dreams alongside waking life:

Nor should we regard dream-phenomena as merely compensatory and secondary to the contents of consciousness, even though it is commonly supposed that conscious life is of far greater significance for the individual than the unconscious. This view, however, may yet have to be revised, for, as our experience deepens, it will be realized that the function of the

¹²³ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 261.

¹²⁴ Lacan, 125.

¹²⁵ Jung, 24.

unconscious in the life of the psyche has an importance of which we perhaps have still too low an estimate.¹²⁶

This last point, crucial to an understanding of monodrama, is addressed by Lacan when he says, “I was surprised to see . . . one of our colleagues oppose the term *psychic reality* to that of *true reality*. . . . Whether a thing *really* exists or not doesn’t much matter. It can perfectly easily exist in the full sense of the term, even if it doesn’t really exist.”¹²⁷ From Lacan’s point of view, it follows that what is “real” to the subject, regardless of its objective reality, comes to form the whole of reality for the subject, rendering the use of the terms psychic and true reality meaningless. For William James, this observation on the nature of reality was true for all psychic states, including hallucinations as well as dreams, as he believed that the individual is prone to believe what he sees: “Any object which remains uncontradicted is ipso facto believed and posited as absolute reality.”¹²⁸ The observations by Lacan and James provide additional support for the underlying premises of monodrama, since monodrama seeks to represent what the protagonist perceives at any given moment, and there can be little doubt that for the sleeping dreamer, the dream is the one and only reality of the moment in which it occurs.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 40.

¹²⁷ Lacan, 229.

¹²⁸ James, *Principles of Psychology*, 918.

Henri Bergson's concept of duration has proven particularly useful in the ongoing debate over the relationship between the various states of reality in forming the experience of the subject. Bergson suggests that our tendency to differentiate sharply between states of consciousness—to lay them out alongside one another as waking consciousness, dream, hallucination, sleep, etc . . . is a function of our desire to understand the world as simply as possible. In truth, Bergson argues, “states of consciousness, even when successive, permeate one another, and in the simplest of them the whole soul can be reflected.”¹²⁹ For Bergson, the human experience is a unity wherein all aspects of life are equally significant to the “inner life,” as he calls it, of the subject. As a brief explanation of the theory, Bergson offers, “Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself *live*, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.”¹³⁰ Bergson's duration subsumes time, space, and perception under the totality of the individual experiences of the subject. From the cliché, “time flies when you're having fun,” to the experience of waiting on line for a flight one is late for, it is fairly easy to understand how duration recasts the concept of time. In speaking of the

¹²⁹ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 98. This idea has gained scientific support in a recent Cornell University study that suggests that rather than working “in a series of distinct stages,” the mind instead functions in “a dynamic continuum.” Michael Spivey suggests that in the new model of cognition his study proposes, “you do not have to be in one state *or* another, like a computer, but can have values in between—you can be partially in one state *and* another.” See Susan S. Lang, “New Cornell study suggests that mental processing is continuous, not like a computer,” *Cornell University News Service*, 27 June 2005, <http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/June05/new.mind.model.ssl.html> (accessed 2 July 2005).

¹³⁰ Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 100.

subjective nature of perception, we have already seen examples of duration in the way we look at the world. When we awake in the morning, it is natural to draw a distinction between the state we were in just minutes earlier and our now waking consciousness. But for Bergson, both the sleeping and waking states exist within the unbroken continuum of the life of the mind. Though we may, in order to simplify our understanding of life, break these states into discreet segments, in the mind, according to Bergson, life is experienced as an unbroken flow.

This concept of the unbroken flow of life is unmistakably similar to the ideas of a contemporary of Bergson's, equally influential on early twentieth-century thought and art. In his seminal *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James proposed the following:

Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself chopped up into bits. Such words as "chain" or "train" do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or a "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. *In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.*¹³¹

James's intellectual kinship with Bergson has been well documented, and the affinity of the stream of consciousness to duration is clear. The influence of this concept on art can be readily seen in the appellation "stream of consciousness"

¹³¹ James, *Principles of Psychology*, 233. [Italics are James's.]

being applied to the writing of Joyce, William Faulkner, and Virginia Woolf, among others. Indeed, the term has been used almost interchangeably with Dujardin's concept of interior monologue as it applies to literature. Although Bergson's duration seems to apply more directly to monodrama, James's ideas are unquestionably reflected in monodramatic works as well.

The unbroken flow described by James and Bergson may additionally be seen to bear upon monodrama scenically, particularly in Evreinov's desire for scene changes that need not result in an interruption of the stage action: "I suppose that we will not overstep the bounds of experimental psychology, if we apply the concept of 'motion' even to scene-changes in a monodramatic sense."¹³² Monodrama and the theories of Bergson and James intersect at a number of points, and it is only natural that Evreinov should seek a way to eliminate intermissions, even short ones for scene changes, as they would seem to indicate a break in the flow of consciousness of the protagonist. This idea of scenery representative of the unbroken flow of thought seems to have been shared by Edward Gordon Craig in his theory of screens, the first practical application of which was to have been the Moscow Art Theatre *Hamlet*. Unfortunately, Craig's screens broke in final technical rehearsals, leaving the concept, at least for the moment, unrealized.¹³³

¹³² Evreinov, "Monodrama," 196.

¹³³ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 170-172. Craig, who was not present when the screens broke, did not believe this explanation, thinking instead that Stanislavsky had intentionally sabotaged them to humiliate him. Craig continued to hold this belief for years, perhaps until his final visit to Moscow and Stanislavsky in 1935.

Earlier, I posited, citing Freud, the ego as divided into perception and consciousness, and claimed that monodrama lay in the ground between the two. I then suggested that monodrama often represents dream-life, which, according to Jung, was a representation of the unconscious. These seemingly contradictory ideas are reconciled by Bergson's idea of duration, in which ideas that, in language or time, must be laid out consecutively can, in the totality of the mind, be experienced simultaneously. Duration is the unity through which we experience the world. Rescuing psychic states from their status as discrete and hierarchized states of being, Bergson posits waking experience, dreams, and hallucinations as all equally significant and "real" in the duration of the subject.

Like our earlier division between perception and consciousness, Bergson suggests a similar gap between duration and what he refers to as "intuition":

The intuition we refer to bears above all upon internal duration. It grasps a succession which is not juxtaposition, a growth from within, the uninterrupted prolongation of the past into a present which is already blending into the future. It is the direct vision of the mind by the mind, — nothing intervening, no refraction through the prism, one of whose facets is space and another, language. Instead of states contiguous to states, which become words in juxtaposition to words, we have here the

indivisible and therefore substantial continuity of the flow of the inner life.¹³⁴

At first glance, this appears indistinguishable from the concept of duration itself. A hint as to the difference can be gleaned from the mention of a “vision of the mind by the mind,” but the true significance of the gap between the two ideas can best be understood when Bergson states, “My intuition is reflection,”¹³⁵ and, more explicitly, “Along side of intelligence there is in effect the immediate perception by each of us of his own activity and of the conditions in which it is exercised. Call it what you will; it is the feeling we have of being creators of our intentions, of our decisions, of our acts, and by that, of our habits, our characters, ourselves.”¹³⁶ In the phrase “immediate perception,” Bergson again seems to present intuition as pure experience, but ultimately it is clear that duration represents the immediate experience of life in the mind, and intuition, for those lucky enough to have it, and few according to Bergson do, represents our ability to understand our functioning within that duration. For, clearly, the elements of reflection and the feeling of being creators of ourselves are essentially analogous to the work of conscious analysis, while duration would seem closest to the “impersonal ‘One’” of perception posited by Merleau-Ponty. Monodrama, ultimately, attempts to portray onstage the experience of the protagonist in pure

¹³⁴ Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1968), 35.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

duration. Indeed, as Jeffrey N. Cox noted in regard to early incarnations of the form, “Because of its very immediacy, the monodrama could stage but not analyze self-consciousness.”¹³⁷ Perhaps, we might suggest, the goal of monodrama is to offer the spectator intuition into the duration of the protagonist, and with a new insight into the process of duration, the ability to gain intuition of one’s own duration.

The relevance of Bergson’s ideas on subjectivity and his concept of duration to an attempt to represent the “inner life” is apparent in the following passage from his 1903 essay, *Introduction to Metaphysics*:

Consider, again, a character whose adventures are related to me in a novel. The author may multiply the traits of the hero’s character, may make him speak and act as much as he pleases, but all this can never be equivalent to the simple and indivisible feeling which I should experience if I were able for an instant to identify myself with the person of the hero himself. Out of that indivisible feeling, as from a spring, all the words, gestures, and actions of the man would appear to me to flow naturally. They would no longer be accidents which, added to the idea I had already formed of the character, continually enriched that idea, without ever completing it. The character would be given to me all at once, in its entirety, and the thousand incidents which manifest it, instead of adding themselves to the idea and so enriching it, would seem to me, on the contrary, to detach themselves

¹³⁷ Cox, *Shadows of Romance*, 44 (see chap. 1, n. 7).

from it, without, however, exhausting it or impoverishing its essence. All the things I am told about the man provide me with so many points of view from which I can observe him. All the traits which describe him, and which can make him known to me only by so many comparisons with persons or things I know already, are signs by which he is expressed more or less symbolically. Symbols and points of view, therefore, place me outside him; they give me only what he has in common with others, and not what belongs to him and him alone. But that which is properly himself, that which constitutes his essence, cannot be perceived from without, being internal by definition, nor be expressed by symbols, being incommensurable with everything else. Description, history, and analysis leave me here in the relative. Coincidence with the person himself would alone give me the absolute.¹³⁸

Bergson seems here to provide a template for monodrama and perhaps a description of the *monologue intérieur*.¹³⁹ He very effectively presents the allure

¹³⁸ Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E. Hulme (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 22.

¹³⁹ It is worth noting that Dujardin insisted that the historical influence worked in the opposite direction: “The limited scope of this study does not allow us to examine the connections between Bergsonian philosophy and the movement of 1885. Let us simply recall that Henri Bergson, although our senior by only a few years (he was born in 1859), only began to outline the tenets of his philosophy at the end of the nineteenth century and that the work which really set them forth, *L’Evolution créatrice*, dates from 1907. If Bergson gave expression to certain of the tenets of Symbolism, it cannot at all be said that he inspired them; he seems

of such a project, even providing counterarguments to the criticisms we encountered earlier regarding the lack of context we are given for the central character. Indeed, Bergson's image of the absolute identification of reader with character anticipates, to a remarkable extent, Evreinov's theory which would come just five years later.

Though the affinity of Bergsonian ideas to monodramatic thought is apparent, Hilary Fink, in her book *Bergson and Russian Modernism*, offers the possibility that that affinity may actually have been more of a direct influence. "Bergsonian ideas," Fink suggests, "were so much in the air during the second and third decades of the twentieth century that most Russian intellectuals were likely to be familiar with the basic themes of Bergson's *Introduction to Metaphysics* and *Creative Evolution*."¹⁴⁰ If "most Russian intellectuals" would have been familiar with Bergson by the 1910s and 20s, then surely Evreinov was likely to have been familiar with him a few years earlier. At the same time, Fink suggests that a familiarity with the concept of duration in Russia predated Bergson's formulation of it: "Russian philosopher Petr Chaadaev wrote about the concept of duration as early as 1830 in his *Philosophical Letters* (1829-30), 'I perceive myself in that limitless duration, which is not divided into days, into

rather to be one of those who inherited their legacy. Whatever the exact truth of the matter, the huge success he obtained at the beginning of the century is proof, one among others, of the extent to which the movement of 1885 was a profound and lasting renewal." Dujardin, 133.

¹⁴⁰ Hilary L. Fink, *Bergson and Russian Modernism, 1900-1930* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), xiv.

hours . . . [This is] the only real time.”¹⁴¹ That Chaadaev would not only refer to what seems to be the same concept as Bergson, but also employ the same term for it must certainly give pause, though Fink does not pursue the possibility of Bergson’s being influenced by Russian philosophy. Indeed, Fink avoids any solid conclusion on the nature of Bergson’s link to Russian drama of the early twentieth century, other than to suggest, as I have, a very strong kinship.

The concept of duration is particularly useful in an understanding of monodrama on a very basic level in that it would tend to discourage the pigeonholing of plays as dream plays, memory plays, or other appellations that tend to place the action in the realm of fantasy or the unalterable past. Monodrama depicts a character in the moment of a palpable and significant experience and in the process of change, and these plays represent not just one conscious state, but the entire breadth and unity of duration.

As we examine the varieties of monodrama and analyze examples of the form, we will continually return to the ideas presented here. Akin to the very projects of psychology and philosophy (and, one might say, even theatre), we will see (as we did in the Romantic poetic drama) that one of the fundamental themes of monodrama is a human being in the process of coming to an understanding of him or herself and his or her place in the world—not a fully formed subject, but the subject itself in the process of formation.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 11.

Part II

Varieties of the Monodramatic

Introduction

monodrama, n. A dramatic piece for a single performer, originally with spoken text and musical accompaniment; an operatic work for one singer. Also: the genre of drama of this type.

-Oxford English Dictionary
December 2002

Despite decades of discussion of the term and a historical background that, as we have seen, offers a range of possible definitions, the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of monodrama hews closely to the most simplistic possible meaning of the term. Although the list of related quotations includes an excerpt from Southey and a mention of Berlioz (in the 1989 edition), no acknowledgement is made of the possibility of monodrama as containing multiple characters, or of a representation of interiority as a condition of the genre. In writing the citation for the term for Grove Music, Anne Dhu McLucas seems to offer hope for a broader view when she opens her definition with "In its narrow meaning, a form of melodrama which features one character."¹ But in turning to expand the definition, McLucas remains firmly within the limits of the formal and numerical: "In modern times, the term has lost its exclusive association with the combination of speech and music characteristic of melodrama and is most often used as a synonym for a one-character opera."²

¹ Anne Dhu McLucas, "Monodrama," *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy, www.grovemusic.com (accessed 4 August 2004).

² *Ibid.*

Evreinov, in writing "Introduction to Monodrama," was clearly aware of the problem of terminology:

This word (having become the property of the scholastics, the word is at present utterly forgotten and its meaning lost to any but the sedulous philologist) used to mean a certain kind of predominantly melodramatic work, which from start to finish was performed by one actor alone. Even now we are able to make acquaintance with this type of performance through the appearances of a new kind of quick-change artist, in the style of Fregoli, Francardi and their ilk. This art is of very ancient derivation; its originator appears to be the immortal Thespis, who more than twenty-five hundred years ago, after writing plays with several characters following a certain plan, took to performing them as one-man shows, with the help of linen masks and distinctive costumes of his devising.

However, as one might easily surmise from my preceding statement, I should like to see the term "monodrama" embrace an entirely different concept of dramatic presentation.

And of course I should not have had to rouse this term from its age-old slumber, if another one had managed to arise, to better define this species of dramatic presentation which sooner or later will take its rightful place in the history of the theater.

But when one is talking about creating new values, it is ridiculous to invest much importance in creating new words as vocables. Moreover, a new pearl glows all the more brightly in an old, tarnished setting.³

Evreinov, it seems, rejects a historical basis for his formulation for monodrama, even as he acknowledges previous uses of the term. Rather than taking issue with those other uses of the term, or placing his usage along a historical continuum, Evreinov insists that he is utterly recasting the term, freeing it from its previous associations.

Despite Evreinov's rejection of a historical background for usage of the term *monodrama* to describe the variety of drama he proposes, there is some striking evidence that the word was being used to refer to work of this nature well before it was theorized as such. A *New York Times* review of Henry Irving's production of Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* from October 30, 1883, argues that the third and final act of the play is in fact a monodrama, and that it is the only worthwhile portion of the play: "A printed 'argument' on the programme in place of the intolerable tedium of the first and second acts to introduce this monodrama would make it something like a work of art."⁴ The reviewer elaborates, "The avowed monodram [sic] of the third act, as we have said, is the drama. The voices of the apparitor and of the Judge come out of a gloom which we can barely

³ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 186-187 (see chap. 2, n. 39).

⁴ Review of *The Bells*, by Leopold Lewis, as performed by Henry Irving and company, New York, *New York Times*, 30 October 1883, 4.

make out in the darkness to be peopled with fixed or moving shapes. A white light falls upon the figure of the prisoner alone and follows him wherever he moves.”⁵ The scene in question, the climax of the play, begins as Mathias, the central character made famous in Irving’s portrayal, disappears into an alcove with the words, “No one now will hear you, if you dream. No one! No more folly!—no more Bells! Tonight I triumph; for conscience is at rest!”⁶ When he returns to the stage a moment later, dressed differently and in what soon takes the shape of a trial scene, it is fairly clear that we have entered Mathias’s dream, and thus, his monodrama. But soon, within the trial, the Judge summons a Mesmerist, who hypnotizes Mathias. The Mesmerist returns Mathias to the night he murdered a Polish Jew in an attempt to escape his debt. At this point we move from the multi-character monodrama of the trial scene to what is essentially a single-character monodrama, reminiscent of the musical monodramas of Rousseau and Benda, and particularly of Matthew Lewis’s *The Captive*. Mathias, transfigured by the Mesmerist, proceeds to relive the murder, taking us through his actions moment by moment, as in the following excerpt: “It must be, Mathias, that you kill him! (*He listens.*) No one on the road—no one! (*With an expression of terror.*) What dreadful silence! (*He wipes his forehead with his hand.*) One o’clock strikes, and the moon shines. Ah! The Jew has already passed! Thank God! Thank God! (*He kneels—a pause—he listens—the Bells heard without as*

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Leopold Lewis, *The Bells*, Gaslight e-text, <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ab.ca/thebells.htm> (accessed 8 August 2004).

before.) No! The Bells! The Bells! He comes!”⁷ While the entire dream sequence constitutes a monodrama for the spectator, Mathias’s re-experiencing of the murder that haunts him stands as a monodrama for the onstage crowd assembled to watch the trial. Mathias is hanged in the dream trial, only to wake from his dream and return to where he was before he disappeared into the alcove. He emerges holding his throat, and suffocates to death.

That *The New York Times* would utilize the term *monodrama* in this way in 1883 is rather surprising. Picard would first use the term four years later, Saint-Pol-Roux six, and Evreinov twenty-five. And although Berlioz had called *Lélio* a “monodrame lyrique,” the term had otherwise not been directly attached to any multi-character drama, nor to any significant theory that would envelop such drama. Although the reviewer could conceivably have simply been referring to Mathias’s monologue, this seems unlikely, as that monologue is several times interrupted by the Mesmerist and the Judge. Furthermore, if it were merely Mathias’s speech to which the reviewer referred, the term *soliloquy* might well be the more obvious choice.

The possibility that the Evreinovian definition of monodrama was in common usage well before his theory is further bolstered by the critical response to Stephen Crane’s 1895 novel, *The Red Badge of Courage*. In a January 1896 review in the *New Review*, George Wyndham, a member of the British Parliament, as well as a critic and editor, describes the book’s method: “He traces the successive impressions made on [Henry Fleming, the novel’s protagonist],

⁷ Ibid.

from minute to minute, during two days of heavy fighting. He stages the drama of war, so to speak, within the mind of one man, and then admits you as to a theatre.”⁸ Approving of Crane’s style, Wyndham continues, “In all his [Crane’s] descriptions and all his reports he confines himself only to such things as that youth heard and saw, and, of these, only to such as influenced his emotions. By this compromise he combines the strength and truth of a monodrama with the directness and color of the best narrative prose.”⁹ Wyndham’s description of the novel places it in close kinship with the theories of Evreinov, who would first lecture on monodrama twelve years later. And although Wyndham may be connecting Crane’s method to the Romantic monodrama (he does mention Tennyson and Browning later in the review), Wyndham’s use of the theatrical analogy is telling. Indeed, in a 1926 article recalling his reaction to the book, Joseph Conrad (whose *Heart of Darkness* might well be read as a monodrama in the same light as *Red Badge of Courage*) referred to the novel as: “This monodrama, which happy inspiration or unerring instinct had led him to put before us in narrative form.”¹⁰ While the 1926 date of Conrad’s essay makes his

⁸ George Wyndham, Review of *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane, *New Review* XIV (January 1896), [The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CRANE/reviews/wyndham.html), <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CRANE/reviews/wyndham.html> (accessed 18 January 2005).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Last Essays*, [The Red Badge of Courage: An Episode of the American Civil War](http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CRANE/reviews/wyndham.html), <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/CRANE/reviews/wyndham.html> (accessed 18 January 2005).

use of the term somewhat less surprising, it serves to reinforce Wyndham's reading of the novel, as well as the theatrical nature of Wyndham's usage.

The use of monodrama to describe *Red Badge of Courage* is notable in that it demonstrates the applicability of the concept outside of theatre. Indeed, though this study is necessarily limited to the term's life in the theatre, I would argue that works demonstrating the underlying concepts of monodrama can be found in both the novel (as we saw with the *monologue intérieur*) and in film. When considered alongside the description of Act Three of *The Bells* as monodrama, Wyndham's use of the term without explanation or definition raises the strong possibility that by the time Saint-Pol-Roux and Nikolai Evreinov wrote their theories laying claim to creating the genre, monodrama was being employed in critical parlance in much the same way that they would later define it.

A final example of an early use of monodrama in accordance with our definition comes from a particularly unlikely source. In the preface to his 1901 play, *Tannhäuser*, Aleister Crowley takes up the question of terminology in describing his play: "Drama indeed is an altogether misleading term; monodrama is perhaps better. It is really a series of introspective studies; not necessarily a series in time, but in psychology."¹¹ Crowley further notes, "The various other characters are all little parts of Tannhäuser's own consciousness and not real persons at all: whether good or bad, all alike hinder and help (and there is not one

¹¹ Aleister Crowley, "Preface" to *Tannhäuser*, in *The Works of Aleister Crowley*, Volume I (London: Foyers, 1905), 224.

whose function is not thus double) the realization of his true unity with all life.”¹² Finally, anticipating a criticism that had been leveled at the Romantics and would later be directed at Evreinov and other monodramatists, Crowley continues, apologetically: “This circumstance serves to explain, though perhaps not to excuse, the lack of dramatic action in the story.”¹³ For both good and bad, it would seem, Crowley understood his use of the term monodrama in precisely the way that term is defined in this project.

The continuing instability of monodrama in contemporary usage is indicated by Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo in their 1997 article, “Performing Hybridity in Post-Colonial Monodrama,” when, in a footnote to the very title of the article, the authors feel the need to explain their terminology:

We are using the term “monodrama” to refer to plays/theatre pieces performed by one actor, occasionally with the assistance of musicians (or a chorus) which do not have substantial speaking parts but rather function as part of the *mise en scène*. In contradistinction to the dramatic monologue, which can stand alone or constitute part of a multi-actor play, the monodrama is a specific theatrical form defined by its reliance on the solo performer.¹⁴

¹² *Ibid.*, 225.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo, “Performing Hybridity in Post-Colonial Monodrama,” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 32, no. 1 (1997): 17.

While the OED and Grove Music were attempting to offer a “complete” definition of the term, it should be noted that Gilbert and Lo are ultimately referring only to a specific example and works closely related to it.

Similarly, Andrew Parkin, in a footnote at the beginning of his article “Monologue into Monodrama: Aspects of Samuel Beckett’s Plays,” offers a guide to his use of the term, though with a far different definition: “A monodrama is a play which dramatizes a single mind or personality either by means of one character or through the interplay of a number of characters which may be viewed as fragments of the protagonist’s personality or consciousness.”¹⁵ Parkin’s definition of the term, and its similarity to the definition that forms the basis of this dissertation, is particularly interesting in light of the fact that so many of Beckett’s plays contain a single character. Parkin, in tracing elements of both dramatic monologue and monodrama in Beckett’s work, sees the concept of monodrama as distinct from the single-character play. Nevertheless, the very fact that Gilbert and Lo and Parkin feel the need to define monodrama at the outset of their respective articles demonstrates the extent to which, more than two hundred years after its initial use, the term continues to lack a universally agreed-upon meaning.

¹⁵ Andrew Parkin, “Monologue into Monodrama: Aspects of Samuel Beckett’s Plays,” *Éire-Ireland* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 32.

Perhaps the most complete attempt to consider the various uses of monodrama is Egil Törnqvist's 1973 essay, "Monodrama: Term and Reality." Törnqvist begins his investigation, as I have here, from a dictionary definition:

The best definition is found in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* (1961); in all its brevity it reads:

1. a drama acted or designed as if to be acted by a single person;
2. a dramatic representation of what passes in an individual mind;
3. a musical drama for a solo performer.

Here all three primary meanings of the term are listed. The order chosen, however, is not the historical one. In the following discussion I prefer to deal with the term and what it stands for in chronological order, that is, in the order 3-1-2 of the Webster definition.¹⁶

Törnqvist's assertion is problematic, since, as I have argued earlier, the concept of the representation of interiority intimated by the second definition was integral to the solo musical form of definition three from the very outset of that form, properly identified by Törnqvist as having been initiated by Rousseau's *Pygmalion*.

Törnqvist ultimately concludes that while the forms identified by Webster's definitions one and three are connected, the difference between these forms and that implied by definition two "is so crucial . . . that there seems to be

¹⁶ Egil Törnqvist, "Monodrama: Term and Reality," in *Essays in Drama and Theatre. Liber Amicorum Benjamin Hunningher* (Amsterdam: Standaard, 1973), 145.

little sense in using the term ‘monodrama’ for both categories. I would therefore deem it advisable to retain the term ‘monodrama’ for types (1) and [(3)] and substitute the already established term ‘Ich-drama’ for type [(2)].”¹⁷ The extent to which the term “Ich-drama” has already been established (either in 1973 or today) is highly debatable. Other than in regard to German Expressionist plays the term appears little, if at all, in connection with the form we are discussing, as opposed to monodrama, which has become common (if often unexplained) usage in critical commentary on plays that approximate the form. Furthermore, to erect an impermeable barrier between these different uses of the term requires the dismissal of the accumulated history that I have surveyed here. Indeed, Törnqvist’s conclusion is reached without reference to or acknowledgement of several of the historical trends outlined earlier in this study. Drawing upon Kirsten Gram Holmström’s work, Törnqvist asserts, “The musical monodrama died out at the beginning of the nineteenth century.”¹⁸ No mention is made of the term’s passage into Romantic dramatic poetry, nor its appearance in Romantic music, despite Berlioz’s explicit use of the word.

Törnqvist goes on to suggest that monodrama reemerged in the single character dramatic form designated by Webster’s first definition, in 1889 with Strindberg’s *The Stronger*. Törnqvist is seemingly unaware of the work of the French symbolists, particularly Picard and Saint-Pol-Roux. This is even more surprising in light of the fact that he does refer, if only in passing and completely

¹⁷ Ibid., 156.

¹⁸ Ibid., 147.

uncontextualized, to “the modern ‘interior monologue.’”¹⁹ Finally, Törnqvist posits Evreinov’s “Introduction to Monodrama” as the birth of the second of Webster’s definitions. Though Törnqvist’s study is one of the few attempts to examine the multiple definitions of monodrama, it suffers, in my opinion, from a lack of historical depth, thus undercutting its sweeping conclusions.

Although monodrama has often been used to describe any one-actor play or performance and undoubtedly will continue to be used in this way in a popular vein, this usage blurs distinctions and does not take into account the entire tradition of monodrama from Rousseau and Benda through Evreinov to the present as a subgenre or mode of musical and dramatic composition, as well as its use as an interpretive concept employed in production and analysis. I would therefore prefer to call one-actor plays and performances just that—one-actor, or solo performance—and reserve the term monodrama for the complex and varied form that I argue has become a distinct and recognizable genre of modern drama (and film), and whose counterpart is seen in the interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness forms in modern fiction. This usage is in accord with recent Russian theorizing on monodrama (as in Aleksei Pasuev’s 2001 article on monodrama at the Moscow Art Theatre 2), as well as Western scholarship (i.e. Senelick’s work on Craig’s *Hamlet* in Moscow, Daniel Gerould’s “Russian Symbolist Monodrama,” Andrew Parkin’s articles on monodrama in the work of Yeats and Beckett, and many others).

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

My goal in questioning the use of the term “monodrama” to describe any and all performances with a single actor is in no way to diminish these forms, or to suggest that single-actor performances cannot be monodramatic—indeed, I have already discussed several in chapter one, and will discuss others in chapter four. Rather, my aim, both here in particular and in the whole of this study, is to establish a definition of monodrama that reflects the historical trends through which the genre has been formed, as well as to explain in concrete terms the frequent use of monodrama in contemporary critical parlance in reference to plays that attempt to depict the immediate experience of subjectivity.

As I suggested earlier, although he may not have been the originator of the term, Nikolai Evreinov’s theory of monodrama forms the most substantial and enduring conceptualization of the form. As such, Evreinov’s theory offers us three elements that stand as the foundation of a formal definition of monodrama:

1) A strong central protagonist. Essential to monodrama is the presence of a strong central protagonist. All elements of the drama are, on some level, seen from the protagonist’s mental perspective. Although there are often other characters in monodrama, those characters are always secondary to the single central character whose monodrama the play actually represents. To have more than a single central character forces the spectator to shift his perception and concentration between these two centers, an experience that, according to Evreinov, “provokes mental fatigue and consequently a weakening of the ability to perceive. So,” Evreinov continues, “the true object of a dramatic performance

must be seen to be an emotional experience, and in the hope of facilitating perception, it should be the emotional experience of a single mind, not of several.”²⁰

2) The external depiction of internal experience. Along with his insistence on a single central protagonist in the above quote, Evreinov points toward a second element of monodrama, interiority. In monodrama, Evreinov states, “the external spectacle must be an expression of the internal spectacle.”²¹ This may take the form of an effusion of emotion, as we saw in the early musical monodramas, a representation of the subjective nature of everyday experience, such as we will see in Strindberg’s *To Damascus* and other plays we will look at in chapter five, or in a personification of the warring elements of a psyche, such as Evreinov’s *The Theatre of the Soul*. This list is hardly exhaustive, and we will look at other methods in the next several chapters, but the element of interiority is always present on some level in monodrama.

3) The spectator is to share an experience with the protagonist at the moment it occurs. The goal of monodrama is to involve the spectator so completely in the experience of the protagonist that that experience is shared by the spectator. As Evreinov puts it, “the spectator ‘co-experiences’ along with the active

²⁰ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 186.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

participant.”²² Essential to the nature of this shared experience is the element of temporality. In Evreinov’s most concise definition of monodrama, quoted earlier, he noted that the world on stage was to represent the protagonist’s experience “at any given moment of his existence.”²³ Inherent in this concept is an idea of the immediacy of experience. As I suggested in chapter two, the experience depicted in monodrama is one that precedes conscious reflection or analysis. For the time of the performance, we experience what the protagonist experiences, at the moment he or she experiences it.

These three elements—a strong central protagonist, an external representation of interiority, and shared, immediate experience between spectator and protagonist—can exist in degrees and can be conceptualized in different ways. Furthermore, it is possible for a portion of a play, and not the entire drama, to be monodramatic, as was the case with *The Bells*. Evreinov acknowledges this possibility: “In such cases there comes a moment which I would call *monodramatic*, despite all its lack of preparation and scenic groundwork.”²⁴ One example, predating St.-Pol-Roux’s monodramas by several years, is Madame Rachilde’s 1891 play, *Madame la Mort*. As Frazer Lively has noted, “The author called the play a ‘cerebral drama,’ but the first and third acts were essentially realist. Rachilde’s innovation was to try to show a subjective inner truth by

²² Ibid., 184.

²³ Ibid., 187.

²⁴ Ibid., 189. [Italics are Evreinov’s.]

locating the second act inside the protagonist's mind."²⁵ Similarly, Egil Törnqvist points toward the “monodramatic forest scenes of O’Neill’s *The Emperor Jones*,” as part of what is otherwise a multi-perspectival play.²⁶ The plays that we will examine in the chapters that follow are those that, by and large, most completely reflect all three of the elements I have set forth here. The examples cited are by no means comprehensive, but are chosen to demonstrate the applicability of monodramatic analysis both to works called monodramas by their authors and to those not so conceived by their creators.

In chapter three, we will look at the most direct heirs of the trend initiated by Rousseau and Benda—single-character performance. We will look at the reemergence of monodrama in the twentieth century in musical works by Arnold Schoenberg and Peter Maxwell Davies. We will also consider the diverse range of single-character spoken works that have borne the name monodrama, including plays by Strindberg and O’Neill, as well as the genre of solo performance.

Chapter four focuses upon the monodramas of the divided self. Works by two of the earliest theorists of monodrama, Saint-Pol-Roux and Nikolai Evreinov, fall into this category, and the depiction of warring elements within the psyche through personification can be found in the work of playwrights such as Vladimir Mayakovsky, Samuel Beckett, Sławomir Mrożek, and Adrienne Kennedy.

²⁵ Frazer Lively, “Introduction” to Rachilde, *Madame la Mort and Other Plays*, trans. and ed. Kiki Gounaridou and Frazer Lively (Baltimore, MD: PAJ Books, 1998), 17.

²⁶ Törnqvist, “Monodrama,” 154.

Finally, in chapter five we look at the broadest category—multi-character monodramas that depict a protagonist at least ostensibly interacting with the world at large. This category, most closely reflecting the theory set forth by Evreinov in “Introduction to Monodrama,” contains a remarkably broad body of work, including examples from Ibsen, Strindberg, Maeterlinck, Georg Kaiser and the German Expressionist movement, to more recent work by Arthur Miller.

These categories are not necessarily totally discrete, but as we will see, at some places seem to overlap and intertwine. It is certainly arguable that of the plays I include in chapter five, some may be interpreted as occurring wholly within the mind of the protagonist, with the other characters mere projections of his psyche, and thus seem more appropriate to chapter four. Indeed, while many of the plays we will look at are vastly different in many ways, it is striking just how much these plays have in common. It is this common thread—the external expression of the immediate internal experiences of a single central protagonist—that binds these plays together under the name of monodrama.

It is also important to note that while the examples of monodrama I cite in the following chapters are among those that most clearly exemplify the form as I have defined it here, my goal is not to set strict limits upon what is and is not monodrama. Rather, the monodramatic readings that follow aim to demonstrate the continued relevance of monodrama in a historical and conceptual context, and its potential as a method of interpretation. Just as Evreinov asserted that monodrama “sooner or later will take its rightful place in the history of the

theater,”²⁷ I believe that monodramatic analysis as an interpretive strategy can assume a place in contemporary scholarship.

²⁷ Evreinov, “Monodrama,” 187.

Chapter 3

“We Live as We Dream, Alone”¹: Single-Character Monodrama

In the preceding chapters, we have seen that while prematurely declared dead by some twentieth-century critics, the musical monodrama form initiated by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Georg Benda lived on in various configurations throughout the nineteenth century. Despite the fact that the original form seems to have undergone a period of dormancy through much of the century, the single-performer musical form remained not only a catalyst for new forms, but a significant and viable art in its own right. Indeed, significant evidence exists, above and beyond the nineteenth-century examples of monodrama, to demonstrate discrete connections between the form initiated by Rousseau and Benda, and new works of musical monodrama that begin to appear early in the twentieth century.

Perhaps the most tantalizing evidence of a link between the new manifestations of musical monodrama and earlier theory and practice comes from Edmond Picard. When last we left Picard, we noted that while some elements of his theory would echo in later theories of monodrama, his own theory, in and of itself, failed to provide any significant insight into an understanding of monodrama as the form has developed. And yet in 1910, twenty-three years after its initial publication and Picard’s public reading, Picard’s “monodrama” *Le Juré*

¹ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 57.

was set to music by composer Henri Thièbaut; Picard himself adapted his play for the libretto, and *Le Juré* was redubbed from simply “monodrame,” to “monodrame lyrique parlé.” In publishing the vocal score of the piece, Picard revisited his 1887 essay, “La lettre sur le Monodrame,” in which he discussed the form he was then proposing. Picard’s revision of this essay explains the significance of this seemingly minor change in nomenclature. The essay had been republished almost without alteration (a brief opening paragraph was removed, and some minor syntactical changes appeared throughout) in Picard’s 1897 *Discours sur le Renouveau de la Théâtre*, as a chapter entitled “Monodrame.” And while the essay may have undergone few changes between 1887 and 1897, in 1910, now bearing the title “Le Monodrame lyrique parlé,” Picard’s essay nearly doubled in size, and with its increased size came a broader view of the form.

Although Picard maintains his central concept of the author (or a surrogate for the author) presenting his work alone on stage, expressing through his own voice and action the various figures of the play, the addition of a musical element permits Picard to consider a deeper conceptual basis for his idea of monodrama. Considering the possibilities of music as a force in drama, Picard rejects the excesses of nineteenth-century melodrama—“le ‘gros-mélo’,” as he calls it—and points to the fact that “un certain nombre d’oeuvres—relativement peu nombreuses toutefois,—sont là pour attester la puissance d’effet considérable qui peut résulter de la combinaison de la ‘parole parlée’ et de la musique, s’unissant

et se renforçant.”² As he insisted in 1887, Picard believes that he is once again offering something utterly new to the drama:

Voilà ce qui fait c’est la première fois, je crois, que dans une oeuvre, tout entière ‘parlée’, importante, développée, proférée et mimée par une seule personnalité, de préférence l’auteur, non seulement il y a continuité absolue dans l’association de la Parole et de la Musique mais encore et surtout, celle-ci se trouve confondue d’une façon aussi complète avec celle-là.³

Picard’s description must remind us, if not directly of Rousseau’s version of the form, certainly of Georg Benda’s. And yet, while Picard cites neither Rousseau nor Benda in his essay, he does, tellingly, cite Schumann’s *Manfred*.

But Picard’s revised theory goes beyond the formal musical characteristics to include a conceptual understanding of the form that again seems to echo earlier theory. Picard decries the fact that in the earlier examples he has cited, including *Manfred*, the music “est plutôt simplement descriptive, ou destinée à renforcer l’impression générale, ou à corser tel effet de scène, ou à commenter telle tirade.”⁴ In contrast, Picard insists, in *Le Juré* the music “analyse psychologiquement, pour ainsi parler, les personnages, s’identifie avec eux, extériorise leurs impressions intérieures, sans se priver pour cela, bien entendu, d’être descriptive lorsqu’il y a

² Edmond Picard, “Le Monodrame lyrique parlé” in Edmond Picard and Henri Thiébaut, *Le Juré: Monodrame Lyrique Parlé en cinq actes* (Paris: Rouart-Lerolle, 1910), v.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

lieu.”⁵ Although it is worth noting that J. Van der Veen has posited a similarly psychological role for the music of earlier monodrama, Picard’s statement is even more remarkable for its affinity to the conceptual basis of monodrama as set forth in the theories of Saint-Pol-Roux and Nikolai Evreinov—an affinity that was not apparent in the 1887 and 1897 versions of Picard’s essay.

Finally, once again placing the spectator in a central position, Picard notes, “Avec son énorme puissance d’évocation, avec l’infinie souplesse qu’elle possède, la Musique fouille le texte dans ses plus intimes replis, ‘devinant’ les sous-entendus qu’il recèle, rendant toutes ses intentions ‘plastiquement tangibles’ si je puis ainsi dire, à l’auditeur.”⁶ The idea of the music as providing tangible images to the spectator is in keeping both with the concept of early musical monodrama, and with Picard’s earlier ideas of the spectator creating the setting of the drama in his own imagination.

Although “Le Monodrame lyrique parlée” remains problematic as an all-encompassing theory of monodrama (we are still left with the issue that any work could be set in this way, and that the theory is more formal than conceptual), the changes in Picard’s theory between 1897 and 1910 are striking and cannot be explained solely by the addition of music. In its reflection of earlier trends in musical monodrama and in the interweaving of ideas of psychology and the expression of interiority, Picard’s revised essay offers a look back to the roots of monodrama and a glimpse into its future.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

While Picard's authorship ensures that "Le Monodrame lyrique parlée" was intimately connected to the emerging monodramatic theories of the *fin de siècle*, the emergence of monodrama in the work of Arnold Schoenberg might at first seem unconnected to that trend. And yet, it can hardly be seen as a total coincidence that in 1909, a year after Nikolai Evreinov delivered his first lectures on monodrama, Schoenberg was at work composing *Erwartung*, a single-character opera that was designated as a monodrama both by Schoenberg and his collaborator, librettist Marie Pappenheim.

It is worth noting that the designation of *Erwartung* as monodrama has engendered some debate. According to Diane Penney Holloway, "When [Schoenberg] was introduced to Marie Pappenheim by [Alexander] Zemlinsky, he was impressed enough to ask her to write a libretto for him. She replied that the most she could write would be a monodrama."⁷ This would seem to indicate that the designation had more to do with the single-character nature of the work than with its concept or content. This idea may be confirmed by Holloway's assertion that "Schoenberg had already completed the score before Pappenheim gave her text a genre designation or title."⁸ On the other hand, Schoenberg obviously knew that Pappenheim was intending to write a monodrama from her response to his offer, and it is noteworthy that Schoenberg included the sub-title "(Monodram)"

⁷ Diane Penney Holloway, "Schoenberg's Janus-work 'Erwartung': Its musico-dramatic structure and relationship to the melodrama and Lied traditions" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1989), 62-63.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

on the title page at each stage of the work, a subheading that would hardly seem necessary if its only purpose was to designate the single performer. Furthermore, Schoenberg never used the term to describe his 1912 work *Pierrot Lunaire*, despite the fact that it too contained only a single performer.

While the designation of *Erwartung* as “monodrama” may, taken on its own merits, fail to justify its inclusion in the genre that is the focus of this study, evidence abounds to reinforce *Erwartung*’s status as monodrama. In seeking sources for the genesis of *Erwartung*, Holloway looks back to the eighteenth-century monodramas of Georg Benda, both in form and content: “While the German emphasis on the importance of music in melodrama would be continued with Schoenberg, the drama of Benda’s texts would also find a reflection in the twentieth-century master’s monodrama.”⁹ Holloway goes on to draw specific connections between Schoenberg’s work and Benda’s duodrama, *Ariadne auf Naxos*: “Benda’s heroine, Ariadne, in *Ariadne auf Naxos* has a monologue of despair that resembles the situation used later in Schoenberg’s *Erwartung*. . . . The feelings and situations expressed in *Erwartung* are remarkably similar to Benda’s *Ariadne*. In both works, the heroines express themselves in short fragmentary exclamations. Both come to a tragic end.”¹⁰ Berthold Hoeckner, in his *Programming the Absolute: Nineteenth-Century German Music and the Hermeneutics of the Moment*, confirms this view when he argues that *Erwartung*

⁹ Ibid., 123.

¹⁰ Ibid., 123-125.

“is a free historical reprise of Georg Benda’s melodrama *Ariadne auf Naxos*.”¹¹

Connecting both works with the larger concept of interiority, Hoeckner continues, “In both *Ariadne* and *Erwartung*, exterior action is stripped away in favor of an inner drama.”¹² *Erwartung*, with its sung, rather than spoken, vocal part, represents a divergence from the earlier form, but no more so than Benda’s form, with music and spoken dialogue overlapping, rather than separated, differed from Rousseau’s. On the other hand, *Erwartung* remains perfectly in keeping with the expression of interiority inherent to the musical monodrama form.

Another significant influence on *Erwartung* came from the tradition of the German *lied*, particularly those of Franz Schubert, whose *Winterreise*, as mentioned in chapter one, shared a similar concern with interiority. As Holloway notes, “The influence of Schubert’s songs on Schoenberg’s style was, by Schoenberg’s own admission, profound.”¹³ The importance of Schoenberg’s admiration for Schubert to an understanding of *Erwartung* is clearly evidenced by Schubert’s 1815 setting of a ballad by Schiller, also titled *Erwartung*. Like Pappenheim’s text, Schiller’s ballad depicts the immediate impressions and thoughts of its protagonist, in this case, a man waiting for his lover. The refrains of Schiller’s ballad consist of the protagonist misinterpreting a sensation and then realizing its true cause, for example: “Do I not hear the gate?! Did not the bolt

¹¹ Berthold Hoeckner, *Programming the Absolute: Nineteenth-Century German Music and the Hermeneutics of the Moment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 199.

¹² *Ibid.*, 200.

¹³ Holloway, 189.

rattle?/ No, it was the wind blowing,/ whirring through the poplars.”¹⁴ This form is mirrored several times in Pappenheim’s text, as demonstrated by the following: “Oh, oh . . . what is that? . . . A body/ No, just a tree trunk . . . ”¹⁵ Reflecting the depiction of immediate experience in the source poem, Holloway notes, tellingly, “Schiller manipulates the reader into believing that the poem is an *interior monologue* of an expectant lover anxiously awaiting the arrival of his beloved.”¹⁶ Holloway’s assertion that Schiller “manipulates the reader” is rooted in the fact that while the opening ten stanzas of the poem maintain the format of the external expression of the speaker’s interiority, the poem’s final stanza suddenly shifts to the voice of an omniscient narrator: “And softly, as if from the heights of heaven,/ The hour of happiness arrives:/ She had approached unseen/ and awakened her friend with kisses.”¹⁷ Despite this shift, the similarities between Schiller’s text and Pappenheim’s, as well as Schoenberg’s admiration for and deep familiarity with Schubert, indicate a close kinship between these homonymous works.

The plot of the Schoenberg/Pappenheim *Erwartung* is as follows: The Woman (referred to only by the simple pronoun, as in many of the Expressionist dramas that would arise in the years that followed the piece’s composition) enters

¹⁴ Friedrich Schiller, “Erwartung,” trans. Emily Ezust, *The Lied and Art Song Texts Page*, ed. Emily Ezust, <http://www.recmusic.org/lieder> (accessed August 18, 2004).

¹⁵ Marie Pappenheim, libretto to *Erwartung*, in liner notes for Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung*, Op. 17, *Pierrot Lunaire* Op. 21, and *Lied der Waldtaube* (sound recording), Pierre Boulez, conductor (Sony Classics, 1993), 13.

¹⁶ Holloway, 192. [Italics are mine.]

¹⁷ Schiller, “Erwartung.”

the forest at night, seemingly searching for her lover. She walks about in fear and anguish, expressing her every emotion and impression as they occur, as demonstrated by the text of scene three, which appears here in its entirety:

SCENE III

The path still in the dark. Next to it a broad band of light; the moon lights up a clearing in the forest, with long grass, ferns, large yellow mushrooms. The woman approaches from the darkness.

There's a light! . . .

Oh, just the moon . . . Lovely . . .

Something black dancing there . . . hundred hands . . .

Don't be silly . . . it's my shadow . . .

Oh, your shadow on the white walls . . . But you have to leave so quickly .

..

(a rustling sound)

Are you calling? . . . And it won't be evening for ages . . .

(slight puff of wind)

But the shadow is crawling! . . . Wide yellow eyes . . .

Protruding . . . like stalks . . . How it goggles . . .

(a moaning noise in the grass)

That's no animal, dear God, no animal . . . I'm so frightened . . . Darling, my darling, help me . . .

(*She runs on.*)¹⁸

Ultimately, the discovery of her lover's body in the play's long concluding fourth scene sends the Woman into a frenzy, and we learn through her frenetic expression of emotion that her lover has been seeing another woman, and although we never know for sure, it seems likely that the Woman has killed her lover in a fit of jealousy, and is now lost in the madness that has overtaken her.

Much of the commentary on *Erwartung* has focused on the madness of the Woman. In part, this focus is textual. Alexander Carpenter notes that "her fragmented, exclamatory text makes it clear that she is anxious, frightened, and quite possibly mentally disturbed."¹⁹ David Isadore Lieberman, taking a stronger position, argues, "Evidence of her madness comes not only from her wild, shifting emotions, but from the disintegration of her memory into tenuously interconnected fragments, shorn of coherent sequence."²⁰ The textual case for the Woman's madness is bolstered by an extra-textual fact that places *Erwartung* right at the heart of *fin de siècle* intellectual trends. Holloway, among others, has noted that Bertha Pappenheim, a cousin to Marie, was actually Anna O., the

¹⁸ Pappenheim, *Erwartung*, 13.

¹⁹ Alexander Carpenter, "Schoenberg's *Erwartung* and Freudian Case Histories: A Preliminary Investigation," *Discourses in Music* 3, no. 2 (Winter 2001-2002), <http://www.discourses.ca> (accessed February 13, 2004).

²⁰ David Isadore Lieberman, "Schoenberg Rewrites His Will: *A Survivor from Warsaw*, Op. 46," in *Political and Religious Ideas in the Works of Arnold Schoenberg*, ed. Charlotte M. Cross and Russell A. Berman, (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 199.

famous patient of Sigmund Freud's mentor, Dr. Joseph Breuer.²¹ The influence of Freud was considerable throughout Europe by 1909, but nowhere was this influence more keenly felt than in Vienna, home to both Schoenberg and Freud. And while there is little evidence that either Pappenheim or Schoenberg met with Freud, Gustav Mahler and Alban Berg, close friends of Schoenberg, both consulted with Freud, and Berg shared the insights gained by these conversations with Schoenberg.²² The relationship between *Erwartung* and Freudian psychology is interesting for several reasons. First, like Mathias's trance-induced confession in act three of Leopold Lewis's *The Bells*, the nature of the experience of the Woman in *Erwartung* may be seen as similar to that of a person under hypnosis, recounting traumatic events as they occur in the mind, a strategy Freud often used in his treatments. Furthermore, Freud's concern with dreams is mirrored by the nightmarish landscape of the piece, as Schoenberg himself noted: "For the whole drama can be understood as a nightmare."²³

Just as *Erwartung* is representative of the growing influence of trends in psychoanalysis, the piece also reflects the dramatic movements emerging around it. In line with Strindberg's statement that in his dream plays, "Time and place do not exist,"²⁴ Schoenberg said of *Erwartung*, "The aim is to represent in slow

²¹ Holloway, 87.

²² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

²³ Arnold Schoenberg, letter to Ernst Legal, quoted in Holloway, 83. [Underline is Schoenberg's.]

²⁴ Strindberg, "Author's Note to *A Dream Play*," 209 (see chap. 2, n. 121).

motion everything that occurs during a single second of maximum spiritual excitement, stretching it out to half an hour.”²⁵ This idea of the compression of time stands a major feature of monodrama, as evidenced by Nikolai Evreinov’s own 1912 monodrama, *The Theatre of the Soul*, which is described in its stage directions as taking place “within the space of thirty seconds.”²⁶

The compression of time indicated by Schoenberg may certainly be seen as reflective of the concept of time posited by Henri Bergson’s theory of duration. As suggested in chapter two, duration can also be seen as closely related to new developments in the art of scenery advanced by Edward Gordon Craig, and by Evreinov in “Introduction to Monodrama.” Schoenberg seems to have had just such an idea of constantly shifting scenery in mind in his composition of *Erwartung*. In a 1930 letter to Ernst Legal, who was to direct the piece at the Kroll Opera in Berlin, Schoenberg wrote:

In composing I left almost no time for the three transformations, so that they must be managed without bringing down the curtain. . . . The first two transformations can be done by merely shifting the light indicating the path along which the woman must go, so that she enters from different sides, and for the rest one can manage by merely representing another part of the forest by using some movable or revolving scenery. In the 4th scene

²⁵ Arnold Schoenberg, quoted in Bryan R. Simms, *The Atonal Music of Arnold Schoenberg, 1908-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 95.

²⁶ Nikolai Evreinov, “The Theatre of the Soul,” in *Life as Theatre: Five Modern Plays by Nikolai Evreinov*, ed. Christopher Collins, (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), 23.

the house in the background must become visible and the forest must have disappeared.²⁷

Schoenberg's instructions recapitulate closely Evreinov's ideas of how scenery should be handled in monodrama to suggest the continuity of the character's mental experience.

The extent to which Schoenberg sought an Evreinovian merging of spectator and protagonist, and the success of that effort, is indicated by Diane Penney Holloway:

Audience identification is aided by disguising the elements of theatre. The darkened theatre immediately draws the audience's attention to the stage and creates a feeling of suspense. The impression of a real forest conjures an emotion common to most people: fear of the dark and of getting lost. The naturalistic makeup and dress contributes to the audience's belief in the realistic situation. All of these are features which draw the audience into the drama. These elements, if rendered as Schoenberg and Pappenheim designed them, serve to increase the audience's identification with the woman.²⁸

²⁷ Schoenberg, quoted in Holloway, 83.

²⁸ Holloway, 92.

Holloway's description serves to reinforce the argument that *Erwartung* is conceptually related to Evreinov's vision of monodrama. Clearly, as Holloway suggests, Schoenberg and Pappenheim desired a strong connection between spectator and character.

It is worth noting that although written in 1909, *Erwartung* was not performed until 1924 in Prague. Thus, the earliest public exposure to Schoenberg's music-theatre work was through his 1912 *Pierrot Lunaire*. *Pierrot*, also composed for a single performer, consists of twenty-one separate poems, rather than a single continuous experience. Like Schubert's *Winterreise*, the individual songs²⁹ of *Pierrot Lunaire* (set from the French poetry of Albert Giraud, and translated into German by Otto Erich Hartleben), represent spontaneous lyrical expressions of moments of the hero's existence. Consider, for example, song number seven, "The Ailing Moon":

You ailing, death-awaiting moon,
 high upon heaven's dusty couch,
 your glance, so feverish overlarge,
 lures me, like strange enchanting song.

With unrequited pain of love
 you die, your longing deep concealed,

²⁹ Although he called them called "songs," Schoenberg called for the piece to be performed in a technique known as *Sprechgesang*, in which the words were to be spoken to the accompaniment of the music, in a style similar to that of Benda's monodramas.

you ailing, death-awaiting moon,
high upon heaven's dusty couch.

The lover, stirred by sharp desire
who reckless seeks for love's embrace,
exults in your bright play of light,
your pale and pain begotten flood,
you ailing, death-awaiting moon.³⁰

Unlike the immediate expression of experience seen in *Erwartung*, *Pierrot Lunaire* offers the musings of Pierrot on the various sensory experiences and thoughts that occur to her (although the hero of the piece is Pierrot, the part is written for a female voice).

Nevertheless, James Huneker, a well-respected music critic whose critical essays and books brought early attention to the symbolist dramatists in America, penned a January 19, 1913 *New York Times* review of a performance of the piece in Berlin that attests to both the possibility of *Pierrot* as monodrama and to the evocative power of Schoenberg's music:

Schoenberg not only arouses the image of anguish, but brings it home to his auditory in the most subjective way. You suffer the anguish with the fictitious character in the poem. Your nerves—and remember the porches

³⁰ Albert Giraud, libretto to *Pierrot Lunaire*, in liner notes for Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung*, Op. 17, *Pierrot Lunaire* Op. 21, and *Lied der Waldtaube* (sound recording), Pierre Boulez, conductor (Sony Classics, 1993), 23.

of the ears are the gateways to the brain and ganglionic centres—are literally pinched, scraped.

. . . Schoenberg is, I said to myself, the cruelest of all composers, for he mingles with his music sharp daggers at white heat, with which he pares away tiny slices of his victim's flesh. Anon he twists the knife in the fresh wound and you receive another horrible thrill, all the time wondering over the fate of the Lunar Pierrot and—hold on! Here's the first clue. If this new music is so distractingly atrocious what right has a listener to bother about Pierrot? What's Pierrot to him or he to Pierrot? Perhaps Schoenberg had caught his fish in the musical net he used, and what more did he want, or what more could his listeners expect?—for to be hooked or netted by the stronger volition of an artist is the object of all the seven arts.

How does Schoenberg do it? How does he pull off the trick? It is not a question to be lightly answered. In the first place the personality of the listener is bound to obtrude itself; dissociation of one's ego—if such a thing were possible—would be intellectual death; only by the clear, persistent image of ourselves do we exist—banal psychology as old as the hills. And the ear, like the eyes, soon 'accommodates' itself to new perspectives and new harmonies.³¹

³¹ James Huneker, "Schoenberg, Musical Anarchist, Who Has Upset Europe," *The New York Times*, 19 January 1913, p. SM9.

Huneker's review seems to describe the fulfillment of Evreinov's vision of monodrama—the spectator so overwhelmed by the performance that he “dissociates” from his own ego to identify completely with the protagonist, suffering and experiencing with that protagonist each excruciating moment. And though Huneker is speaking of *Pierrot Lunaire* rather than *Erwartung*, it is clear that the intended effect of the two works is the same. The experience Huneker describes indicates the possibilities of a successful monodrama.

Forty-three years after the first performance of *Erwartung*, a thirty-three-year-old Englishman, deeply inspired by the work of Arnold Schoenberg, assembled his own performing ensemble. The group was named “The Pierrot Players,” and consisted of the sextet necessary to perform Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire*. Peter Maxwell Davies, who along with his friend and fellow composer, Harrison Birtwistle, formed the group, would further the legacy of the Austrian master, not only by performing his works, but by expanding upon Schoenberg's experimental forays into atonality, the use of the voice, and monodrama.³²

Davies's experiments with monodramatic form can be traced back as far as 1965, when he adopted several of George Trakl's expressionist poems into the monodrama (designated as such by Davies himself) *Revelation and Fall*. His best-known experiment with the form, however, is his 1969 *Eight Songs for a Mad King*. Like Schoenberg's monodramas, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* is a

³² It is worth noting that for the group's first public performance on May 30, 1967, Birtwistle had contributed a piece entitled *Monodrama*, though it was later withdrawn. See Paul Griffiths, *Peter Maxwell Davies* (London: Robson Books, 1982), 18.

song cycle in which everything the audience sees and hears is filtered through the disturbed psyche of the protagonist.

King George III, the protagonist of *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, was a popular subject for artistic representations in the later part of the twentieth century, including Alan Bennett's 1991 play, *The Madness of King George*, and its subsequent film adaptation. Davies utilizes the legend of King George's madness as a means to experiment with musical form. Like *Winterreise* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, *Eight Songs*, as the title would indicate, is constructed not in an unbroken line, but as eight distinct songs. The songs are connected by the thread of King George's interpretations of his surroundings, and of his projections on those surroundings. The text, written for Davies by Australian poet and novelist Randolph Stow (who also penned the libretto for Davies's *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*), including some monologues said to have been uttered by King George himself, is fragmented and often absurd, as evidenced by the first song, entitled, "The Sentry":

The King imagines himself approaching the sentry before going for a walk in the country. He speaks paternally to the soldier, and promises him a present from his vegetable garden. Then suddenly, seeing himself as the prisoner of the sentry, he breaks down. (In this mood, he once burst into tears and cried: "I wish to God I may die, for I am going to be mad.")

Good day to Your Honesty: God guard who guards the gate.

Here is the key of the Kingdom.

You are a pretty fellow: next month I shall give
you a cabbage.

Undo the door!

Who has stolen my key? Ach! My Kingdom is
snakes and dancing, my Kingdom is locks and
slithering. Make room!

Pity me, pity me, pity me. Child,
child, whose son are you?³³

King George utters disordered words and phrases, and may even mistake the sentry for his son, amply establishing his mental condition.

The extent to which we share King George's perspective in the piece is established not only through the text, but also in the staging of the work. The sextet (the piece was originally performed by the successor to the Pierrot Players, The Fires of London) was onstage with the Mad King, but rather than being seen simply as accompaniment, the musicians too were given roles to play in the piece. Placed in cages onstage, the musicians come to represent a Lady-in-Waiting with whom the King converses in song three, the Thames River in song four, and as the King's birds throughout the piece. Randolph Stow explained, "The songs are to be understood as the King's monologue while listening to his birds."³⁴ The

³³ Randolph Stow, libretto to *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, in *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot & Eight Songs for a Mad King* (sound recording) (London: Phonographic Performance, Ltd., 1987), 9. ["Pitty" is Stowe's spelling.]

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

presence of the cages onstage, and the King's interactions with them, helps to establish for the audience that, as in the King's mind, the musicians are to be seen as songbirds.

Davies himself made clear that what we see onstage is seen through the King's mind: "Just as the music of the players is always a comment upon and extension of the King's music, so the 'bullfinch' and keeper' aspects of the players' roles are physical extensions of this musical process—they are projections stemming from the King's words and music, becoming incarnations of facets of the King's own psyche."³⁵ Like the Woman's mistaking a fallen tree for her lover in *Erwartung*, King George's sometimes bizarre observations and misinterpretations of his surroundings are clearly indicative of a mind under great duress.

As the title indicates, the question of madness is just as central to *Eight Songs for a Mad King* as it was to *Erwartung*. In his article "'I'm not ill, I'm nervous': Madness in the Music of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies," Ruud Welten argues, "Maxwell Davies not only uses madness as a theme, he actually incorporates it in the music. . . . The King, the personification of power, becomes insane and so does the music."³⁶ To accomplish this, Davies utilizes and extends Schoenberg's atonal strategies, employing extremities in the voice in the same

³⁵ Peter Maxwell Davies, note to *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, in *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot & Eight Songs for a Mad King* (sound recording) (London: Phonographic Performance, Ltd., 1987), 8-9.

³⁶ Ruud Welten, "'I'm not ill, I'm nervous': Madness in the Music of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies," *Tempo* 196 (April 1996): 21.

sort of innovative way that Schoenberg first used atonality in the instrumental music. Although Davies used Schoenberg's *Sprechgesang* technique from *Pierrot Lunaire* (in which Schoenberg insists that the vocals are to be spoken, as in the early monodrama form, and not sung) as a model, Davies takes this a step further by having the King shriek and squeal at points throughout the piece. Though it is possible that these outbursts are meant as an absolute representation of the King's speech, it seems more likely that they are in fact meant as a reflection of his mental state. As Welten notes, "The *Songs* confront the listener with a near seismic reproduction of [the King's] outcries. Schoenberg's expressionism escalates in Maxwell's work to hyper-expressionism."³⁷ The hyper-expressionism of which Welten speaks once again represents the external representation of internality: "The music becomes the expression of madness."³⁸

Although Davies and Stow seem to have intended the protagonist of *Eight Songs* to be King George himself, an intriguing alternate interpretation has been offered in several productions. In an interview with David Gable, Pierre Boulez spoke of a 1983 production that he conducted: "We had a production that was very clever because the young Australian [David Freeman] who directed it did not choose George III. He chose to put the action in a hospital ward where there was a madman taking himself for King George III."³⁹ In a 2003 production of the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁹ David Gable, "Ramifying Connections: An Interview with Pierre Boulez," *The Journal of Musicology* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1985-86): 109. Also see Janet Halfyard, "Eight Songs for a Mad King: Madness and the Theatre of Cruelty," *MaxOpus*:

piece at the City University of New York Graduate Center, conceived and performed by Paul Houghtaling, a similar strategy was employed. While earlier Mad Kings, such as Roy Hart and Julius Eastman (both of whom had worked directly with Davies), had played the character costumed in full royal habit, Houghtaling appeared onstage wearing a ratty jacket and torn jeans, looking generally rather disheveled. The choice was an interesting one, leading the audience to speculate as to the true nature of the character Houghtaling was portraying. The intentions of this choice are made clear by a comparison between Houghtaling's performance notes and Davies's liner notes. The last sentence of Houghtaling's performance notes reads, "The question remains open: is the persecuted protagonist Mad George III, or somebody who *thinks* he is George?"⁴⁰ This construction strikingly mirrors the last line of Davies's liner notes, in which Davies suggests that the purpose of his choices within the piece has been, "to leave open the question, is the persecuted protagonist Mad?"⁴¹ There can be little doubt that Houghtaling's essay-ending question echoes Davies's essay-ending question. However, there is an unmistakable and productive difference between these questions. While Davies questions, "Is the protagonist, King George III, really mad?," Houghtaling asks, "Is the protagonist really King George III?" Though I would posit that many of the choices made in Houghtaling's

The Official Website of Sir Peter Maxwell Davies,
http://www.maxopus.com/essays/8songs_m.htm (accessed 20 August 2004).

⁴⁰ Paul Houghtaling, Performance Notes for *Eight Songs for a Mad King*, CUNY Graduate Center, May 21, 2003. [Italics are Houghtaling's.]

⁴¹ Davies, note to *Eight Songs*, 9. [Capitalization is Davies's.]

performance had more to do with circumstances (lack of funding, a single performance rather than an extended run) than meaning, certainly the choice of a contemporary disheveled look, rather than the King's royal garb, allows Houghtaling to explore the possibility that the protagonist is not, in fact, King George, but rather a contemporary madman believing that he is re-living the monarch's experience (as the spectator relives it with him).

Whether the protagonist is depicted as the historical King George III or a contemporary madman impersonating George, *Eight Songs for a Mad King* exemplifies a representation of subjectivity that is similar to the instability of self we discussed in chapter two. Freud clearly saw the experience of madness as akin to that of the dream, and offered a concise summary of the literature on the link between dreams and madness:

Attention was long ago directed to the underlying kinship between dreams and mental disorders, exhibited in the wide measure of agreement between their manifestations. . . . Kant writes somewhere [1764]: 'The madman is a waking dreamer.' Krauss (1859) declares that 'insanity is a dream dreamt while the senses are awake.' Schopenhauer [1862] calls dreams a brief madness and madness a long dream. Hagen [1846] describes delirium as dream-life induced not by sleep but by illness. Wundt [1878] writes: 'We ourselves, in fact, can experience in dreams almost all the phenomena to be met with in insane asylums.'⁴²

⁴² Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 121-122 (see chap. 2, n. 123).

The experience of madness, then, is seen here as akin to an inescapable waking dream in which the subject is constantly alienated from himself. Michel Foucault, in his groundbreaking work on the subject of insanity, *Madness and Civilization*, seems to confirm this view when he speaks of the process and necessity of curing the insane subject, “The subject must be restored to his initial purity, and must be wrested from his pure subjectivity in order to be initiated into the world; the non-being that alienates him from himself must be annihilated, and he must be restored to the plenitude of the exterior world, to the solid truth of being.”⁴³ (As a point of clarification, Foucault, in speaking of “pure subjectivity,” is referring to a solipsistic subjectivity that exists only in reference to itself, blocking outside input.)

Ruud Welten clearly sees a similar process at play in the work of Davies, when he notes, “Within madness is a phenomenon known in psychiatry as depersonalization: the disintegration of the unity of the self. One hears oneself talk as if someone else were talking, one experiences one’s body as if it were not one’s own.”⁴⁴ If we consider James Huneker’s assertion that the music of Schoenberg can lead a spectator to dissociate from his own ego, alongside claims that the insane subject is alienated from himself, we find that these musical monodramas of madness offer a world in which the subjectivities of both

⁴³ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 176.

⁴⁴ Welten, 21.

spectator and character are destabilized, resulting in a stage experience that becomes the mutually lived experience of both.

It is worth noting briefly two other monodramas of madness by Davies. In *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot* (1974), Davies offers us a glimpse into the fractured psyche of Eliza Emily Donnithorne, the woman who was the real-life model for Miss Havisham, the jilted bride in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*.⁴⁵ With Miss Donnithorne having become fixed at the moment of her jilting (we see her still in her wedding gown, though the event we witness likely takes place years later), "we may well infer that Miss Donnithorne's re-living of her experience is a compulsively repeated ritual, one that may have taken place every night of her life."⁴⁶ Ruud Welten, speaking of the piece, argues, "The listener is told a story which he knows is only imaginary. The piece acquires an autarkic truth: it does not refer to a reality outside itself, but, as it were, draws the listener into the sick mind of the protagonist."⁴⁷ At least in the last part of the statement, Welten might well be speaking of all of Davies's monodramas of madness.

A final, and particularly intriguing, example of Davies's monodramas is the 1981 piece, *The Medium*, also classified as a monodrama by Davies himself. Unlike *Eight Songs for a Mad King* and *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, *The Medium* is distinguished by the complete lack of instrumental accompaniment—

⁴⁵ Steven Pruslin, Introductory note to *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*, in *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot & Eight Songs for a Mad King* (sound recording) (London: Phonographic Performance, Ltd., 1987), 3.

⁴⁶ Pruslin, 4.

⁴⁷ Welten, 24.

consisting only of the vocal soloist. The woman who appears onstage may be a psychic medium at a fair seeking to read palms of passers-by, or she may be a patient in a mental ward, undergoing shock treatment before our very eyes. The Medium comes to embody a variety of characters during her time on stage, and whether they are psychic emanations of a true medium, or the multiple personalities of a schizophrenic, the characters share one important characteristic—the vessel of the protagonist.

In addition to their affinity to the musical monodramas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Georg Benda, the twentieth century musical monodramas, so often concerned with the question of madness, strikingly recall “Monk” Lewis’s 1803 monodrama, *The Captive*. In subject matter, form, and effect, these modern musical monodramas stand as a reminder of the history of monodramatic form and as a glimpse of the possibilities that the genre continues to hold. Schoenberg and Davies are hardly the only contributors to the form. Francis Poulenc’s *La Dame de Monte Carlo* (1961), Carlisle Floyd’s *Flower and Hawk* (1972), and Dominick Argento’s *Miss Havisham’s Wedding Night* (1981—using Dickens’s fictional character instead of the real-life model Davies depicted in *Miss Donnithorne’s Maggot*), are but a few examples of musical monodrama’s continued vibrancy in the twentieth century. It stands to reason, therefore, that in sharp contrast to Kirsten Gram Holmström’s premature obituary for the genre,

Diane Penney Holloway concludes, “Musical melodrama continues to be a vital art form more than 200 years after the first efforts of Rousseau and Benda.”⁴⁸

While a clear path may be traced from the musical monodrama form of Rousseau and Benda to the twentieth century musical monodramas, it is considerably more difficult to trace a coherent path for single-character (or actor) spoken monodrama. In part, this may be attributed to a lack of any firm historical foundation for spoken single-character performance. This is not to say that such performances did not exist. We have already mentioned Dickens’s readings of his own works,⁴⁹ and the nineteenth-century practice of actors displaying their virtuosity by performing the collected high points of tragedies.⁵⁰ But these, and other single-actor performances, some of which bore the name monodrama, demonstrate no connection to one another, historically or formally, and bear little resemblance to the form as I have defined it.

Self-proclaimed “monodrama” with a single character and no musical accompaniment first appeared in 1882, when German writer Richard von

⁴⁸ Holloway, 180. Holloway here follows J. van der Veen’s practice in holding to “melodrama” to describe the form, although she is clearly referring to the musical monodrama. This further demonstrates the terminological confusion surrounding monodrama.

⁴⁹ For a complete discussion of Dickens’s public readings, see Raymund Fitzsimons, *Garish Lights: The Public Reading Tours of Charles Dickens* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1970).

⁵⁰ See Golub, 35 (see chap. 2, n. 44).

Meerheimb published a collection entitled *Monodramen neuer Form*.⁵¹ Howard Roman describes von Meerheimb's form as follows:

Monodrama at its simplest is nothing more than drama in monologue. At its most ambitious, however, it can assume that a number of persons other than the single actor are present on the stage, in which case the single actor indulges in one-sided dialogue with them, their words and actions being communicated to us through him. All scenery and props, like these unseen secondary characters, are also imaginary.⁵²

Roman's description raises an interesting parallel to Picard's monodramatic vision, where the spectator's mind was responsible for "creating" the dramatic world, with Picard's narrating author replaced by a protagonist who lives through the imagined setting. Applying this general formula more specifically to von Meerheimb's work, Roman notes:

Von Meerheimb's psychodramas are scenes written around a climactic event in the lives of contemporary bourgeois or military characters . . . or historical personages. Typical and best in the latter class is . . . *Oktavia*, which is in blank verse and shows us Oktavia's arrival in Alexandria, her

⁵¹ Howard Roman, "Rilke's Psychodramas," *Journal of English & Germanic Philology* 43 (1944): 402.

⁵² *Ibid.*

inquiries after Marc Antony and her sudden discovery of his body—all through the eyes and words of Oktavia alone.⁵³

Certainly, it is worth noting that the scene Roman describes, a woman searching desperately for her lover, only to stumble upon his dead body, can be seen as presaging Pappenheim's plot for *Erwartung*, though it is uncertain whether either Pappenheim or Schoenberg would have had any knowledge of von Meerheimb's work. "Though Meerheimb's works are now long forgotten," Roman argues, "they were exceedingly well known in their day."⁵⁴ Roman then goes on to argue that von Meerheimb's *Monodramen* influenced a very young Rainer Maria Rilke, who before the age of twenty wrote two plays in a very similar form: *Murillo*, published in January 1895, and *Die Hochzeitsmenuett* in July of that same year.⁵⁵

While it is less than certain to what extent von Meerheimb's work was well-known (and to whatever extent it can be classified as monodrama according to our definition, as we will discuss), many works have been written in a similar style in years since. Seven years after the publication of *Monodramen neuer form*, August Strindberg completed his one-act play *The Stronger*. The play consists of two female characters, Mrs. X, who is married (and was played in the initial 1889 performance by Strindberg's then-wife, Siri von Essen), and Ms. Y., who is not. And though both characters are seated at a café table together, only

⁵³ Ibid., 403. Von Meerheimb's subtitle to *Monodramen neuer Form* was *Psychodramen*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 402.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Mrs. X speaks, while Ms. Y nods, stares, and even laughs at Mrs. X, but never utters a word. Over the course of Mrs. X's extended monologue, the audience learns that the two were formerly friends, but that Ms. Y was engaged in an affair with Mrs. X's husband. The question of who is "the stronger" dominates the play, as Lee Strasberg points out: "The play posits a basic sequence: no matter what happens through the first part of the play, Miss Y is the stronger. She's supposed to be the stronger in the beginning in the simplest dramatic terms. The play is called *The Stronger*."⁵⁶ As the play comes to an end, however, Mrs. X stakes her claim to the play's title: "Maybe when all is said I'm really the stronger right now. . . . And why do you always keep still? Well, I thought that was strength, but it's probably only that you haven't anything to say!"⁵⁷ *The Stronger* was written in the midst of Strindberg's high naturalist period, only a year after *Miss Julie*, and comes a decade before his first experiment in extreme subjectivity with *To Damascus*.

It must be noted that Strindberg himself did not call *The Stronger* a monodrama. It is clear, however, that Strindberg did connect the idea of a single speaking character or actor to monodrama, at least in later years. In 1903, Strindberg wrote to Harriet Bosse: "If you were here, I would write monodramas for you! Or arrange *Macbeth* or Schiller's *Maria Stuart*, etc . . . as

⁵⁶ Lee Strasberg, quoted in Robert H. Hethman, *Strasberg at the Actors Studio: Tape Recorded Sessions* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1965), 181.

⁵⁷ August Strindberg, *The Stronger*, in *Pre-Inferno Plays*, ed. Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1970), 198.

monodramas.”⁵⁸ In a footnote attached to this letter, the editor, Michael Robinson, suggests a possible source for Strindberg’s interest in monodrama: “His old friend August Lindberg had given a series of one man performances of *The Tempest*, *Faust*, *Peer Gynt* and *Oedipus* between 1900 and 1903, and the genre was implicit in certain trends within the drama and theatre of the time.”⁵⁹ Details of Lindberg’s performances are disappointingly scarce, but it seems likely that Lindberg’s solo performances took a form similar to that of von Meerheimb’s plays. But while Robinson sees Lindberg as the probable source for Strindberg’s interest in the form, Egil Törnqvist, looking at the same letter from Strindberg to Bosse, offers a different interpretation: “From the notes left in the Strindberg archive, we can see that he was outlining monodramas consisting of monologues and pantomimes with music around this time—monodramas, that is, in the 18th century sense of the word.”⁶⁰ The fact that this letter was written fourteen years after *The Stronger* makes it difficult to ascertain if Strindberg would have been thinking of the musical form when he wrote the play, and since Lindberg’s solo performances began in 1900, it would appear to be impossible that he was part of Strindberg’s inspiration for the play. Nevertheless, the evidence of these coalescent strains of monodrama surrounding Strindberg is rather intriguing,

⁵⁸ August Strindberg, letter to Harriet Bosse, 17 September 1905, in *Strindberg’s Letters, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Michael Robinson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 720.

⁵⁹ Michael Robinson, note to Strindberg letter, in *Strindberg’s Letters, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Michael Robinson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 888.

⁶⁰ Egil Törnqvist, *Strindbergian Drama* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1982), 243.

especially in light of his 1899-1901 *To Damascus*, which we will look at in chapter five.

Single-character spoken monodrama also appeared in Russia in the midst of the same symbolist movement of which Nikolai Evreinov was a part. Valerii Briusov's 1911 play *The Wayfarer* (subtitled, like Richard von Meerheimb's *Monodramen*, a "Psychodrama") presents a forester's daughter at home alone in the midst of a stormy night. A knock on the gate outside brings her to the window, but the girl has been properly instructed to protect her innocence, and refuses to answer the door. The knocking is insistent however, and though the man knocking at the gate remains silent at each of her questions, she eventually softens and lets him in. The Wayfarer, as the play's mute character is named, only nods and gestures in response to the Daughter, much like Ms. Y to Mrs. X in *The Stronger*. The impassivity of the Wayfarer inexplicably leads the Daughter to become increasingly intimate with him, sharing her dreams of love and a future life, speaking of a man who will come to find and marry her. And though, she says, "I did/ expect the prince to come in a golden coach,/ With throngs of servants, followed by his retinue,"⁶¹ she nevertheless is willing to adapt her dream to the circumstances:

Did

You know that you were sent to me by Fate?

You are the one that I was waiting for!

⁶¹ Valerii Briusov, *The Wayfarer*, trans. Daniel Gerould, in *Symbolist Drama*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: PAJ Publications, 1985), 199.

You are the one the Lord ordained for me!
 My betrothed! My beloved! My sweetheart!⁶²

The Daughter's confession of love to a man who has never spoken a word to her fails to move the Wayfarer (whom the Daughter, with no indication from him positively or negatively, has chosen to call Robert) to any act of speech or even interest. This ambivalence seems to have absolutely no effect on the Daughter, whose expression turns from the romantic to the lustful:

Till now

I've never kissed a man! All of the strength
 Of my virginal tenderness I'll give to you!
 To you I'll give my innocence, as if
 You were my fiancé, my husband, my master!
 . . .
 Take me! Possess me! I am yours, all yours!
 (*She throws herself at the Wayfarer.*)⁶³

Once again, despite the fact that the Daughter has, literally, thrown herself at the Wayfarer, we see absolutely no reaction from the quiet stranger. It is at this moment, in the play's final two lines, that the Daughter realizes that the Wayfarer

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 199-200.

is dead. She screams and shrieks, and tries to find help, but her newfound love is gone. The spectator has no way of knowing when or how the Wayfarer died, or indeed, if he ever existed at all.

This style of single-speaking-character drama soon made its way to the United States. In 1916, directly influenced by *The Stronger*, Eugene O'Neill wrote a similar play with two characters, one of whom never speaks—*Before Breakfast*. The play is one long tirade by Mrs. Rowland as she berates her unemployed husband, Alfred, who is in the bedroom and is never seen but for a trembling hand that appears through the door twice during the play. As the play comes to a close, we hear a stifled groan from the other room, and a tumbling chair. As Mrs. Rowland runs into the room with a scream, we learn that Alfred, no longer able to bear his plight, has killed himself. Like *The Stronger*, *Before Breakfast* is ostensibly set in a realistic milieu. It is interesting to note that the Provincetown Playhouse's 1917 production of the play featured an actor playing Alfred who was giving his farewell performance—Eugene O'Neill.⁶⁴ Considering the extent to which the heroes of monodramas have been identified with their authors, it is tempting to see O'Neill's playing Alfred as indicative that we, as spectators, are seeing the action from the perspective of the unseen husband, rather than the protagonist wife. It is likely that the spectator feels just as harassed by Mrs. Rowland's vitriol as her husband, further aligning us with the spectral, and later suicidal character.

⁶⁴ Signed copy of Eugene O'Neill, *Before Breakfast* (New York: Frank Shay, 1916), at <http://www.eoneill.com/works/16910.htm> (accessed August 26, 2004).

A final example (though there are certainly many others) of this form may be found in Jean Cocteau's 1932 play *La Voix Humaine*. Cocteau utilizes modern technology to bring a new angle to the form—instead of speaking to an absent or silent interlocutor, the female protagonist delivers her lines into a telephone. In the course of the play, the woman pleads with her former lover, who is to be married in two days. Despite her desperate pleas, the man is unmoved, and the play ends with the woman strangling herself with her own telephone cord.⁶⁵

While the plays discussed above share certain traits and possibly sources with the early monodrama form, the question remains as to whether they maintain the fundamental aspects of interiority and subjectivity that I argue are a condition of the monodrama form. Howard Roman notes that in von Meerheimb's work, the protagonist is seen as conversing with the absent characters, often "repeating" part of the interlocutor's statement to make it heard by the audience. This method, similar to that of Cocteau in *La Voix Humaine*, does not produce a subjective experience. Rather than presenting us with everything that the protagonist experiences, it actually deprives us of the protagonist's senses—we neither hear what they hear, nor, in the case of von Meerheimb, see what they see. This idea of the spectator's situation *vis-à-vis* the characters of these plays is reminiscent of A. Dwight Culler's argument, discussed in chapter one, that the reader of Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess" is placed not in the position of

⁶⁵ Bertolt Brecht utilized a similar method in his short play *The Jewish Wife* (part of the longer work, *The Private Life of the Master Race*, though often performed alone), with a Jewish woman telephoning friends before she flees Germany. However, that play ends with an on-stage conversation between the woman and her husband.

the speaker, but of the envoy who serves as his audience and judge. As I argued of *Before Breakfast*, it might be more accurate to say that in these works, rather than seeing the world through the subjectivity of the protagonist, we see the protagonist objectively, as the world sees him.

On the other hand, the form bears considerable resemblance to the dramatic structure of the musical monodramas of Rousseau, Benda, and Schoenberg. The silent or absent character gives the protagonist a reason to express the inmost contents of their soul. The discrepancy between the seemingly objective method of von Meerheimb, O'Neill, and Cocteau (and possibly Strindberg) and the more subjective mode evidenced in musical monodrama can be explained by the status of these other characters. While the spoken mode tends to present all characters as alive and conscious, the "interlocutor" in the musical monodramas is depicted as dead or otherwise unconscious. The difference in the status of the character inherently changes the status of the audience member. In the objective plays, although the protagonist is the only one who speaks, we always know that there is someone else there, watching the protagonist just as we are, in what might be called the theatrical equivalent of a point-of-view shot. This might seem to suggest, paradoxically, that what we are witnessing is a monodrama of the other character. However, the fact that we know so little about the other character, and never get his or her opinion on anything makes it very difficult to identify with him or her. Furthermore, these other characters can hardly be said to be strong central protagonists. The eyes of

the other character, therefore, become something like a camera lens, objectively recording reality.⁶⁶

In the musical monodramas, the knowledge that the other character is dead, or in the case of *Pygmalion*, a statue, obviates the possibility of seeing through the eyes of that character. And although the possibility may remain that what we then see is completely objective (with a totally absent “camera” rather than one that is personified), the chances of complete identification with the protagonist are considerably stronger when the living presence of the other (be it corporal onstage, or suggested but not physical) is removed. In the case of the musical monodramas, it seems likely that the music itself plays an important role in leading the spectator to identify with the protagonist.

Whatever role music plays in the effect of single-character monodrama, a spoken version of the form remains a possibility. In *The Wayfarer*, although the title character is dead, we aren’t aware of this until the end of the play, and he could not have been dead all along, as he had to get to, and get into, the house somehow. Nevertheless, *The Wayfarer* raises the possibility that the other character is not simply silent or intended to be imagined by the audience member, but is in fact completely imaginary—a product of the protagonist’s mind.

Although the Wayfarer is physically present onstage, his actual interaction with

⁶⁶ This phenomenon is represented filmically in Spike Jonze’s 2000 film, *Being John Malkovich*. As paying customers enter the portal into John Malkovich’s brain, the spectator is given a typical P.O.V. shot—handheld camera with aureolas representing the field of vision. All the while, Malkovich goes through mundane everyday activities, to which the customer is a passive spectator. When the master puppeteer, Craig Schwartz, succeeds in taking control of Malkovich’s body and mind, the film shifts between P.O.V. shots and more extensive “objective” shots that include Malkovich’s body.

the Daughter (other than a kiss on the hand at one point) is limited to gestures. That he reacts with total indifference to the romantic and sexual advances of the Daughter seems extremely strange, both to us and the Daughter. His death, furthermore, seems completely unmotivated. The Daughter's continued pursuit of the Wayfarer, despite a silence that seems to amount to a rejection, suggests that the "presence" of the Wayfarer is little more than a fantasy of the lonely girl—an opportunity for her to act out her repressed fantasies. Daniel Gerould has referred to the play as "a fine example of the symbolist probing of a single consciousness and its inner workings in monodramatic form."⁶⁷ The applicability of a monodramatic reading to *The Wayfarer* is undoubtedly bolstered by its roots in Russian Symbolism, while, despite their structural similarities to Briusov's play, *The Stronger* and *Before Breakfast*, with their avowed objective realism, seem less apt to be truly monodramatic.

Although written years after the heyday of the trend, Samuel Beckett's 1972 *Not I* demonstrates not only the continued existence of the speaker/listener dramatic form, but also, as in *The Wayfarer*, the applicability of monodramatic analysis to that form. Like many of Beckett's plays, *Not I* resists a single totalizing reading. With the stage populated only by the spare vision of the sharply illuminated Mouth and the Auditor, shrouded and barely visible, Beckett seems to offer an otherworldly version of the type of play we have been discussing. And yet, *Not I* has repeatedly been interpreted as monodramatic. Unlike the prospect of objective reality seen in *The Stronger*, *Before Breakfast*,

⁶⁷ Daniel Gerould, "Russian Symbolist Monodrama," 4. Pending publication, off-print provided by author.

and *La Voix Humaine*, or the mental projection of the Wayfarer suggested in Briusov's play, the characters of *Not I* may be seen as fragmented elements of a single individual. John Lutterbie, in his essay "'Tender Mercies': Subjectivity and Subjection in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*," sees this interpretation as key to understanding the play:

The surreal staging described by Beckett—the elevated and faintly lit mouth and the lower, shrouded Auditor—is sufficient to support the claim that *Not I* is located in an interior, a psychic landscape. Even if I were to read the speaker and the listener as discrete individuals, any interpretation based on perceptual verisimilitude or describing a system of external relationships would almost immediately be confronted with a host of insurmountable contradictions. . . . A sufficiently desolate picture when conceptualized as pertaining to individuals, it gains in force when conceived of as a metaphor for an intrapersonal dynamic.⁶⁸

For Linda Ben-Zvi, the concept of Mouth/Auditor as fragmented individual is perfectly in keeping with Beckett's vision of selfhood: "Beckett also indicates that at any given moment the self exists as two separate entities: an outer I, alive in the macrocosm, commingling in the physical world, and an inner me, unseen, unheard, alive only to the I. . . . It becomes a sign of the impossibility of ever

⁶⁸ John H. Lutterbie, "'Tender Mercies': Subjectivity and Subjection in Samuel Beckett's *Not I*," in *The World of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 87.

uniting the parts of the self.”⁶⁹ Bennett Simon, who sees this pattern as indicative not only of a trend in Beckett’s work but in Western culture in general, extends Ben-Zvi’s observation to note, “In addition to the split between an outer and inner self, there are splits between mental self and bodily self.”⁷⁰ The possibility of *Not I* as representing a divided self is particularly fruitful for this study in that the entirety of chapter four will be concerned with plays that work in this way, and yet, the play also fits perfectly into this discussion of plays with a single speaking character and a listener whose responses, if any, come only in the form of gestures. But while the play may be read as monodrama, of what profit is such a reading? John Lutterbie sees the play as “A simple modernist model of decentered subjectivity—that is, I seek myself in the imaginary distance between what I say and what I hear myself say.”⁷¹ As such, the Mouth’s insistence upon telling the story in the third person “She” and not the first person “I” gains significance, as Lutterbie wonders, “Who is ‘she’? Is she, as seems likely, the objectified self? The ‘I’/‘not I’? The self conceptualized as other?”⁷² If both Mouth and Auditor are fragments of a single self, then both are the “I” in question. The “she,” as an objectifying term, serves to separate both from the whole of which they are parts. Furthermore, if the Auditor may be seen as

⁶⁹ Linda Ben-Zvi, *Samuel Beckett* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986), 5.

⁷⁰ Bennett Simon, “The Fragmented Self, the Reproduction of the Self, and Reproduction in Beckett and in the Theatre of the Absurd,” in *The World of Samuel Beckett*, ed. Joseph H. Smith (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 159.

⁷¹ Lutterbie, 87.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 88.

hearing the Mouth as though from a distance, we must be reminded of Ruud Welten's assessment of insanity, "One hears oneself talk as if someone else were talking."⁷³ *Not I*, then, like many monodramas, represents a subjectivity in limbo—a self that is all at once "I" and "Not I."

Peter Maxwell Davies's *The Medium* may well seem reminiscent of the type of performance, mentioned (and rejected) by Evreinov in "Introduction to Monodrama," represented by Fregoli and Francardi, nineteenth-century quick-change artists, who with slight and instantaneous changes of costume, performed a series of impersonations in the course of an evening.⁷⁴ Like the compendiums of tragic soliloquies, these performances were meant to demonstrate the virtuosity of the performer and amaze the audience.

From the 1930s to the 1950s, Cornelia Otis Skinner performed a series of works designated as monodrama which achieved a great deal of success in the United States. One of her early works, *Edna, His Wife* (1938), largely follows the pattern set by Richard von Meerheimb. In the course of a play that catalogued the marital infidelity of the men of a wealthy, established family, and its effect on the women of that family, Skinner, alone onstage, portrayed in successive scenes several different women, each of whom was seemingly engaged in conversation with others. These other characters were neither seen nor heard.

⁷³ Welten, 21.

⁷⁴ For more information on Fregoli, see Daniel Gerould, "Fregoli, Witkiewicz, and Quick Change," *Theatre Three* 3 (Fall 1987): 49-60.

The bulk of Skinner's work consisted not of fully conceived plays, but rather of character sketches performed consecutively, usually according to a theme. Her works, including *The Loves of Charles II* (1935), *Mansion on the Hudson* (1935), *The Wives of Henry VIII* (1937), and, fifteen years later, *Paris '90* (1952), presented the views of women of various types and classes. A 1935 review of *The Loves of Charles II* in the *New York Times* suggests that these sketches did remain connected to a central story, and that they were, as a whole, rather convincing: "This, like [Skinner's other works] is neatly etched and many sided. Carefully planned, it takes Charles through the Restoration years, building to a climax at his death and, of course, seeing him always through the eyes of the six women in his life."⁷⁵ The review goes on to connect Skinner's work to the quick-change genre rather directly, calling it "this theatre of quick impression, a gift for costume."⁷⁶

Brooks Atkinson, in two reviews of Skinner's work, admires her skill as an actress, but also demonstrates two ways in which this genre diverges from the experiential model of monodrama. In his review of *Mansion on the Hudson* in 1935, Atkinson noted, "The one-woman theatre is a taxing institution, since it concentrates its art without pity upon a single performer. Miss Skinner has an imposing personal beauty which often refuses to be submerged in character."⁷⁷

⁷⁵ J.K.H., Review of *The Loves of Charles II* by Cornelia Otis Skinner, *The New York Times*, 29 March 1937, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Brooks Atkinson, Review of *Mansion on the Hudson* by Cornelia Otis Skinner, *The New York Times*, 3 April 1935, p. 20.

The striking presence, then, of the performer, objectifies the actor, as well as the character she portrays, making it even more unlikely that we will be able to achieve complete identification with character. In a later review, of *Paris '90* in 1952, Atkinson went beyond the problem of Skinner's commanding presence to comment upon her lack of depth in characterization: "Although Miss Skinner is a vigorous and versatile actress, she remains pretty much on the surface of character. She is breezy on the outside, but she seldom looks inside her people."⁷⁸ If the actress herself never gets inside the surface of the character, how much less likely to do so is the spectator? Atkinson's observations on Skinner's art are indicative of the extent to which the quick-change genre is resistant to psychological depth in its character portrayals, and as a result, its general incompatibility with monodrama.

On the other hand, Atkinson suggests that Ruth Draper, who called her pieces "sketches" as she performed on stages on Broadway and the West End from the 1920s to the mid-1950s, was able to perform character studies with a great deal more depth and characterization. Draper's 1925 *The Italian Lesson* depicts a woman in a series of telephone conversations, anticipating by seven years Cocteau's use of the device in *La Voix Humaine*. In *Three Women and Mr. Clifford* (1929), Draper plays the wife, secretary, and then the mistress of the unseen Mr. Clifford, in a manner quite similar to that of Skinner. Draper's own view of her project suggests an intriguing affinity to the goals of monodrama:

⁷⁸ Brooks Atkinson, Review of *Paris '90* by Cornelia Otis Skinner, *The New York Times*, 5 March 1952, p. 33.

“What is really important is not to put anything over, but to bring the audience up onto the stage and into the scene with you.”⁷⁹ Furthermore, in her staging, Draper seems to echo the ideas of Picard, as her bare stage demanded an active audience: “‘The audience must work as well as I do,’ she said. ‘Their imagination must be fired, and supply all that is not there. And consequently something happens. When Shakespeare speaks of ‘How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank,’ there’s no moonlight and no stage effects of moonlight. They did it in daylight, so the audience had to supply a tremendous amount of imagination.’”⁸⁰ Draper seems to have succeeded in firing the imagination of her audience, and may well have succeeded in bringing them into the scene with her, but as I suggested of von Meerheimb’s work, it is likely that they came to play the role of the absent characters with whom Draper’s protagonist often conversed, rather than the protagonist herself.

Although it has developed considerably in complexity, form, and intent, the genre of quick-change solo performance remains with us today in the work of performers such as Anna Deavere Smith, Danny Hoch, and Sarah Jones. If Davies’s *The Medium*, with its constant and instantaneous changes in character, qualifies as monodrama according to our definition, why not these artists who

⁷⁹ Ruth Draper, quoted in David Kaplan and Patricia Norcia, Introduction to Ruth Draper, “Three Breakfasts,” in *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jo Bonney (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), 18.

⁸⁰ Ruth Draper, quoted in Studs Terkel, “When Ruth Draper Was Alone Onstage, Everyone Was There,” *The New York Times*, 26 November 2000, p. AR3.

perform numerous characters with their own body, just like the heroine of Davies's piece?

The answer to this question lies in the very nature of these works, and in the status of the performer onstage. In *The Medium*, the various characters embodied by the heroine are seen as coming from within her. They are seen as inhabiting her—taking over her reality as they express themselves to us. All the while, the audience is aware that to whatever extent there is a stable “I” that lay beneath these multiple personalities, that “I” is the fictional heroine whose suffering we experience along with her. Despite the fact that the lead actress (in the original production, Mary Thomas, who also created the lead role in *Miss Donnithorne's Maggot*) displays a virtuosity not at all dissimilar to that of the quick-change artist, the audience remains firmly aligned with the fictional medium, and not the one portraying her.

In contrast, in the genre embodied by Smith, Hoch, and Jones there is no suggestion that the performer is, in fact, a medium (other than figuratively, perhaps). Indeed, the very virtuosity of the performance ensures our constant identification of the artist behind each role. Jonathan Kalb connects this work with Brecht: “These artists seem to me to fuse a psychological and political appeal, linking compassion and identification with objective scrutiny in a way that . . . amounts to a new, peculiarly American form of *Verfremdung*.”⁸¹ The Brechtian nature of these performances is reflected in the duality of the performer. At all times, the spectator is aware (and intentionally so) of the performer as

⁸¹ Jonathan Kalb, “Documentary Solo Performance: The Politics of the Mirrored Self,” *Theater* 31, no. 3 (2001): 14.

performer, in addition to the character he or she is performing, as Atkinson noted of Skinner. As Brecht would desire, that dual identification aids in a process that keeps the spectator alienated from the performance, ensuring that the spectator can never achieve the complete identification with character typical of monodrama.

In the case of Anna Deavere Smith, this lack of identification is heightened by Smith's own method. Smith, as has been well documented, interviews the subjects who will become her characters, studies the recordings of those interviews, and then, with minimal costuming or props, presents each of those subjects herself. This process ensures that at least to some extent, while Smith takes on the position of the subjects of her interviews, we, as spectators, take the position of Smith herself as she conducted the interviews. And while her performance style can hardly be characterized as textbook realism, there can be little doubt that Smith seeks to present her characters as objectively as possible. Indeed, I would suggest that the subjectivity of the individual characters of Smith's plays is nullified by their very presentation by Smith.

A discussion of single-character plays can hardly be complete without confronting the dominant contemporary form for such work—solo performance. There can be no doubt that the genre of solo performance shares one significant characteristic with monodrama—the focus on subjectivity. Lenora Champagne, in her review of the collection *Extreme Exposures: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, defines the types of work she

finds most rewarding therein: “The work I find most interesting here is of two kinds: 1) passionate explorations of self and identity through persona (as differentiated from character, which is something else altogether); 2) work that takes one on an unexpected lyrical or imaginary journey, using metaphor and tale-spinning to go beyond the literal world, to an invented place where emotional insight crystallizes.”⁸² Both varieties would seem to have a great deal in common with the definition we have constructed of monodrama, and with many of the works we have described, but a look at the performances Champagne cites as examples of these two types is instructive as to why solo performance does not necessarily equal monodrama.

“Examples of the first type,” Champagne states, “are Ethyl Eichelberger’s revisionist *Nefert-iti*, in which he borrows a persona from history, and Rachel Rosenthal’s fierce reflection on philosophy, science, and the future in *filename:FUTURFAX*. David Cale’s *Deep in a Dream of You* and Brenda Wong Aoki’s *Mermaid Meat* (both of them take us underwater) exemplify the second type.”⁸³ The earliest of these, Ethyl Eichelberger’s 1976 *Nefert-iti* is the closest to monodrama as we have defined it herein. Eichelberger, a drag performance icon, performed a series of pieces in which he portrayed an iconic historical or mythological figure—*Phèdre* (1972), *Medea* (1980), *Catherine was Great* (1982), *Marie Antionette* (1983), and *Saint Joan* (1987), among many others. In the case

⁸² Lenora Champagne, “Solitary Acts,” Review of *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Jo Bonney, *Performing Arts Journal* 69 (2001): 98.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

of *Nefert-iti*, Eichelberger portrays the Egyptian queen with a healthy dose of contemporary drag queen thrown in: “Mut-Nodjme, Honey, is that you, my sweet little sister?”⁸⁴ Nefertiti has locked herself inside the tomb built for her by her husband Akhenaten. Tired of the responsibilities of royalty and duties of family, Nefertiti refuses to leave the tomb, despite the fact that her sisters and Bek, her lover, come to plead with her (they, like von Meerheimb’s other characters, are unheard by the audience), Nefertiti remains firm, pleading her case both to the visitors who call upon her, and, it seems, to herself. Finally, having driven away all her companions, the queen drinks poison, and with one last flourish of speech, dies in the tomb that is to hold her for eternity.

Eichelberger’s work has a great deal in common with earlier monodramas. The trope of the historical/mythological heroine, exposing her deepest feelings in one continuous monologue, ending in death (and often, suicide) was common in the early musical monodramas. Like those earlier monodramas, the scene plays out as a personal confession with no apparent audience. Although Eichelberger does sometimes ponder philosophical matters, it is always an extension of her musings of the present moment.

Rachel Rosenthal’s *filename:FUTURFAX*, utilizes a quite different approach to the presentation of her protagonist’s subjective world. *filename:FUTURFAX* depicts Rosenthal (or a character quite similar to her who remains unidentified) as an eighty-six year old woman in the year 2012. That this character is Rosenthal herself is suggested by her metatheatrical statement: “I

⁸⁴ Ethyl Eichelberger, *Nefert-iti*, in Bonney, 76.

know what you're thinking, you think I look pretty young for my age. Well that's because you see me the way I see me. I always see me twenty years younger."⁸⁵

The piece was originally performed in 1992, dating the image of the future character to Rosenthal's presence in the theatre. Certainly, the idea that we would see the character as she sees herself would seem to fit quite well with a monodramatic reading, and *filename:FUTURFAX* does indeed bear many traits typical of monodrama, presenting the immediacy of the fictional present as the protagonist empties her mind, until finally, as the play ends, she dies, in this case, murdered offstage by a band of young thugs. Perhaps the major obstacle to a monodramatic reading of *filename:FUTURFAX* is the fact that as Rosenthal recounts the events of the previous twenty years, we do not experience these events along with the character (as we will later see in works like Arthur Miller's *After the Fall* and Margaret Edson's *Wit*), but rather these events are told to us in narrative form—a remembrance, rather than a re-living, of the past—a feature of a great number of solo performance works.

Although Champagne's description of the work of David Cale and Brenda Wong Aoki as taking the spectator "on an unexpected lyrical or imaginary journey" seems in complete accord with the goals of monodrama, once again the narrative mode in which these artists work disrupts an effort at monodramatic interpretation. Although neither Cale nor Aoki seems to acknowledge the audience, they both use a method that is closer to storytelling than to the fully experiential mode that monodrama would seem to demand. The opening portion

⁸⁵ Rachel Rosenthal, *filename: FUTURFAX*, in Bonney, 95.

of David Cale's *Deep in a Dream of You* is a case in point: "I want to take you swimming in the dark./ It's something you've never done./ It's something you'd like to do."⁸⁶ Despite the fact that the spectator is not necessarily the "you" to whom Cale's narrator refers, we are nevertheless likely to feel distanced by the dialectic of you and I that these opening lines invoke.

While Cale's work is something like a poetry reading, Aoki's *Mermaid Meat* is more like traditional storytelling. Aoki tells her stories in the third person, and though this avoids the problem of pronouns that Cale's work raised, we are still left a spectator to Aoki's storytelling, rather than being made a character in it. *Mermaid Meat's* tale of the fisherman and the mermaid leaves it unclear whether or not Aoki is to be seen as the mermaid, and even if we, as spectators, may be said to take a role, it is impossible to know whether that role would be that of the fisherman or the mermaid. This uncertainty is precisely the type of problem of identification that Evreinov sought to avoid.

The examples I have presented here are, obviously, far from exhaustive. And it is in no way my goal to show that solo performance cannot be monodramatic, only that it is not necessarily so. One interesting example from Bonney's collection of solo performance texts, Dael Orlandersmith's *Monster*, while not monodramatic in its entirety, offers a possibility of what monodramatic solo performance might look like. In the climax of the piece, Winfred's rape of Theresa, Orlandersmith alternates between long sections from Winfred's perspective and long sections from Theresa's. This alternation undercuts an

⁸⁶ David Cale, *Deep in a Dream of You*, in Bonney, 199.

attempt to see the piece as monodramatic, but the method of Orlandersmith's monologue follows the stream-of-consciousness style we have already posited as approximate to monodrama:

And Winfred's dick is in my ass/ In my ass/ He mocks me for liking rock 'n' roll/ He doesn't like rock 'n' roll/ "White bitch," he calls me/ And Patti's in the background chanting, "GLORIA," and I'm thinking/ "How could this happen?"/ I'm blindfolded/ cold, sharp metal and he wants to make a baby/ he says, "You and me," he says/ and he could be the man of the house, he says/ 'Cause he was always the man of the house/ and I'm thinking/ "I'm only fifteen/ I don't want a baby"/ I'm thinking how God doesn't like me . . . God doesn't know I'm here/ Or if he did, he doesn't care/ I left the door open/ how could I have done that . . . ⁸⁷

Orlandersmith's account from Theresa's perspective is immediate and visceral. And though it is closer in many ways to the interior monologue style proposed by Dujardin than the fully integrated *mise-en-scène* of Evreinov, Orlandersmith's monologue does go a long way towards placing us in the position of the victim. Having seen *Monster* at New York Theatre Workshop in 1996, I can attest to the remarkable power of the piece, and the fact that, even from a male perspective, Orlandersmith's method places the spectator in the mindset of the young female victim.

⁸⁷ Dael Orlandersmith, *Monster*, in Bonney, 387-388.

When Orlandersmith takes on the perspective of Winfred, the method of writing she uses is far different. While Theresa's portions are written in sharp, sometimes disconnected passages, separated by slashes, Winfred's are structured in complete sentences and thoughts:

So this one night I'm goin' upstairs, but I sees Theresa's door is open.
 And I walks down da hall and she cold 'sleep in da bed. Like she waitin' for me? An' I walks over to the bed an' sits down, and she wakes up an' I say, "Hey baby, and she say, "Winfred, whachoo doin' here?" An' I say, "Well you want me here. I'm here."⁸⁸

While Theresa's story is being recounted as though it is occurring in the present, Winfred's ("So this one night . . .") is in the past tense. Winfred's tale is a narrative told *to* us, rather than an experience shared with the protagonist. We are distanced both from the experience, and from the "monster" telling it. The difference between these two methods is reminiscent of a distinction Edouard Dujardin made between the dramatic monologue (Dujardin uses Browning and Dostoevsky as examples), and the interior monologue that he champions:

The essential innovation introduced by interior monologue consists in the fact that its aim is to evoke the uninterrupted flow of thoughts going through the character's being, as they are born and in the order they are born, without any explanation of logical sequence and giving the

⁸⁸ Ibid., 386.

impression of ‘raw’ experience. We were saying earlier that a concrete choice is necessary; what is peculiar to interior monologue is not absence of choice, but that choice is not made according to rational logic. The difference does not consist in the fact that conventional monologue expresses *less* intimate thoughts than interior monologue, but in that it coordinates them, demonstrates their logical sequence, that is to say explains them, and most often is content to summarize them.⁸⁹

Winfred’s speech, I would argue, is exemplary of the organized and coherent thought that Dujardin describes as conventional monologue, while Theresa’s represents the “‘raw’ experience” of interior monologue, considerably more akin to monodrama.

A complete cataloguing of the various modes and styles of solo performance, if even possible, is beyond the scope of this study. My goal, however, in offering examples of works that may or may not fit the model we have constructed, is to demonstrate the confusion engendered by the use of the term monodrama to describe all of solo performance, regardless of method or goal. The term that has been most often, and I would argue most fittingly, used to describe this type of work—solo performance—seems sufficient. The use of the term monodrama in this case seems to unnecessarily muddle both genres.

⁸⁹ Dujardin, 118-119.

Varied in style and complexity, the single-character genre of solo performance represents the closest link between the original musical form and its modern manifestations. As we turn to look at monodramas containing multiple characters, we will revisit the idea, already discussed in chapter one, that the single-character monodrama provides a precedent for its many-charactered progeny rooted not just in history, but also in concept.

Chapter 4

Me, Myself and I: Divided-Self Monodrama

Self-division, or the divided self of modern psychiatry is the primary condition and not a result, mistake or accident. Self-division is not to be joined or healed, but to be reflected through an archetype which initiates consciousness into the significance of the pathology.

James Hillman, *Loose Ends*

It has often been said that the twentieth century (and the early years of the twenty-first) has been witness to a fundamental displacement in the status of the individual. The stable, self-defined, and always self controlled (and seemingly always male) subject that dominated discourse from the time of the enlightenment through the nineteenth century has come under severe questioning, if not outright assault. As a result, the philosophical and psychological conception of the individual's relationship to himself and the world has undergone great changes. Rather than the perceived stability and unity of both the world and the individual, modern man and his world have come to be seen as inherently fragmented, pulled apart by varied forces (both internal and external) that he cannot control, and often cannot even recognize. Attempts to depict the psyche of an individual beset

by forces such as these have produced a significant subgenre of monodrama—plays of the divided self.

The trope of the divided self has been prevalent in literature (as we saw in the case of the Romantics), philosophy, and psychology for centuries. Friedrich Schlegel, speaking of the duality of man in 1829, noted, “So deeply is this dualism rooted in our consciousness, that even when we are, or at least think ourselves alone, we still think as two, and are constrained as it were to recognize our inmost profoundest being as essentially dramatic. This colloquy with self, or generally, this internal dialogue, is . . . the natural form of human thinking.”¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, in an 1841 essay, is similarly convinced that man is to be seen in binary terms: “An inevitable dualism bisects nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as, spirit, matter; man, woman; odd, even; subjective, objective; in, out; upper, under; motion, rest; yea, nay.”² In his 1902 book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which contains a chapter entitled, “The Divided Self,” William James provides evidence that this concept of man as essentially divided continued into *fin de siècle* psychology: “There are persons whose existence is little more than a series of zigzags, as now one tendency and now another gets the upper hand. Their spirit wars with their flesh, they wish for incompatibles, wayward impulses interrupt their most deliberate

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, quoted in Karl Miller, *Doubles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 89. Miller provides a thorough discussion of the literary trope of the double, particularly in Chapter II, “Proteus,” 21-38.

² Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in Karl Miller, *Doubles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 51.

plans.”³ “In all of us,” James continues, “the normal evolution of character chiefly consist[s] in the straightening out and unifying of the inner self.”⁴ It is, quite often, precisely this “straightening out and unifying of the inner self” that we witness in dramas of the divided self.

Contemporary psychology has continued this inquiry concerning man’s essential duality. A fundamental work in this regard is R.D. Laing’s 1969 study of the experiences of schizophrenics, *The Divided Self*. Laing suggests that the schizophrenic undergoes a two-fold break with reality—a break from the world and a division within the self. Self-division, need not, however, be solely a condition of schizoid personality. Georges Poulet sees this condition as connected to concepts of the experience of consciousness since Descartes: “When consciousness becomes a discrete entity, sealed off from the body as it was by Descartes, not only is there ‘a dividing in two of being, but an infinite multiplication of it into innumerable ephemeral personalities which are less and less in rapport among themselves.”⁵ Louis A. Sass sees this process exacerbated by the experience of modernity:

The development in the twentieth century of what has seemed a higher sophistication about human consciousness has been accompanied, oddly

³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2004), 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁵ Georges Poulet, quoted in John Vernon, *The Garden and the Map: Schizophrenia in Twentieth Century Literature and Culture* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 16.

enough, by a certain fragmentation and passivization, by a loss of the self's sense of unity and of its capacity for effective or voluntary action. . .

One variant of this tendency might be termed an impersonal subjectivism or a subjectivity without a subject. In this form of dehumanization . . . there is a fragmentation from within that effaces reality and renders the self a mere occasion for the swarming of independent subjective events—sensations, perceptions, memories, and the like. The overwhelming vividness, diversity, and independence of this experiential swarm fragment the self, obliterating its distinctive features—the sense of unity and control.⁶

This “subjectivity without a subject” is similar to the nature of experience we saw constructed by philosophers and psychologists in chapter two. Sass goes on to suggest, like Poulet, that self-division is inherent to that hallmark of humanity—self-consciousness: “To know my own self is, inevitably, to multiply or fractionate myself; it is to create a division between my knowing consciousness and my existence as a perceivable individual who interacts with others or subsists as a body of flesh and blood.”⁷ The concept of the divided self, then, is not merely relevant to individuals who have had a schizoid break from the world and themselves, but is rather an image of the psychic condition of all individuals.

⁶ Louis A. Sass, *Madness and Modernism: Insanity in the Light of Modern Art, Literature, and Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

While the trope of the divided self has a long history in its own right, the modern presentation of the fragmented parts of a self in dramatic form has been closely tied to monodrama since the first conscious theories of the form. Saint-Pol-Roux, who, as noted in chapter two, was the first conscious theorist and practitioner of monodrama, explores the divided self in his 1893 play, *Les Personnages de l'Individu*. As the play's two central characters come on stage, there is little other than their shared goal to indicate an affinity between the two:

Des deux versants de la vallée accourent vers le torrent, par le versant de droite un jeune homme au duvet blond, par le versant de gauche un vieillard à la barbe blanche. Ils se heurtent au milieu du pont. Leur intention est de se jeter à l'eau. Réciproquement se gênant, ils luttent à qui enjambera le premier le parapet.

Le Vieillard et le Jeune Homme: Place,—je suis arrivé le premier.

Le Vieillard: Je prétends me noyer avant qui que ce soit.

Le Jeune Homme: Moi d'abord, vous après.

Le Vieillard: Suis-je pas le plus vieux?

Le Jeune Homme: Suis-je pas le plus jeune?

Le Vieillard: Tête blonde, obéissance aux cheveux blancs!⁸

And yet, despite their antagonism toward one another, the Young Man immediately recognizes an affinity between them, even if that affinity remains

⁸ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de l'Individu*, 21-22 (see chap. 2, n. 21).

limited to their desired suicide: “Jeunes et vieux, ceux qui vont se tuer se ressemblent, ayant déjà presque une tête de mort.”⁹ The Young Man’s gesture of solidarity leads to an extended sparring match in which the two speak in mirrored phrases, the Old Man pining for his lost youth, while the Young Man, beset with ennui, longs to be initiated into the realm of knowledge that comes with age:

Le Jeune Homme: Avenir, vainement je t’appelai!

Le Vieillard: Vainement je te rappelai, passé!

Le Jeune Homme: Vieillard, je suis marri d’ignorer les surprises du monde.

Le Vieillard: Plût à Dieu que je ne les eusse point connues!¹⁰

Despite their continued division, it soon becomes clear that the resemblance between the figures extends well beyond a shared desire to jump off the bridge, a point that is not lost on the Old Man:

Le Vieillard (*saisi*): O lueur . . . Certain soir d’autrefois me revient à la mémoire où, de même âge que toi, je proférai d’identiques paroles . . . En vérité . . . Cela se passait, il y a des hivers et des hivers, sur ce pont . . . oui . . . j’étais accouru, fatigué comme toi d’un bonheur uniforme . . . Là,

⁹ Ibid., 22.

¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

je me heurtai à un vieillard qui voulait se précipiter dans le torrent . . . il venait du côté gauche et j'arrivais du côté droit des Heures . . .

Le Jeune Homme (*troublé*): Une fenêtre s'ouvre, à ces phrases, sur ma vie antérieure . . .

Le Vieillard: Plus je te considère . . . (*lui accaparant les mains; à brûle-pourpoint*) ne serais-tu pas le jeune homme que je narre et qu'autrefois je fus.¹¹

As the two come to realize that they are, in fact, one, they are greeted by a truly fantastic vision: “*Entre le jeune homme et le vieillard, un fantôme se forme graduellement, molécule à molécule . . .*”¹² Bewildered and amazed, the pair demand that the fantastic image explain itself, to which the Phantom replies, “Je suis l’Idée dont vous êtes les apparences.”¹³ Even further awestruck at the Phantom’s words, the Young and Old Man, employing a device typical of modern monodramatic works, repetition, echo the Phantom’s words, proclaiming through gaping mouths, “L’Idée . . . dont nous sommes les apparences.”¹⁴ It is not in disbelief that the Young and Old Man repeat these words, almost trance-like in their wonder, but rather with conviction, almost as though they knew what the Phantom was going to say before he actually said it.

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

¹² Ibid., 32.

¹³ Ibid., 33.

¹⁴ Ibid.

The Phantom goes on to explain that while the Young and Old Man are temporal embodiments of the self, the Phantom is the eternal essence of that self. Part of the pain, the Phantom explains, in living in their respective bodies, is that they want to reach the essence that the Phantom represents, but their temporal existence will not permit them to do so. The only way to achieve that unity, it seems, is death.

The despairing duo of *Les Personnages de l'Individu* is reminiscent of the suffering victim in Søren Kierkegaard's 1849 *The Sickness Unto Death*. Kierkegaard asserts that the sickness—despair—is one of alienation from self. He proposes several progressive forms of despair—the first, “In despair not wanting to be oneself,” Kierkegaard posits as a form of weakness.¹⁵ Within this type of despair, Kierkegaard notes, “there is no infinite consciousness of the self.”¹⁶ And yet, Kierkegaard argues, the despairer:

. . . has a vague conception that there may even be something eternal in the self. But he struggles in vain. The difficulty he has stumbled on requires a complete break with immediacy, and he does not have the self-reflection or the ethical reflection for that. He has no consciousness of a self that is won by infinite abstraction from all externality. This self, naked and abstract, in contrast to the fully clothed self of immediacy, is the first form of the infinite self and the progressive impulse in the entire

¹⁵ Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, trans. Alastair Hannay (London: Penguin Books, 1989), 80.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

process through which a self infinitely takes possession of its actual self along with its difficulties and advantages. . . . So then he despairs, and his despair is: not wanting to be himself.¹⁷

It is in this state that we first meet the Young Man and the Old Man. Both, longing to be something that they cannot, despair in wanting to be rid of themselves. And yet, the appearance of the Phantom would seem to be precisely the moment at which our divided hero arrives at a consciousness of an eternal, abstract self.

Kierkegaard argues that the real horror of despair is its incurability, that the moment despair strikes it remains with the despairer “unto death.” The victim of this despair, paralyzed by a desire not to be oneself (or even to be oneself), is, therefore, never able to truly become oneself. The Young Man and Old Man, therefore, have been perpetually locked in this struggle, with this despair constantly pushing the individual to suicide. That this scene has been played out many times before has already been indicated by the Old Man’s remembrance that he spoke the same words that the Young Man is speaking now. This time, however, is different:

Le Jeune Homme: Une fois, pourtant, ne nous trouverons-nous pas résolu à en finir?

¹⁷ Ibid., 85-86.

Le Vieillard: Cette fois définitive, certaines d’avoir épuisé le cycle des mutuelles épreuves, nos désespérances enlacées se précipiteront dans le torrent suprême.¹⁸

It is just a moment later that the Phantom materializes. And though the Old Man has recalled aspects of this scene before, there is no indication that he has any recollection of the Phantom or what will occur during the remainder of the play.

While the appearance of the Phantom, and the accompanying consciousness of the eternal self, would seem to draw the Young and Old Man away from despair and towards self-fulfillment, the progress is not that simple. And as Kierkegaard posits the next step in the progression of despair as “Despair over the eternal,”¹⁹—a despair resulting from the despairer’s fear that he will not be permitted into heaven—so Saint-Pol Roux places another roadblock in the path of our hero(es). Almost like fairies out of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the Hours of Joy and the Hours of Pain arrive, enchanting the Young Man with visions of the future he yearns to inhabit, and the Old Man with visions of the past he longs to recapture. The two are mesmerized, and as they are tempted by the visions, the Phantom begins to weaken: “Le sort en soit jeté! Sans hégémonie sur les instincts que ma faute a créés, je suis trop faible pour vous dompter.”²⁰

¹⁸ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de l’Individu*, 32.

¹⁹ Kierkegaard, 91.

²⁰ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de l’Individu*, 41.

However, the enchantment of the Hours of Joy and Pain soon fades. “Sitôt venu, sitôt lassé,” remarks the Old Man, and both recognize the futility of wanting to reverse time:

Le Jeune Homme (*criant au vieillard par-dessus le torrent*): O mon demain et mon hier, il a dit vrai notre fantôme . . . je retrouve les lourdes souffrances qui m’ont déjà pesé.

Le Vieillard (*de même*): O mon hier et mon demain, il a dit vrai notre fantôme . . . je retrouve les mélancoliques félicités qui déjà m’exaspérèrent.²¹

Fighting off the Hours of Joy and Pain in an effort to return to the Phantom on the bridge, the Young and Old Man come to embody the third and final stage in Kierkegaard’s progression of despair—“The despair of wanting in despair to be oneself.”²² While Kierkegaard saw the despair of not wanting to be oneself as evidence of weakness, he defines the despair in wanting to be oneself as an act of defiance, an active, rather than passive despair: “Here despair is conscious of itself as an activity; it comes not from the outside in the form of a passivity in the face of external pressure, but directly from the self.”²³ Indeed, while when we first met them, the Young and Old Man sought suicide as a way out of life to the

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Kierkegaard, 98.

²³ Ibid., 99.

peace of death, the Phantom ultimately convinces them that this is an act that embraces life:

Le Fantôme (*illuminé*): C'est la vie, vous dis-je, c'est la vie des vies! . . .

Le Jeune Homme et Le Vieillard (*transfigurés*): La vies des vies! . . .

Le Fantôme: Allons à la Vie!

Il précipite du pont le jeune homme et le vieillard.

Le Jeune Homme et Le Vieillard (*en tombant dans le torrent*): Allons à la Vie!²⁴

With their disappearance into the torrent, the Phantom too disappears—the idea and its appearances have become one again. It is worth noting, ironically, that Kierkegaard offered a single solution to that “sickness unto death” of despair—his famous “leap of faith.” While hardly the type of leap that Kierkegaard advocated, the Young and Old Man certainly do take a certain leap of faith towards a true self, and in so doing, appear to achieve the peace they (or he) had long desired.

Although his theoretical statements on monodrama showed little concern for the duality of man, Nikolai Evreinov, like Saint-Pol-Roux, produced an example of a monodrama of the divided self. While his first experiment in monodrama, *The Representation of Love* (discussed in chapter two), had failed to receive a production in Russia (although Spencer Golub notes that the play was performed in Vienna and Budapest), Evreinov's second attempt, *The Theatre of*

²⁴ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de l'Individu*, 46-47.

the Soul, which he boasted was “the most original play in the history of world theatre,”²⁵ was presented to great acclaim at his own Crooked Mirror Theatre in October 1912.

The play is heavily satirical, but clearly fraught with concern about the nature of selfhood. These two elements are evident from the outset of the piece, as a stodgy professor enters the lip of the stage before the curtain where a blackboard has been set up, and embarks upon a very academic, but also very telling lecture introducing the play:

The Theatre of the Soul [is] a strictly scientific work based on the latest developments in psychophysiology. The researches of Wundt, Freud, Theodule Ribot and others demonstrate that the human soul is not something indivisible, but consists of several *Selves*. Is that clear so far? (*Writes on the board: S₁+S₂+S₃=S_n.*) . . . According to the most recent data, although the world is not the Self, neither is the Self the Self. Perfectly clear? The Self is not the Self, because the Self consists of several Selves. In fact, the Self consists of three Selves. (*He writes on the board: S=x/3.*) Therefore, the true Self, the basic Self—what we used to call the Soul—may be broken down to Self sub one, the rational Self, the thinking Self—what we used to call Reason; Self sub two, the emotional Self, the romantic Self—what we used to call Feeling; and Self sub three, the subconscious Self, the psychical Self—what we used to call the

²⁵ Golub, 42 (see chap 2, n. 44).

Eternal. That's all clear now, isn't it? These three Selves together make up a larger entity, the Self. (*Writes on board: s+s+s=S.*)²⁶

While seeming to mock an appeal to the hard sciences (and particularly, Spencer Golub argues, Stanislavski's penchant for such appeals²⁷), the Professor's address (and indeed the entire play) indicates an undeniable concern with the psychological nature of the individual and of the self.

This soul, the professor argues, "happens to be located in our body near the very spot on our chest that we strike instinctively when we wish to emphasize our good faith or when we say things like 'my soul is filled with joy . . . My heart bleeds for you . . . My soul bleeds with indignation!' and so forth."²⁸ The professor then diagrams this location in the chest, and as he completes the diagram, he takes his leave, and blackboard and curtain are withdrawn to reveal a living image of the diagram—a spinal cord, beating heart, lungs inhaling and exhaling, piano strings for nerves and the three selves on a stage that doubles as a diaphragm (though, luckily for the actors, it does not expand and contract). As the set, designed by Evreinov and Mikhail Bobyshev, actually appeared on stage (see Figure 1), the heart and lungs were to move in rhythm with the accompanying music, governed by the intensity of the action onstage. According to Spencer Golub, "Evreinov records that when the curtain went up revealing the

²⁶ Nikolai Evreinov, *The Theatre of the Soul*, 25 (see chap. 3, n. 26).

²⁷ Golub, 45.

²⁸ Evreinov, *Theatre of the Soul*, 25.

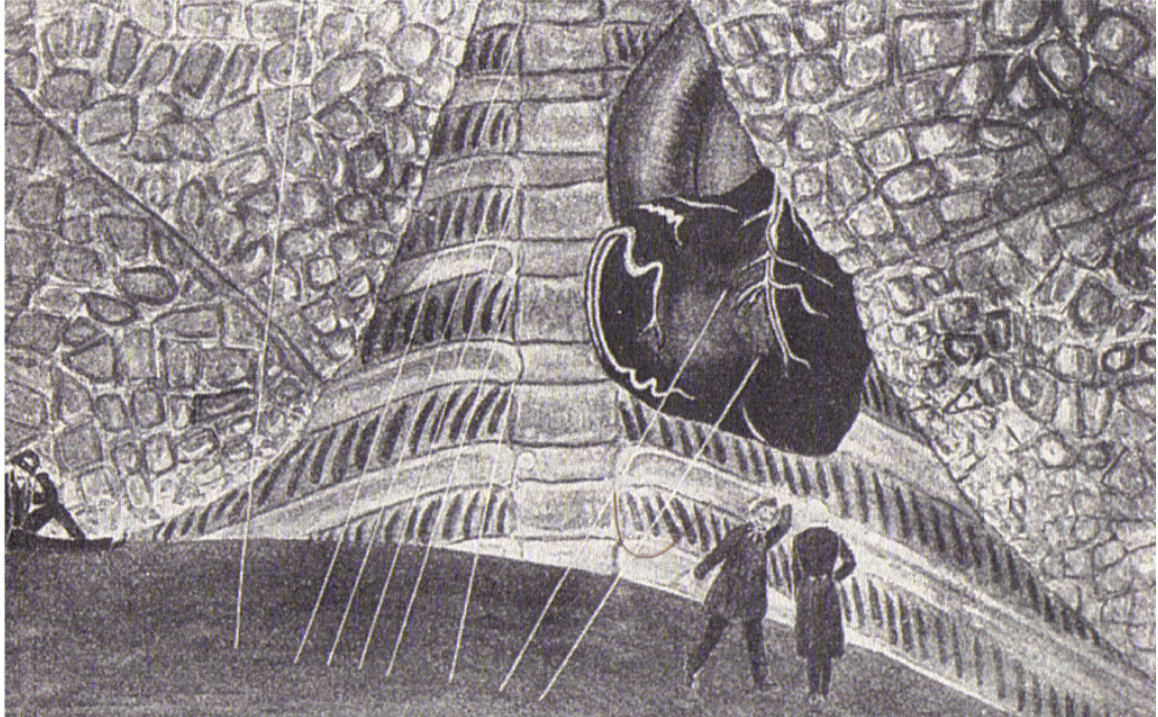


Figure 1. Stage design for *The Theatre of the Soul*, Mikhail Bobyshev and Nikolai Evreinov. Image printed in *Teatr i iskusstvo* 43 (1912), 829, reprinted in *Laboratory of Dreams: The Russian Avant-Garde and Cultural Experiment*, ed. John E. Bowlt and Olga Matich (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 94.

set, a lady in the audience fainted and had to be carried out of the auditorium.”²⁹

And while the complexity of the set is notable in and of itself, it is worth considering the fact that while Saint-Pol-Roux’s drama takes place in a seemingly external (if somewhat surreal) landscape, Evreinov’s reflects the interiority that is so central to the drama. We might have expected the locale of that interiority to be the brain and not the chest, but Evreinov’s play is *The Theatre of the Soul*, not the Theatre of the Mind.

The action of the play is fairly simple. As the curtain rises, S₃, the subconscious, is asleep in the corner, where he will remain for the length of the play, while the rational and emotional selves command the breadth of the stage.

²⁹ Golub, 42.

As in *Les Personnages de l'Individu*, the two immediately establish themselves as opposites:

S₂: I'm speaking the honest truth . . . Whose fault is it he drinks, do you suppose?

S₁: You're the one demanding he drink more!

S₂: Sure, I demand it; so you and your boredom won't drive him to hang himself.

S₁: Pure rubbish . . . I think it's just the other way around, all his unhappiness and misfortunes are because you, the emotional Self, are such a debauched, lost soul! Don't you ever have the faintest interest, well, let's say, in intellectual pursuits, in the noble work of the mind, aren't you ever visited by any higher, moral considerations?

S₂: You make me sick! You and your damned morality, you and your miserable catechism!

S₁: I despise you, emotional Self! . . .

S₂: And I despise you, rational self!³⁰

As the two stake out their positions, a telephone is used as the means of communication with the brain and motor functions, as the emotional Self demands that the Self have another drink every few lines, and the rational Self calls for valerian drops.

³⁰ Evreinov, *Theatre of the Soul*, 26-27.

Having established the basic premise, Evreinov quickly moves to the central conflict of the play. The rational Self chides the emotional Self for raising the prospect of abandoning their wife and child for a cabaret singer. In response, the emotional Self leads in his image of the singer, an alluring, seductive beauty, who dances in time to the gorgeous melody she sings in French (leading the emotional Self to ask of the rational, “Try to pick up a little French, will you, I really need it.”³¹). The emotional Self now lost in joyful reverie, the seductress leaves the stage, and the rational Self ushers in his picture of the singer, a debauched strumpet, from whom he removes a wig (revealing a bald head), false breasts, and finally, false teeth. He orders her to sing, which, as an instrument of his imagination, she of course does, and, the stage directions note, “*She sings off-key, gumming the words and prancing around, with all the grace of some old nag sent off to the glue factory.*”³² In contrast to this image of decay, the rational Self brings in the wife, a veritable *Madonna and Child* as she cradles their baby in her arms, and sings a lullaby, along with the praises of the father, to the sleeping child. The emotional Self is unimpressed: “That’s not it at all . . . It’s a crude idealization . . .,”³³ and counters with his own image of the wife, a stereotypical mundane nag: “*a sharp-tongued petty bourgeoisie with a slovenly chignon and*

³¹ Ibid., 28.

³² Ibid., 29.

³³ Ibid.

*dressed in a shabby dressing gown covered with coffee stains,*³⁴ who goes on to berate the Self as a drunken, lazy atheist.

The emotional Self leads back the ideal image of the singer, and the rational counters with the ideal wife. Here, the imagination truly takes on a life of its own, as the two mental images battle it out, quickly descending into a comical catfight that ends in the defeat of the wife, who runs off crying. The rational Self moves to defend his wife, attacking the singer, who is quickly defended by the emotional Self, who strangles the rational Self to death, an act that causes the heart to stop for a moment, and several nerves to break. The emotional Self, feeling victorious, and moving to claim his prize, is quickly returned to reality, as the Songstress Image, likely repeating a moment that occurred in the lived experience of the Self, dismisses the emotional Self: “First the money, then the love . . . And you don’t smell much like money to me . . . Where are you going to get any? . . . No, no, I’m not yours . . . I was just teasing.”³⁵ Distraught at the loss of his love, and no longer checked by the calm reason of the rational Self, the emotional self, predictably, acts rather impulsively:

S₂ (*unable to bear it any longer, rushes to the telephone*): Oh please . . . quick . . . It’s all over now . . . I’m exhausted . . . The pistol’s in the right back pocket . . . Hurry! . . . Hurry! . . . I can’t bear it any longer . . . Don’t miss! . . . Between the third and fourth ribs! . . . Go on, go on! . . . What are you afraid of? . . . It’s just an instant. Quick! . . . (*A pause. S₃ awakes*

³⁴ Ibid., 29-30.

³⁵ Ibid., 31.

*and uneasily looks around as if sensing impending disaster. A shot rings out, very loud, as if from a cannon, and the roar reverberates through the soul. An enormous, gaping hole appears in the heart, out of which roll red ribbons. Darkness descends. S₂ falls convulsively to the floor beneath the heart, drowning in a sea of red ribbons. The heart stops. The lungs cease breathing.*³⁶

Finally, the subconscious takes its place in the play, as a conductor enters, informing the subconscious that it is time to get off, to disembark for “Newville,” which presumably refers to heaven, but is left vague enough to conform to any idea of an afterlife.

The Theatre of the Soul bears significant similarities to *Les Personnages de l'Individu*. The central plot line of the fragmentation of the self, resulting ultimately in the suicide of the protagonist, sets the template, as we shall see, for a surprising number of later dramas. And though it is unlikely that Evreinov was aware of Saint-Pol-Roux's play, the kinship between these works indicates the extent to which these two early theorists of monodrama were intellectually and artistically involved in the same quest, one that went beyond even the well-known affinities between French and Russian symbolism.

At the same time, the differences between these plays are just as striking as their similarities. We have already seen that while Saint-Pol-Roux constructs an elaborate, and seemingly exteriorized landscape for his interior drama, *The Theatre of the Soul* is clearly just that, an interior drama taking place inside a

³⁶ Ibid.

painstakingly constructed image of the body. But this is hardly the only difference between the plays.

Just as the depiction of place serves to differentiate these plays, the depiction of time is also radically different. Before the Young and Old Man of *Les Personnages de l'Individu* enter the scene, and again after they have leapt from the bridge, the Torrent mournfully cries: “Mon suaire de larmes/ Vêt d'éternelle paix,/ Pèlerins des alarmes/ Qu'endolorit le faix,/ Mon suaire de larmes/ Vêt d'éternelle paix.”³⁷ The eternity that is invoked in Saint-Pol-Roux's prologue and epilogue stands in sharp contrast to *The Theatre of the Soul*, the action of which, “takes place in the Soul within the space of thirty seconds.”³⁸ Both plays therefore reflect a manipulation of time (for Saint-Pol-Roux, the condensation of eternity into twenty-six pages, for Evreinov, the expansion of thirty seconds into six pages that are likely to take fifteen to twenty minutes in performance) that is very much in keeping with Bergson's idea that time can only be understood through the subjective experience of the individual.

Time stands as a difference between these plays not only in the gap between thirty seconds and eternity, but also in the nature of the depiction of the fragmented selves that stand at the center of these works. Saint-Pol-Roux's characters are defined by their temporality (old vs. young), while Evreinov's Selves are aspects of personality. In a sense, this divergent approach to the nature of the division of the self remains tied in with the eternity vs. thirty seconds

³⁷ Saint-Pol-Roux, *Les Personnages de l'Individu*, 21, 47.

³⁸ Evreinov, *Theatre of the Soul*, 24.

problem, in that the Young Man and Old Man could only coexist in the eternal, whereas the problem of temperament that divides the rational Self from the emotional Self can easily be present at any given moment in time.

Indeed, the issue of temporality is central in ascertaining an important conceptual difference between these plays. The conflict between the Young Man and the Old Man is, essentially, universal. The Young Man's lament is that of any young man, filled with ennui, longing for knowledge of the world, and the Old Man's longing for youth is archetypal. At no point does either character lay claim to a suffering that is unique to a specific situation located in time, place, or individual circumstance. In effect, *Les Personnages de l'Individu* purports to show not the moment of death of one individual, but rather the eternal struggle of any and all potential suicides. By contrast, the protagonist of *The Theatre of the Soul*, although nameless (Martin Esslin identifies him as Ivanov,³⁹ but this name appears nowhere in Christopher Collins's English translation, nor in any other discussion of the play), is specific—we know his occupation (bookkeeper), his hobbies (drinking, philosophy, philandering), and his religious beliefs (atheist), and we are privy to his perceptions of both his wife and lover. Although the conflict that Evreinov depicts is a general human dilemma, in *The Theatre of the Soul* we witness the dissolution of a single, specific soul.

The split between the eternity and universality of *Les Personnages de l'Individu* and the immediate temporality and specificity of *The Theatre of the Soul* may help to explain one final difference between the two works. Although

³⁹ Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 44.

both plays end in the suicide of the protagonist, Saint-Pol-Roux gives his play what can paradoxically be called a happy ending, as his divided self reunites in an Hegelian synthesis, while Evreinov suggests that the gulf between the rational Self and the emotional Self is an irreconcilable division. And while the eternal Self (S₃) might seem to play a role similar to that of the Phantom, suggesting a belief in a true lasting whole beneath the fragmented self, the descent to suicide in *The Theatre of the Soul* remains one of acrimony and violence, in clear opposition to the optimistic (if perhaps darkly so) “éternelle paix” offered by the protagonist’s leap towards “la Vie des Vies.”

Before I leave Evreinov, it is worth noting that the specificity of *The Theatre of the Soul* has led Spencer Golub to speculate that the actual soul in question in the play is that of Evreinov himself: “The wife’s image of the husband suggests Evreinov himself, the atheist, the philosopher and, at times, the excessive drinker. . . . Evreinov, like the unseen hero of his play, was infatuated with a female *artiste* who could very well have been the inspiration for the songstress, namely Isadora Duncan.”⁴⁰ Although such evidence cannot be taken as conclusive proof, the concept of Evreinov as the hero of the play is certainly in keeping with Evreinov’s idea that all art is essentially the subjective vision of the author. It also reflects the continued influence of Sologub. In *The Representation of Love*, Evreinov included the author-narrator (proposed by Sologub in “The

⁴⁰ Golub, 43. Duncan, it should be remembered, was the one who brought Craig and Stanislavski together, resulting in Craig’s monodramatic *Hamlet* at MKhAT.

Theatre of a Single Will”) as a character-narrator; Evreinov now takes the final step, fully integrating the author figure within the world of the play.

The connection between the trope of the divided self and monodrama, made explicit in these two works by the two primary early theorists of modern monodrama—Saint-Pol-Roux and Nikolai Evreinov—raises two fundamental issues. First, we must ask whether the presentation of a divided self in drama is necessarily monodramatic. At the very least, I would argue, the general idea of presenting a divided self onstage does tend towards monodrama, even if the play itself need not be wholly monodramatic. Carl Jung, offering his interpretation of the nature of dreams posited “all the figures in the dream as personified features of the dreamer’s own personality.”⁴¹ In essence, the plays of the divided self attempt, as Jung suggested of the dream state, to present “a *spontaneous self-portrayal, in symbolic form, of the actual situation in the unconscious.*”⁴² While Jung’s observation refers only to the dream state, Bergson’s idea of the continuity of psychical experience in duration suggests both the importance and “reality” of the dream to the dreamer, as well as the possibility that these dream visions are occurring within us constantly, and are merely foregrounded in the dream, rather than being submerged under the demands of waking reality. From this perspective, we can see in the divided-self plays a reflection of the interior experience of existence, precisely what monodrama purports to represent.

⁴¹ Jung, 52.

⁴² Jung, 49. [Italics are Jung’s.]

Second, after having examined these early divided-self monodramas I should like now to discuss how this model might be applied to other works. In the pages that follow, I examine a series of works from the twentieth century as divided-self monodramas. Using their resemblance to *Les Personnages de l'Individu* and *The Theatre of the Soul* both in structure and content, as well as the writings of critics who have taken a similar tack, I demonstrate how these plays fit into the tradition of divided-self monodrama and how the concept can be used as a tool for the interpretation of other dramas.

While Evreinov can only by an interpretive hypothesis be called the central figure of *The Theatre of the Soul*, the protagonist of *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* is explicitly Mayakovsky himself. On the surface, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* seems to bear little resemblance to the work of Saint-Pol-Roux or Evreinov. A dominant central self, so clearly lacking in either of the two earlier plays, is present here. Furthermore, nowhere in the text of Mayakovsky's play is there a dialectical conflict as there is in the plays by Saint-Pol-Roux and Evreinov—either of age or personality. And yet, the play has often been interpreted as a monodrama by critics both contemporary to the work and in recent years.

Instead of characters divided by age or temperament, Mayakovsky's characters (such as the Man with One Eye and One Leg, Man with One Ear, Man without a Head, etc . . .) are defined largely by their physicality. That the physical descriptions of these characters never overlap (i.e., there are not three "Man with

One Eye”s) might seem to suggest a fragmentation of the self, although this is somewhat problematized by the fact that besides Mayakovsky, there are other, seemingly whole characters (The Conventional Young Man, The Old Man with Scrawny Black Cats), as well as female characters (The Enormous Woman, described as “his lady friend,”⁴³ as well as three women with various sized tears). The action of the play, which is largely static rather than dynamic, essentially consists of Mayakovsky’s monologue of lament, supplemented by the comments of the other characters. There is little of the antagonism between the protagonist and the secondary characters that we saw in the earlier plays of the genre, as the characters mostly build upon, rather than objecting to, each other’s statements.

Indeed, as Katherine Lahti has noted, “These repeated stories of suffering give each of the characters a striking resemblance to Mayakovsky, both the suffering character in this play and the tortured persona of the Futurist poet.”⁴⁴ Victor Shklovsky, Lahti adds, “even ventured to call the other characters ‘Mayakovskys.’”⁴⁵ Such an idea is quite similar to the approach Robert Payne takes in the introduction to the collection in which the play appears in English translation:

⁴³ Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy in Mayakovsky: Plays*, trans. Guy Daniels (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 20.

⁴⁴ Katherine Lahti, “*Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Dithyramb*,” *The Slavic and East European Journal* 40, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 256.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Most of the characters, even those who offer tribute to Mayakovsky, were Mayakovsky. The Man Without a Head, the Man with One Ear, the Man with One Eye and One Leg, the Man with Two Kisses, the Man with a Long Drawn-out Face, the Conventional Young Man, and the Old Man with Scrawny Black Cats were all Mayakovsky in his various manifestations, and there is some question whether The Enormous Woman, fifteen to twenty feet tall, was not a projection of the Mayakovsky who in his final appearance wished he had breasts large enough to feed everyone. Even the Woman with a Tiny Tear, the Woman with a Tear, and the Woman with a Great Big Tear may be regarded as projections of Mayakovsky's devouring self-pity.⁴⁶

This monodramatic interpretation was apparently considered from the first appearance of the play, as the critic, dramaturg, and director Piotr Yartsev, describing the piece in his December 7, 1913 review of the play for the newspaper *Rech*, "maintained that Mayakovsky's tragedy emerged on stage as a 'monodrama' in which only the poet himself was 'a real person,' and the other *dramatis personae* were the products of his imagination."⁴⁷ Benedict Livshits, twenty years later, would repeat and expand upon Yartsev's interpretation in his memoir of the Cubo-Futurist era, *Polutoraglazi strelets (The One-and-a-Half-*

⁴⁶ Robert Payne, Introduction to *Mayakovsky: Plays* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 3-4.

⁴⁷ Konstantin Rudnitsky, *Russian and Soviet Theatre* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1988), 13.

Eyed Archer).⁴⁸ The monodramatic interpretation is given added weight by Laurence Senelick's assertion that Mayakovsky attended Edward Gordon Craig's monodramatic 1912 production of *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. According to his companions that evening, Senelick claims, "it was at this performance that the idea for his own imagistic tragedy *Vladimir Mayakovsky* took shape."⁴⁹ In this light, *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* takes on the characteristics of a hybrid of the divided-self monodrama and the multiple-character monodramas we will examine in chapter five—a fragmented self experiencing the world through a subjective lens with people in that outside world constructed through a complex interaction of their own traits and the protagonist's interpretation of and projections upon them.

The identification of the play as monodrama is not, however, unanimous. Katherine Lahti, in her essay "*Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Dithyramb*," strongly rejects the monodramatic interpretation of the play, a rejection that rests essentially on one fundamental issue:

There is strong momentum in Mayakovsky criticism that demands one ascribe the monodrama genre to his first play. Yet no one has acknowledged the simple fact that problematizes this reading: different perceptions of various people made by the same person (the subjective basis of Evreinov's original theory of monodrama) and different versions

⁴⁸ Lahti, 157.

⁴⁹ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 177 (see chap. 2, n. 59).

of the same person (the subjective basis of Mayakovsky's play) are two different phenomena.⁵⁰

Certainly, Lahti makes an important point. Evreinov's "Introduction to Monodrama" did indeed posit monodrama as a genre that traces an individual character's subjective reactions to and interactions with the world around him, and makes no mention of a divided self as a category of monodrama. I have already noted earlier that Evreinov's theory does stand in some contrast to his practice. But as we have just seen, in his practice, Evreinov, as evidenced by *The Theatre of the Soul*, which he labeled "A One-Act Monodrama with Prologue,"⁵¹ clearly did see the interior experience of a fragmented self as falling under the rubric of monodrama.

Lahti opposes the interpretation of *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy* as monodrama by suggesting that the play most closely approximates Friedrich Nietzsche's interpretation of the Greek dithyramb. Lahti goes on to cite, as I have earlier, Nietzsche's statement on the lyric poet: "The images of the *lyrist* are nothing but *his very* self and, as it were, only different projections of himself, so he, as the moving center of this world, may say 'I': of course, this self is not the same as that of the waking, empirically real man, but the only truly existent and eternal self resting at the basis of things, through whose images the lyric genius

⁵⁰ Lahti, 258.

⁵¹ Evreinov, *Theatre of the Soul*, 21.

sees this very basis.”⁵² Lahti suggests that this idea is central to Mayakovsky’s play:

It was common in the Russian histories of the dithyramb that were current at this time to read the claim that originally poets lead them. This offers an explanation for why the character Mayakovsky makes so much of the fact that he is the poet in this play. . . . Rather than merely being a coincidence with the performer’s identity in real life, ‘poet’ defines his place in the dithyramb *vis-à-vis* the other characters. He is saying he is *the* poet, not *a* poet.⁵³

Lahti may well be right that the play resembles a dithyramb in accordance with Nietzsche’s concept, but this in no way precludes it from being a monodrama. If anything, the idea of Mayakovsky as Nietzschean lyrist is perfectly in line with the Picard/Solugub/Evreinov pattern of author-centered monodrama.

In his final speech in Act II, Vladimir Mayakovsky, the character, cries, “I’ll go out through the city,/ leaving/ shred after shred of my tattered soul/ on the spears of houses.”⁵⁴ He had, it seems, already left some shreds of his tattered soul on paper and stage.

⁵² Nietzsche, 50, (see chap. 2, n. 59). [Italics are Nietzsche’s.]

⁵³ Lahti, 260.

⁵⁴ Mayakovsky, 36.

If Mayakovsky's play with its seeming exteriority ("*The stage represents a city with its spider web of streets.*"⁵⁵) resembles in some way *Les Personnages de l'Individu, Mrs. Laneen*, by Mayakovsky's fellow Futurist, Velimir Khlebnikov, returns us to a world of the interior. Written in the same year as *Vladimir Mayakovsky: A Tragedy*, 1913, *Mrs. Laneen* bears some marked similarities to Mayakovsky's play, but also some obvious contrasts. While Mayakovsky's characters are differentiated by physicality, Khlebnikov's not only lack any semblance of physicality, but are in fact thirteen different internal aspects of a self—Voice of Sight, Voice of Hearing, Voice of Reason, Voice of Thought, etc . . .

The action of the play takes place "*during two days in Mrs. Laneen's life, a week apart,*" at "*twilight.*"⁵⁶ These indications seem, however, somewhat arbitrary, considering the fact that time is never really an issue in the play, and the scene is to be played out, according to the stage directions, "*in front of a blank wall.*"⁵⁷ This seeming disconnect may be explained by the central idea of the play, which is that all of the faculties that are the characters of the play are reporting back to the central self on the information that they receive (or, in the case of characters such as the Voice of Reason and the Voice of Thought, that they produce). The twilight Khlebnikov cites in the stage direction, therefore,

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁶ Velimir Khlebnikov, *Mrs. Laneen*, in *Collected Works of Velimir Khlebnikov, Volume II: Prose, Plays, and Supersagas*, ed. Ronald Vroon, trans. Paul Schmidt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 237.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

could only be visible on stage by privileging one sense (sight) over the others. This would seriously hamper the conceit of Khlebnikov's play.

The plot of *Mrs. Laneen* focuses on the failing health of the title character, although this is merely hinted at in the first act:

Voice of Sight: Yes, someone is coming closer. But he walks very slowly.

Voice of Recollection: It's Doctor Loos. He's been here before, it wasn't too long ago.

Voice of Sight: He's dressed in black from head to foot. And his hat is pulled way down, you can barely see his laughing blue eyes. . . . He's smiling, his lips look as if they are saying something.

Voice of Hearing: He's saying: "Hello Mrs. Laneen." He's also saying: "Nice weather we're having today, isn't it?" . . . He's asking it again. He's asking: "How do you feel?"

Voice of Reason: Say something to him. Say: "I feel fine." . . .

Voice of Hearing: He's saying: "I hope"

Voice of Reason: Don't listen to what he says. He'll be saying goodbye in just a minute. He'll be leaving soon.⁵⁸

There seems to be no imminent danger in this rejection of the doctor, and indeed, the scene merely seems to reconfirm the self-obsessed nature of both the play and

⁵⁸ Ibid., 238.

of Mrs. Laneen, as the first act ends with the Voice of Will stating, “I won’t say a word. I am keeping my distance from people.”⁵⁹

In the second act, the visit from the doctor that earlier seemed so innocuous takes on a very different cast, as something is clearly very wrong with Mrs. Laneen:

Voice of Attention: They went away. They changed direction. Now they’re coming back.

Voice of Reason: This way. That means me. They’re coming for me. . . .

Voice of Hearing: Here’s what they’re saying: “You’re a sick woman. Please come with us. It’s doctor’s orders.”

Voice of Will: No.

Voice of Consciousness: I won’t say a word.

Voice of Sight: They’re all around me. . . .

Voice of Hearing: They’re saying: “Hold her head! Take her by the shoulders! Got her? Let’s go!”

Voice of Consciousness: They are carrying her away. It’s all over. Worldwide evil.

Voice of Hearing: I can hear someone saying: “Haven’t they gotten that patient moved yet?” “Not yet.”

Voice of Consciousness: Everything’s dead. Everything’s dying.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Ibid., 239.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 240-241.

With this, the play ends. Though not a suicide (unless we wish to call self-neglect suicide), we seem once again to witness here the fragmentation of the self before death. It is interesting to note that the Voice of Consciousness shifts in these final lines from the first person “I” to the third person “her,” indicating an alienation of consciousness from the physicality of the body in the moment before death.

Mrs. Laneen succeeds in allowing the spectator to share, moment by moment, the experience of the protagonist; we quite literally receive every piece of sensory and conscious information that Mrs. Laneen receives. However, this identification with the protagonist is dependent upon the imagination of the spectator, who must mentally process the data reported by the different faculties of the characters. In this way, Khlebnikov’s play takes us back to Edmond Picard’s vision of monodrama—a play with no sets, props, or action, but rather a scene that takes place in the imagination of the spectator. The difference is, of course, that instead of a solitary author/narrator, we now receive the story directly from the “senses” of the protagonist.

Steeped in the philosophy of existentialism and focused on the experience of consciousness, the Theatre of the Absurd was a natural breeding ground for divided-self monodrama. Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame*, open to many interpretations, lends itself quite readily to a monodramatic reading. In *The Theatre of the Absurd*, Martin Esslin draws a direct link between *Endgame* and Evreinov’s *Theatre of the Soul*:

While it is unlikely that Beckett knew this old and long-forgotten Russian play, the parallels are very striking. . . . The suggestion that *Endgame* may also be a monodrama has much to be said for it. The enclosed space with the two tiny windows through which Clov observes the outside world; the dustbins that hold the suppressed and despised parents, and whose lids Clov is ordered to press down when they become obnoxious; Hamm, blind and emotional; Clov, performing the function of the senses for him—all these might well represent different aspects of a single personality, repressed memories in the subconscious mind, the emotional and the intellectual selves.⁶¹

And while Esslin's categorization seems to depend primarily on the play's similarity to *The Theatre of the Soul* (along with a close reading of *Endgame* itself) rather than an overview of the genre of the divided-self monodrama, the open-ended question with which Esslin ends his examination of *Endgame* as monodrama is a telling one: "Is *Endgame* a monodrama depicting the dissolution of a personality in the hour of death?"⁶² In touching upon the onset of death, a recurrent theme in the divided-self monodramas, Esslin places Beckett in the ongoing tradition.

⁶¹ Esslin, 44.

⁶² Ibid.

Other critics have taken up Esslin's perspective on the play. Hugh Kenner, focusing on the centrality of the set as indication of the play's psychological bent, notes:

When the curtain rises on *Endgame*, sheets drape all visible objects as in a furniture warehouse. Clov's first act is to uncurtain the two high windows and inspect the universe; his second is to remove the sheets and fold them carefully over his arm, disclosing two ash cans and a figure in an armchair. This is so plainly a metaphor for waking up that we fancy the stage, with its high peepholes, to be the inside of an immense skull.⁶³

This "great skull-like setting," Kenner continues, "suggests a solipsist's universe."⁶⁴ Echoing this perspective is Andrew Parkin, who notes, "*Endgame* has a claustrophobic set with its two small windows, curtains drawn. It suggests Hamm's skull with its blind eyes. . . . Before the play can start, it is necessary to uncover Hamm and the ashbins to which his parents (like many of the old nowadays) are confined. This suggests the action within-the-head of monodrama."⁶⁵ The physicality of the setting and what it represents is matched by the play's ethos, in which, Theodor Adorno, invoking a familiar term,

⁶³ Hugh Kenner, "Life in the Box," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 41.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁵ Andrew Parkin, "Monologue into Monodrama: Aspects of Samuel Beckett's Plays" *Éire-Ireland* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1974): 35.

suggests, “Beckett . . . uses thoughts *sans phrases* as phrases, as those material components of the *monologue intérieur* which mind itself has become.”⁶⁶ What we see at work in the play, Adorno argues, is the “dissociation of the unity of consciousness into disparate elements—nonidentity. As soon as the subject is no longer self-identical, no longer a closed structure of meaning, the line of demarcation with the exterior becomes blurred, and the situations of inwardness become at the same time physical ones.”⁶⁷ Adorno here posits a psychology of the schizoid in which the fragmented self objectifies the varied aspects of the self, as well as its relation to the world around it. Such an idea is compatible with Richard Gilman’s reading of the play:

If Hamm and Clov do not represent or incarnate any types discoverable in the social world, they are not even discrete personalities, except as they possess a sort of provisional and tactical individuation as a source of dialogue and therefore of dramatic propulsion. For many things about the play suggest that there is really only one consciousness or locus of being in the room, a consciousness akin to that of the ‘narrator’ of [Beckett’s] novels, so that it is more than plausible to take the room or stage as the

⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*,” in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett’s Endgame*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 11.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

chamber of the mind and the figures in it as the mind's inventions, the cast of characters of its theater.⁶⁸

As Gilman suggests, in *Endgame*, we truly witness a performance on the mind's stage.

While Esslin's interpretation of the metaphoric roles of the characters of the play provides a useful starting point, I would suggest that rather than representing the intellectual and emotional selves (which would render the play's schema of the division of self essentially identical to that of *The Theatre of the Soul*), Hamm and Clov might best be seen as mind and body. Hamm, then, represents the higher functions and intellect, Clov, the ambulatory and practical aspects of the bodily functions. Nagg and Nell, essentially as in Esslin's model, represent the detritus of parental influence.

In order to understand the nature of *Endgame* as a monodrama, a comparison with *Waiting for Godot* may prove useful, revealing significant differences in the interdependence of the characters. Early in *Godot*, as Vladimir and Estragon struggle to pass the time, they come upon the idea of hanging themselves, a prospect that fills them with excitement. And yet, the question of the strength of the branch from which they are to hang renders their plan fatally flawed, as Estragon notes: "Gogo light—bough not break—Gogo dead. Didi

⁶⁸ Richard Gilman, "Beckett," in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Samuel Beckett's Endgame*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988), 86.

heavy—bough break—Didi alone.”⁶⁹ Despite their constant bickering in the play, the pair have a clear affection for one another that leaves them in dread of one having to live after the other’s death. And although Hamm and Clov have similar arguments and continually threaten each other with abandonment, the prospect of one dying while the other remains alive is several times dismissed as impossible, and it is intimated that the death of one will inevitably mean the death of the other:

Hamm: I’ll give you nothing more to eat.

Clov: Then we’ll die.

Hamm: I’ll give you just enough to keep you from dying. You’ll be hungry all the time.

Clov: Then we won’t die. (5-6)

Clov: If I could kill him I’d die happy. (27)

Clov: Then I’ll leave you.

Hamm: You can’t leave us.

Clov: Then I won’t leave you.

Hamm: Why don’t you finish us? . . .

Clov: I couldn’t finish you. (37)

⁶⁹ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 13.

Hamm: Gone from me you'd be dead.

Clov: And vice versa. (70)⁷⁰

While both sets of characters, Vladimir and Estragon, and Hamm and Clov, display similar interdependence, Hamm and Clov show a level of indivisibility far in excess of Beckett's earlier duo. Indeed, as we reach the end of the play, as Hamm goes into his final long monologue, after finally telling Clov, "It's the end, Clov, we've come to the end. I don't need you anymore," Clov stands "*dressed for the road . . . his eyes fixed on Hamm, till the end.*"⁷¹ The end, at least of the play, comes as Hamm eyes his old handkerchief, and finally: "*He covers his face with handkerchief, lowers his arms to armrests, remains motionless. . . . Brief tableau.*"⁷² Clov is still here for this tableau, but like S₃, leaving for "Newville" at the end of *Theatre of the Soul*, he is likely awaiting the final expiration of Hamm to finally abandon the self. Adorno, once again invoking the unity of Hamm and Clov, remarked, "Even the outlines of Hamm and Clov are one line; they are denied the individuation of a tidily independent monad. They cannot live without

⁷⁰ Samuel Beckett, *Endgame* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 79, 82.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 84.

each other.”⁷³ It might also be said that Hamm and Clov, the mind and body of a single individual, cannot die without each other.

Often grouped together with Beckett as an Absurdist, Sławomir Mrożek presents the possibility of monodrama as political theatre in his 1961 play, *Striptease*. As with the numbered selves of *Theatre of the Soul*, the divided halves of Mrożek’s protagonist are identified only as Mr. I and Mr. II. But while Evreinov’s characters are quite clearly differentiated from the opening lines of the play, Mrożek goes to great length to stress the similarities of these two characters. This resemblance is, at first, physical, as indicated by the opening stage directions:

*The door on stage left opens and MR. I comes rushing in. He is middle-aged, neatly but conventionally dressed, and carries a briefcase. . . . A few moments later MR. II rushes in through the door on stage right. He looks like an exact replica of Mr. I and also carries a briefcase.*⁷⁴

We soon learn that the similarities between the two go well beyond the physical. As the dialogue begins, the two men, in tandem, complete a single thought:

Mr. I: Extraordinary!

⁷³ Adorno, 34.

⁷⁴ Sławomir Mrożek, *Striptease*, trans. Lola Gruenthal, in *The Mrożek Reader*, ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 139.

Mr. II: Incredible!

Mr. I: I was walking along as usual . . .

Mr. II: Not a care in the world . . .

Mr. I: When suddenly . . .

Mr. II: Like a bolt of lightning from the sky . . .⁷⁵

The remarkable extent to which the two men seem to share thoughts is matched by what appear to be identical actions:

Mr. I: I was simply walking, or perhaps, rather, hurrying along . . .

Mr. II: Yes, that's right! You were certainly heading for a particular destination.

Mr. I: How do you know?

Mr. II: It's obvious. I was walking too, or rather, hurrying along, heading for my destination.

Mr. I: You took the words right out of my mouth. As I said, I was heading for this destination when suddenly . . .

Mr. II: And remember, this was a destination that you yourself had chosen.

Mr. I: Exactly! And with conscious intent, mind you, with full conscious intent . . .

Mr. II: Obeying the dictates of your conscience, motivated by faith and reason.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Mr. I: You're reading my very thoughts.⁷⁶

The coincidence between these characters is reinforced later in the play when, after being forced to strip (thus the play's title) by the mysterious large Hand that appears to be their captor, the two men are wearing the exact same "striped, knee-length underpants."⁷⁷ While these similarities might be seen as a commentary on the conformity demanded by the totalitarian communism of Mrozek's Poland, the suggestion that the two men might in fact be one can hardly be ignored.

While the appearance, and even the thoughts, of Mr. I and Mr. II seem identical, as they become increasingly aware of their imprisonment, their responses are starkly divergent. Mr. II embarks upon a course of action, while Mr. I insists upon maintaining his "inner freedom":

Mr. I: Our main task now is to preserve our calm and our personal dignity. Thus, it would seem to me, we still remain in control of the situation. Basically, our freedom is in no way limited.

Mr. II: You call this freedom, our sitting here?

Mr. I: But we can walk out at any moment . . . the doors are open.

Mr. II: Then let's go! We've wasted too much time anyway. . . .

Mr. I: Right now?

Mr. II: Are you afraid?

Mr. I: Not at all.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 139-140.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 150-151.

Mr. II: First you insist on preserving your personal dignity by asserting your freedom, and then you don't even want to leave while there is still time.

Mr. I: If I left right now I would limit the idea of freedom.

Mr. II: What do you mean?

Mr. I: It's quite obvious. What is freedom? It is the capacity of making a choice. As long as I am sitting here, knowing that I can walk out of this door, I am free. But as soon as I get up and walk out, I have already made my choice, I have limited the possible courses of action, I have lost my freedom. I become the slave of my own locomotion. . . . Unlimited freedom, that is my answer to these strange happenings.⁷⁸

Of course, as Mr. II moves to act, these seemingly "free" choices become increasingly limited. As he gets up to leave, the doors slam shut. As he begins to slam his shoe on the wall in hope of a response, the mysterious Hand makes its first appearance, demanding the shoes (along with the belts and suspenders) of both men, initiating the play's striptease. After the men are finally left with nothing but their underwear, Mr. I's frustration finally boils over:

Mr. I: It was you who got us both into this predicament . . . You yourself have brought this down on your head.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 144-145.

Mr. II: An anatomical inaccuracy! Besides, let me repeat this once more: We don't know whether the removal of our clothes was provoked by my action or whether it was part of a predetermined plan.⁷⁹

Just what does Mr. II mean by the exclamation, "An anatomical inaccuracy"? No explanation is offered in the text. Could it be that he is intimating that there is really only one head among the two of them to bring things down upon? In either case, we must agree with Mr. II that there is no way of knowing whether the Hand's actions were in answer to Mr. II's active response to captivity, or if these events would have occurred anyway.

We see a hint of an affinity with Bergsonian philosophy as the characters begin to ponder the broader consequences of their situation:

Mr. II: So far the Hand has limited only our freedom of movement in space. But what assurance is there that soon we won't be limited in something even more essential?

Mr. I: In what?

Mr. II: In time. In our own duration.⁸⁰

Although this is explained no further, the very mention of the term duration in this context is sure to bring Bergson to mind. It would seem that Mr. II fears that not

⁷⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 152-153.

only their movement, but their process of thought may be interrupted, an act which would most certainly destroy even Mr. I's cherished "inner freedom."

In his book *The Voice of Experience*, a follow-up to his groundbreaking *The Divided Self*, R.D. Laing offers a surprising explanation for the literary theme of the divided self, as he quotes Jung discussing Freud:

Professor Freud has expressed in a personal discussion the idea that a further determinant for the motif of the dissimilar brothers is to be found in the elementary observance towards birth and the after-birth. It is an exotic custom to treat the placenta as a child!⁸¹

Applying this concept to the schizophrenic patients that form the basis of his work, Laing notes, "Many people say that they have seen or felt a cord, a chain . . . connecting them to their doubles or subtle other selves."⁸² The placenta as double thesis, although perhaps extreme, could well be applied to any of the divided-self monodramas. But when we consider the ending of *Striptease*, as the Hand has locked the two men, naked but for their boxer shorts (and they are likely permitted those only for reasons of propriety in the theatre, not in the dramatic world), in handcuffs, and forced hoods upon their heads, so that they cannot see and are fumbling blindly in darkness, Laing's theory suggests a novel interpretation of Mrozek's play: Might *Striptease* represent the overwhelming

⁸¹ Carl Jung, quoted in R.D. Laing, *The Voice of Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 117.

⁸² Laing, *The Voice of Experience*, 123.

experience of captivity forcing the dual-protagonist back to an almost womb-like state?

While Mr. I and Mr. II may not represent a fetus, there is certainly strong evidence to suggest that they represent a single individual. As such, Mrožek's play may be seen as a parable for the reaction of the human mind to the oppression of totalitarianism. One might rail against the oppressive force, or, a person may try not to rock the boat in the hope that acquiescence may ultimately bring rewards. As the play comes to a close, with both active resistance and mute acceptance having proved futile, the men decide on a new approach: they will apologize to the Hand (to maintain his "inner freedom," Mr. I concocts a theory in which he is being forced to do so by Mr. II) for their very existence. (In the end, with no way out of the oppression, might absolute submission to it work?) It is at this point that the hoods are placed over their heads, but they are permitted to follow a second Hand, this one covered in a red glove (communism?), out one of the doors. Is this freedom? Perhaps, but only under the guise of blind submission to the dictates of the Hand. In the end, both approaches—resistance and acquiescence—fail. Mrožek seems to suggest that while the evil of oppression may spur the mind to a division over tactics, it ultimately afflicts the entire self equally.

As Mrožek offers the possibility of divided-self monodrama as a response to political oppression, two plays that appeared on New York stages in 1964 demonstrate the effects of societal bias and oppression on the human mind.

Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, which opened at the East End Theatre on January 14, 1964, explores the psyche of a woman torn apart by the forces of both race and gender, while Tom Eych's *The White Whore and the Bit Player*, which opened just a few doors down at La MaMa E.T.C. on August 28, 1964, traces the consequences of both sexual repression and sexual exploitation on the mind of another young woman.

In *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, Kennedy makes it clear from the list of characters that we are dealing with a fragmented self. Of the eight characters listed, four of them (The Duchess of Hapsburg, Queen Victoria Regina, Jesus, and Patrice Lumumba) are each described as "one of herself,"⁸³ in addition to the character of "Negro Sarah" herself. A sixth character, Sarah's mother, who wanders the scene carrying a bald head (perhaps Sarah's), speaking very little, and only about how "the wild black beast [Sarah's father] raped me,"⁸⁴ an echo of Sarah's own diatribe against her father, is hardly given an independent existence, and can certainly be seen as a further projection of Sarah's mind. This leaves Sarah's white landlady and her white Jewish boyfriend, Raymond, described as "Funnyhouse Lady," and "Funnyhouse Man,"⁸⁵ respectively, as the only characters with the possibility of objective reality. In the introduction to the play in *Black Theatre U.S.A.*, the editors describe them as "the two characters outside

⁸³ Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, in *Black Theatre U.S.A.: The Recent Period, 1935-Today*, ed. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 335.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 336.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 335.

Sarah's head."⁸⁶ But even their objective reality is less than certain. Their appearance, in the play's final scene, as they discover Sarah's hanging body, would appear to reinforce the ambivalence of the outside world to Sarah (Landlady: "The poor bitch has hung herself."⁸⁷). And yet, Raymond's final line, "He [Sarah's father] lives in the city in rooms with European antiques, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books and oriental carpets. Her father is a nigger who eats his meals on a white glass table,"⁸⁸ is eerily familiar, essentially identical to words that have been spoken repeatedly throughout the play by Sarah and her alter-egos. Perhaps even these characters, like Sarah's mother, are projections of Sarah's imagination; an image of the feigned tolerance and acceptance of the outside world. Or, even if the characters do have some sense of reality, perhaps we are seeing this reality as Sarah interprets it in her fractured psyche at the very moment of her death, with her last warped instant of consciousness.

The intense division of Sarah's mind undoubtedly has its root in her background: her mother was white and apparently of high status, her father an African black man. This inter-racial heritage, certain to be an issue in 1960s America, is exacerbated by the issue of gender, as Lorraine A. Brown, in her article, "For the Characters are Myself: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a*

⁸⁶ James V. Hatch and Ted Shine, Introduction to Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, in *Black Theatre U.S.A.: The Recent Period, 1935-Today*, ed. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine (New York: The Free Press, 1996), 333.

⁸⁷ Kennedy, 342.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

Negro,” notes, “The problem of identification is complicated by the fact that her mother’s whiteness was counteracted by her sex and her father’s sex by his blackness.”⁸⁹ Brown suggests that the crux of Sarah’s difficulty arises in that her desire for status and acceptance in society is problematized by the fact that neither of her parental images is wholly in line with the culturally dominant (white and male) markers. And while the abjection of blackness, so rampant in the speeches of Sarah and her other selves, is symptomatic of American prejudice and societal mores, miscegenation is hardly seen more positively from the African side of the equation. As Sarah tells the story of her parents’ coupling (a story whose veracity is very much in doubt throughout the play), it is clear that her father’s family was no happier with their marriage than her mother’s: “His mother didn’t want him to marry my mother and sent a dead chicken to the wedding. I DON’T want you marrying that child, she wrote. She’s not good enough for you. I want you to go to Africa.”⁹⁰ Meanwhile, while the mother sees her son as the savior of the black race, “His father told him that the race was no damn good.”⁹¹

Considering the ambivalence (and often outright hostility) to blackness that Sarah witnesses, it is little surprise that she strives to identify with whiteness and status. In all of her guises we hear an almost identical wish:

⁸⁹ Lorraine A. Brown, “‘For the Characters are Myself’: Adrienne Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro*,” *Negro American Literature Forum* 9, no. 3 (August 1975): 86.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Negro: It is my dream to live in rooms with European antiques and my Queen Victoria, photographs of Roman ruins, walls of books, a piano, oriental carpets, and to eat my meals on a white glass table. I will visit my friends' apartments which will contain books, photographs of Roman ruins, pianos and oriental carpets. My friends will be white.

I need them as an embankment to keep me from reflecting too much upon the fact that I am a Negro. For, like all educated Negroes—out of life-and-death essential—I find it necessary to maintain a stark fortress against recognition of myself.⁹²

Sarah's longing for whiteness, wealth and status is embodied by her selves as depicted in Queen Victoria and the Duchess of Hapsburg (who, Claudia Barnett suggests, represent the dichotomy between chastity and sexuality⁹³), while her depiction of one of her selves as Patrice Lumumba reflects a lingering identification with her blackness despite her attempt to build a fortress against self-recognition. The choice of Lumumba to embody this identification reflects not only her link to her father, who, Sarah's landlady claims, "hung himself in a Harlem hotel when Patrice Lumumba was murdered"⁹⁴ (although Raymond, before contradicting himself at the end of the play, claims that he shot, rather than

⁹² Ibid., 336.

⁹³ Claudia Barnett, "A Prison of Object Relations: Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*," *Modern Drama* 40, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 377.

⁹⁴ Kennedy, 337.

hung himself⁹⁵), but also a hint of black pride beneath her deeply ambivalent exterior, and perhaps a desire to save the black race, as her grandmother had hoped her father would do. On the other hand, the other male figure of Sarah's selves, Jesus, depicted here as a “*hunch-back, yellow-skinned dwarf*,”⁹⁶ seems to represent less the divine savior (Could the Christian Trinity be yet another divided self?) than an embodiment of Sarah's desire to assimilate into white, Christian, American society. Indeed, Sarah's Jesus shares her desire to erase blackness:

Jesus: Through my apocalypses and my raging sermons I have tried so to escape him, through God Almighty I have tried to escape being black. . . . I am going to Africa and kill this Black man named Patrice Lumumba. Why? Because all my life I believe my Holy Father to be God, but now I know that my father is a Black man.⁹⁷

Sarah's Jesus, it would seem, is out to kill not the historical Patrice Lumumba, but the Patrice Lumumba—and the blackness that he represents—that lives within Sarah.

As we have seen, monodrama is frequently author-centered; in this light, the protagonist of *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, and all of her alter-egos, can be considered alter-egos for Adrienne Kennedy herself. James V. Hatch and Ted Shine note:

⁹⁵ Ibid., 338.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 337.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 341.

In 1964, to express her emerging African awareness, Kennedy stopped straightening her hair and wore an Afro cut, something very few Black women were doing and something she was criticized for. In *Funnyhouse*, Sarah loses her hair (symbolically her European identity), but she is unable to identify herself as an African; hence, in the madhouse of racism, she has neither straight nor kinky hair—she is bald.⁹⁸

In a New York Times review of a 1995 revival of the piece (performed with another Kennedy one-act, *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*) at New York's Public Theatre, Ben Brantley, who suggested that *Funnyhouse* conveyed “the sense of the interior landscape of a single mind,” is even more explicit in drawing the link between Sarah and Kennedy: “Though Sarah and Clara, the principal characters of *Funnyhouse* and *Movie Star*, have different names, they are obviously the same person: the playwright.”⁹⁹ Kennedy's own family was inter-racial (although a generation removed from Sarah's, and with the gender/racial mix reversed); her white maternal grandfather was a wealthy peach farmer. Furthermore, Kennedy's father was a social worker, as both parents are said to be in *Funnyhouse*.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Hatch and Shine, 334.

⁹⁹ Ben Brantley, Review of *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *A Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*, *The New York Times*, 25 September 1995, p. C11.

¹⁰⁰ “Women of Color, Women of Words,” Biography of Adrienne Kennedy, <http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~cybers/kennedy2.html> (accessed 11 January 2004).

Funnyhouse of a Negro is yet another divided-self monodrama that ends in the death (indeed, the suicide) of the protagonist. Furthermore, as in *The Theatre of the Soul*, there apparently is a telescoping of time in order to depict the very moment of Sarah's death; as Rosemary K. Curb notes, the play, "set in the character's mind, portray[s] the elusive, almost timeless moment just before death, when horrifying images and past events replete with monotonous conversations kaleidoscopically flash through the memory and imagination of the protagonist."¹⁰¹ As Sarah first enters the stage, "*She is a faceless, dark character with a hangman's rope about her neck and red blood on the part that would be her face.*"¹⁰² It is not until the end of the play, when we see Sarah hanging in her room, that we understand with any certainty what that rope meant—Sarah has, in fact, been hanging in her room from the moment the play began.

That *Funnyhouse of a Negro* depicts the dissolution of a young woman's psyche at the moment of her suicide is only obliquely suggested. Tom Eyen, however, in his opening note to *The White Whore and the Bit Player*, makes the premise of his play quite explicit:

A play about *one* woman
before and after she made it
the nun-mind—what she imagines herself to be

¹⁰¹ Rosemary K. Curb, "Fragmented Selves in Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* and *The Owl Answers*," *Theatre Journal* 32, no. 2 (1980): 180.

¹⁰² Kennedy, 336.

the whore-flesh—what the world saw her to be
 taking place from the time she commits suicide
 —by strangulation on her cookie-room cross—
 to the time she actually dies, ten seconds later. The play being all the
 flashes that appear in clear view of death.¹⁰³

Eyen's description quite clearly links the play to *The Theatre of the Soul*, and to its recent predecessor, *Funnyhouse*. But while *Funnyhouse* presented Sarah's other selves as aspects of a whole in chaotic (and ultimately destructive) cohabitation in the mind of the protagonist, Eyen's play, like Evreinov's, depicts the two halves of a self directly at war with each other, fighting to take control.

The play, in essence, consists of the Nun and the Whore arguing over the details of their shared life—from her abandonment by her suicidal mother, to the religious school struggle between academics, piety, and the discovery of sexuality, to her failed (but for a brief flirtation with stardom) movie career, and finally, to her failed marriage. The nun, for instance, playing the role of a teacher at St. Francis School, recalls a moment from eighth grade:

Nun: Dear! Yes, you. You are still flat. One should not be flat by the time one reaches the eighth grade of St. Francis. We pride ourselves on well-developed pupils. So for your assignment in music tonight, dear, buy

¹⁰³ Tom Eyen, *The White Whore and the Bit Player*, in *Sarah B. Divine! And Other Plays* (New York: Winter House, 1971), 311.

yourself a good pair of falsies! Now we will all take our English One books with religious illustrations and turn to page 281, verb usage.¹⁰⁴

English, like breast development, it seems, was another area in which the protagonist was a failure in school. As she moves to a career in Hollywood, where she became, according to the Whore, “The Dinah Shore of the B movies,”¹⁰⁵ her exploitation by the movie moguls is palpable, as she is forced to sign a contract that binds her for “sixty-five years minimum,” from which she can only be released “by natural, accidental, or suicidal death.”¹⁰⁶ When age lines begin to appear on the protagonist, the studio has no more use for her. And since death is (as the Whore, playing a studio secretary, notes) “the only way we can legally get you out of your contract,” the only solution is to “Have you killed, dear. All those who do not rise to our expectations are killed. You have failed, shall we say, ‘to put out.’ Oh, it will be quite proper—in an accident. We have a whole publicity department specializing in unusual deaths.”¹⁰⁷ What follows is a series of ways in which the protagonist is said to have died, not unlike the confusion as to the circumstances of Sarah’s father’s death (or lack thereof) in *Funnyhouse*: “STAR’S SUICIDE FROM AN OVERDOSE OF SLEEPING

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 316.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 317.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 318.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 320-321.

PILLS!,” “You died of uremic poisoning, sweetheart. I just read it here in the paper,” and “Was killed today on the Freeway by a Volkswagen bus.”¹⁰⁸

As the play moves towards its end, the confrontation between the Nun and the Whore becomes increasingly violent, until the Whore strangles the Nun, utilizing the Nun’s own beads as she stands against the large cross that has stood at the center of the set. As this final moment plays out, Eyen creates a sort of *tableau vivant*, depicting the suicide as it actually occurred:

*Lights fade quickly and come up once more, immediately—this time not spotlights but rather several camera lights cutting through the darkness, showing ten snapshots of the last picture-freeze. Time: approximately ten seconds.*¹⁰⁹

Just as *The Theatre of the Soul* demonstrated the actual moment of death inside the body through the explosion of blood from the heart, *The White Whore and the Bit Player* depicts what would appear to be an actual physical, external image of the suicide, but for the fact that both sides of the divided self—Nun and Whore—remain present on stage.

While we have seen the physical representation of the link between characters in the identical dress of Mr. I and Mr. II in *Striptease*, it is worth noting that *The White Whore and the Bit Player* employs a novel device to depict the unity of its two characters. As the play approaches its conclusion and the action

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 323-324.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 340.

becomes increasingly frenzied, the Nun, removes her robe, revealing a slip identical to the one the Whore has worn throughout the play. In turn, the Whore takes the Nun's robe and puts it on, completely reversing roles. All that remains are the Nun's beads, over which they struggle, until finally they become the means of suicide, as the Nun (now dressed as Whore) notes, "White beads dangling, waiting for me to commit one mortal sin so they can strangle me."¹¹⁰ And indeed they do, ending the life of both the Whore and the Nun, and the single soul they inhabited.

Sam Shepard's *True West* (1980), another American drama that presents a soul in conflict with itself, can also be interpreted as a divided-self monodrama. While the struggle between the brothers, Austin and Lee, is usually seen as a sibling rivalry run amok, the play lends itself to a reading as an internal struggle perfectly in line with the pattern we have now repeatedly seen.

Austin and Lee are described as stark opposites—Austin clean-cut and preppy, and Lee a disheveled rebel. Their personalities are as different as their appearances—Austin a calm, intellectual screenwriter who lives in suburban Northern California, while Lee is a thief and a drifter who is at home in the vast expanses of the "true west." The conflict between them is further drawn out as Lee decides to write his own screenplay. While Austin is writing a "period piece,"¹¹¹ with clear pretensions to high art, Lee, according to Austin, has

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 337.

¹¹¹ Sam Shepard, *True West*, in *Seven Plays* (New York: Bantam, 1981), 13.

concocted an “idiotic” Western about “two lamebrains chasing each other across Texas.”¹¹² The two are at each other’s throats continually in the play, a conflict that comes to a head with the arrival of Austin’s producer, Saul Kimmer. When Saul agrees to produce Lee’s script, and drop Austin’s, Austin begins to become unhinged. As the two have quite literally switched places, with Lee sitting at the typewriter and Austin sprawled out on the floor drinking everything in the house, Austin has a moment of clarity:

Austin: Here’s a thought. Saul Kimmer—

Lee: Shut up will ya’!

Austin: He thinks we’re the same person.

Lee: Don’t get cute.

Austin: He does! He’s lost his mind. Poor old Saul. (*giggles*) Thinks we’re one and the same.¹¹³

William Kleb, in his article, “Worse Than Being Homeless: *True West* and The Divided Self,” sees the significance of this moment:

The conflict between Austin and Lee clearly has meaning beyond a study of sibling rivalry. Indeed, as Shepard describes them and as they appeared on stage at the Magic [Theatre, in the play’s initial production in 1980], the *reality* of their relationship is questionable: they couldn’t look less

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 30.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

alike; they seem to be, at the beginning at least, physical and psychological opposites. . . . Austin represents objectivity, self-control and self-discipline, form and order, the intellect, reason. Lee stands for subjectivity, anarchy, adventure, excess and exaggeration, intuition and imagination. Only when Austin abandons his professional project and pose and gets drunk is his repressed imaginative side released. . . . Lee dramatizes the opposite lesson: without self-discipline and technique, he becomes frustrated, his creative energy turns violent and destructive. To sum up Shepard's point, Austin tells Lee, after the two have switched roles, that Kimmer "thinks we're the same person." Metaphorically, they are.¹¹⁴

Certainly the presence of Kimmer and the mother of the pair raises questions about a monodramatic reading of the play. But Kimmer, as we have already seen, seems to blur the boundaries between the brothers, rather than making them seem distinct and separate. The mother, however, is perhaps even less "real" than Austin and Lee, as she returns from her very odd trip to Alaska, and invites the boys to the museum to meet Picasso. Kleb refers to her as "an archetype and a

¹¹⁴ William Kleb, "Worse Than Being Homeless: *True West* and the Divided Self," in *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, ed. Bonnie Marranca (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1981), 121. Lynda Hart cites and restates Kleb's argument in her book *Sam Shepard's Metaphorical Stages* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 105. Gregory Lanier refers to Hart in making a similar argument about the unity of the characters Frankie and Jake in Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*: Gregory W. Lanier, "Two Opposite Animals: Structural Pairing in Sam Shepard's *A Lie of the Mind*," *Modern Drama* 34 (1991): 410.

parody, a kind of satiric *deus ex machina*.”¹¹⁵ Like Nagg and Nell in *Endgame*, the mother may be interpreted as a psychological remnant of parental influence, the voice of reason (albeit a markedly failing sense of reason) in a rapidly disintegrating psyche.

True West, like many of the plays we have looked at, ultimately descends into violence as it reaches its conclusion. While Mom looks on, horrified, Austin strangles Lee with a telephone cord. As in *Endgame*, the question looms as to whether or not Austin can actually kill Lee:

Mom: Will you let him go now?

Austin: I don't know. He's not gonna' let me get outa' here.

Mom: Well you can't kill him.

Austin: I can kill him! I can easily kill him. Right now. Right here. All I gotta' do is just tighten up. See? (*he tightens cord, LEE thrashes wildly, AUSTIN releases pressure a little, maintaining control*) Ya' see that?

Mom: That's a savage thing to do.

Austin: Yeah well don't tell me I can't kill him because I can. I can just twist. I can just keep twisting. (*AUSTIN twists the cord tighter, LEE weakens, his breathing changes to a short rasp*).¹¹⁶

When Austin finally does let up, Lee is motionless and does not respond to Austin—he appears to be dead. Is it possible? Can one half of the divided self

¹¹⁵ Kleb, 120.

¹¹⁶ Shepard, 58.

survive alone? Just as Austin makes for the door, Lee leaps back to life, and thwarts his brother's move to leave. As the play ends, the two square off and case one another as the lights fade. Rather than the death of one half, or as we have most frequently seen, the death of both or all, Austin and Lee remain alive, seemingly destined to torment one another eternally.

For Kleb, the struggle between the brothers “is a metaphor for the creative act; at issue is the nature of creativity. . . . Lee has the vision; Austin the skill and self-discipline. The latter, Shepard seems to be saying, must finally serve the former; even then this collaborative psychic process is a precarious one—a continual, nerve-racking battle.”¹¹⁷ And if *True West* is an exploration of the nature of creativity, whose creativity is being explored? Kleb has an answer that by now must seem familiar: “Shepard himself encourages such an immediate, even autobiographical reading of his play.”¹¹⁸ Kleb's author-centered reading certainly takes much from Shepard's dual public persona—the actor who so often plays the cowboy and maverick, and the respected, renowned playwright. But Kleb takes his concept further, noting that Shepard's mother, like the brothers', lives in a suburb of Los Angeles, and that Shepard, like Austin, lives in Northern California with his wife and son. Finally, Kleb notes, Shepard has no brother.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Kleb, 121.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* Kleb's analysis brings to mind the recent film *Adaptation.*, in which Charlie Kauffman, the main character of the film, bearing the name of the film's author, is working on a film adaptation of a novel, when his brother (Kauffman too has no brother) Donald moves into their mother's house with Charlie. Donald is bent on making a successful formulaic Hollywood thriller, while Charlie is

If Shepard is depicting a struggle inside himself, then the violent, and yet not fatal conflict with which the play ends becomes a metaphor for the constant battle inside Shepard's own soul—between the cowboy and the suburbanite, the artist and the *matinée* idol.

The plays discussed here are merely examples. The divided self is an archetype that has been explored at great length in art and there are surely countless examples from film and literature (as well as many more plays) that demonstrate the appeal of this motif. What is so remarkable about these plays is that in so few cases do these writers appear to have any significant knowledge of the other works in the genre. The seemingly independent creation of these works, then, is testament to just how deeply the concept of the divided self runs in human thought. Perhaps there is, inside each of us, an epic, unending struggle of equally matched forces, fighting for control of our every move.

dedicated to doing justice to the beauty of his source and avoiding Hollywood clichés. Ultimately, deeply stuck in writer's block, Charlie asks for Donald's help. The screenplay, which we finally realize is the film we are watching, quickly falls into every imaginable Hollywood cliché.

Chapter 5

“The World Inside His Head”: Multi-Character Monodrama

Given the fact that the divided-self monodramas contain more than one character, it may seem odd to nominate another variety of monodrama as “Multi-Character.” However, while the plays of the divided self depict characters who exist solely as parts or attributes of a larger, singular protagonist, the plays that we will look at in this chapter represent a protagonist interacting, at least on some level, with other more or less fully formed characters in some semblance of an outside world. On the one hand, this genre is distinguished from the type catalogued in chapter four by the existence of these other characters in what appears to be independence from the protagonist. And yet, this distinction raises the problem of how, if these other characters are afforded an independent existence, these plays can still depict the interiority that we have posited as so centrally important to monodrama.

In fact, despite the apparent exteriority in these plays, the other characters (aside from the protagonist) generally conform to one of two metaphysical positions that undercut any claims they might have to an individual subjectivity. In the first, the world we see on stage does not, in fact, represent an actual external world, but rather is entirely a projection of the protagonist’s mind. This conception bears much in common with many of the plays discussed in chapter

four, except that rather than necessarily attempting to depict the warring parts of a divided psyche, these plays offer an image of the self interacting with those it sees as discrete others. The second type of subjectivity we see in these plays does indeed posit the representation of an external world, but takes for granted that all people, places, and things in this outside world are necessarily seen from the viewpoint of a protagonist who cannot possibly be entirely objective. What we witness onstage is the world as seen through the mind of the protagonist. While the characters in this world may have independent subjectivities, we cannot share those subjectivities, but rather see them only as the protagonist sees and interprets them. These two possibilities for the representation of others are often intertwined in the multi-character monodramas, with the world onstage representing a complex interaction of the protagonist's interpretation of an outside world and his or her projections onto that world. The status of the other in the multi-character monodramas reinforces both the primacy of the protagonist and the interiority of his or her experience, concepts central to Nikolai Evreinov's articulation of monodramatic theory, and implied in the accumulated history of monodrama. While the multi-character monodrama is the type that most closely fits Evreinov's theory of monodrama, examples of the form in practice predate his articulation of that theory.

Indeed, the concept underlying the multi-character monodramas may be traced back at least as far as the Romantics, as we saw in chapter one. A particularly revealing example of the Romantic influence on multi-character monodrama, and of the uses of monodrama as an interpretive strategy, is Henrik

Ibsen's 1867 panoramic *Peer Gynt*. *Peer Gynt*'s debt to the Romantics is initially apparent in the fact that it was written as a closet drama. Ibsen called the work a "dramatic poem,"¹ a designation that seems to weaken the play for Brian Johnston, who reminds readers that "For all its virtues, [*Peer Gynt*] still is 'literary' and 'mental' drama."² Michael Meyer, on the other hand, sees the very literariness of the play as a virtue, and believes that Ibsen did as well: "*Peer Gynt* was written with no thought of performance; and the consequent rejection of the limitations of stagecraft proved tremendously liberating. . . . He felt free to ignore other frontiers, the frontiers between reality and fantasy, between (as we should now say) the conscious and the unconscious."³ The status of *Peer Gynt* as a closet drama offers an opportunity to revisit the question of the closet drama in relation to monodrama.

As we discussed in chapter one, the closet drama represented for the Romantics a way to avoid and reject the limitations that the nineteenth-century stage placed on the author's imagination. At the same time, the closet drama was for the Romantics, as Johnston suggested of *Peer Gynt*, a "mental" drama, in which the dramatic world created by the author could come to life in the mind of the reader in a way that the stage, with its technical limitations as well as the specificity of its representations, could never duplicate. It was this very idea of a

¹ Hans Georg Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), 33.

² Brian Johnston, *To the Third Empire: Ibsen's Early Drama* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1980), 165.

³ Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1971), 271-272.

drama occurring in the mind of the spectator that Edmond Picard cited in his writings on monodrama.

Evreinov's essay, "Introduction to Monodrama," as we discussed in chapter two, places a great deal of faith in (or at least a great demand on) the art of the scenic and lighting designer, and their ability to "display the world around [the active participant] on stage just as the active participant perceives the world at any given moment of his existence on stage,"⁴ the stated goal of which was "to induce the illusion in the spectator that he is turning into the participant."⁵ However, as we noted, the possibility of truly accomplishing this goal was hampered by several factors, particularly the physical presence of the actor on stage, as well as the collaborative nature of the theatre, in which the many voices that contribute to production serve to oppose the singular vision that monodrama purports to present.

While Evreinov's theory and the plays that most closely approximate it may represent an attempt to overcome this difficulty, the closet drama inherently and always stood as an alternative solution to the problem, offering the most direct possible link between an author and his audience.⁶ Like Picard, the authors of closet drama seek to create a drama that occurs completely in the mind of the reader, just as it has come from the mind of the author, but with the

⁴ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 187 (see chap. 2, n. 39).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁶ This is not to say that the link is truly direct, considering the mechanisms of editing, publication, and printing. Even in lieu of these mechanisms, a direct link would remain impossible due to the filter of language, which, as Bergson and many others have argued, prohibits the possibility that thoughts can ever be truly shared.

reader/spectator's own subjectivity imbuing the text with a more uniquely personal connection than a staged drama could. And though monodrama seeks to align the spectator with the protagonist rather than the author, we have already seen that Evreinov acknowledged the primacy of the author in the process of literary/dramatic communication, and sought to fuse the author with the hero of the work. Thus, there is a clear link to be drawn between the modern monodrama and the Romantic closet drama in the goal of linking the reader/spectator to the author/protagonist. Martin Puchner, in his recent study of the modernist closet drama, *Stage Fright*, offers two traditions of the closet drama: the restrained and the exuberant. He explains:

The restrained closet drama . . . consists of philosophical or poetic speeches and monologues, a theatre characterized by a withdrawal from and resistance to scenic action. . . . The exuberant closet drama also resists the stage, but it does so through an excess of theatrical action. . . . [These plays represent a] free-floating, often allegorical theatricality, whose constant changes of scenes, large casts of characters, sudden appearances and disappearances, and strategic mixture of hallucination and reality willfully exceed the limits of theatrical representation.⁷

Peer Gynt would certainly seem to fall in the latter, exuberant category of closet drama.

⁷ Martin Puchner, *Stage Fright: Modernism, Anti-Theatricality, and Drama* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 14-15.

The conflation of author and protagonist suggested by Evreinov (and often seen by critics as a feature of the Romantic closet drama) seems to have played a considerable role in *Peer Gynt*. Ibsen has often been identified with the heroes of his dramas, but in his biography of Ibsen, Michael Meyer suggests that this was particularly the case in *Peer Gynt*:

Ibsen made it clear, if any confirmation were needed, that *Peer Gynt* is a self-analysis. Referring specifically to this play, he stated: “Everything that I have written is most minutely concerned with what I have lived through, if not personally experienced; every new work has had for me the object of serving as a process of spiritual liberation and catharsis; for every man shares the responsibility and the guilt of the society to which he belongs.”⁸

The extent to which Ibsen can be seen in *Peer* is evident in the “process of spiritual liberation and catharsis” of which Ibsen spoke. Brian Johnston, among others, has recognized a quest motif in the play, and connects it, once again, to the Romantics: “The Romantic convention of the heroic journey of discovery of the world and of the abysses within the self recovered one of the oldest of fictive forms: the quest myth.”⁹ Johnston continues, “The play also takes on aspects of the Christian morality play—a play like *Everyman*, for example. *Peer*’s final journey through a landscape that itself reproaches his former life . . . has become a

⁸ Michael Meyer, 273.

⁹ Johnston, 168.

journey through the landscape of the mind, as in Christian allegory.”¹⁰ Johnston here connects *Peer Gynt* in form to the earlier Medieval morality drama (a connection I shall return to when we turn to look at Strindberg’s *To Damascus* and the German Expressionist drama), and in concept, with the idea of a “landscape of the mind,” to the more modern theories of monodrama.

For the most part, *Peer Gynt* has been seen by critics as the tale of Peer’s journeys through the wide world, finally concluding with the aged Peer returning to his long-suffering wife Solveig to live out his final days in her care. Such a view posits a “reality” behind Peer’s voyage that spans an entire lifetime, and leaves us with Peer nearing death’s doorstep, even as he returns, at long last, to his own. I would like to propose a monodramatic reading of *Peer Gynt* that contrasts with the traditional interpretation, with particular emphasis on the interiority of Peer’s travels.

One does not need to look very far to find reason to doubt the reality of Peer’s adventures. Indeed, the very first line of the play is Peer’s mother, Aase, scolding him as he tells her of his ride on the stag over Gjendin edge. “Peer, you’re lying!”¹¹ gasps his exasperated mother, a sentiment that appears all too common in Peer’s small town. This continues to the final act, when Peer has returned to his hometown and asks of the Parish Officer, “Who was Peer Gynt?” and receives the reply, “They say he was a damned liar. . . . All the great deeds he’d ever heard of,/ He pretended he’d done them” (154). In a long monologue

¹⁰ Ibid., 169-170.

¹¹ Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*, in *Plays: Six*, Michael Meyer, trans., (London: Methuen, 1987), 31. Parenthetical page references will refer to this text.

in Act two, Scene four, Peer seems to acknowledge (with anguish) his penchant for exaggeration:

The flight along Gjendin Edge-
 It was all a fake and a lie!
 Up the cliff with the bride-
 Then drunk for a night and a day.
 Hunted by hawks and kites,
 Threatened by trolls and the like,
 Sporting with crazy wenches-
 A bloody lie and a fake! (60)

The fact that we have seen some of the very scenes portrayed (the “sporting with crazy wenches,” and “up the cliff with the bride,” among others) that Peer now decries as lies, is likely to lead us to question what we see on stage.

In addition to Peer’s proclivity for lying, the idea of Peer’s adventures as a dream is raised repeatedly throughout the play. First, as Peer tries to escape the troll wedding: “I wish to God I could wake!” (70). Then later, as his yacht pulls away from the shore without him on it: “I’m dreaming! It’s a nightmare! I’ll wake up soon! . . . It’s a hallucination! I’m asleep! I’m drunk! I’m mad!” (102). What does this mean? Are we to gather from this that all of Peer’s experiences in the play are nothing but a dream? It need not be so cut and dried. Peer’s dreams may indeed include action (or perhaps, his actions may include dreams). As Edvard Beyer has noted: “In *Peer Gynt*, fantasy and reality constantly merge.

Figures from one can suddenly appear in the other. Indeed, secret thoughts and desires can step suddenly forward as actualized facts. . . . ‘Inner’ and ‘outer’ worlds simply cannot be separated—the landscape in which Peer finds himself is co-extensive with his own mind.”¹² Similarly, Brian Johnston suggests, “The fragments of Peer’s totally disintegrated consciousness appear as a bewildering procession of figures that are simultaneously inward and outward: they are aspects of Peer’s subjectivity yet, at the same time, aspects of the objective world of spirit that Peer has failed to comprehend.”¹³ This conflation of fantasy and reality is of great importance to *Peer Gynt* and is indicative of Ibsen’s method in aligning us with Peer.

The process of our alignment with Peer’s mental state is a gradual one—we do not begin the play immersed in Peer’s psyche but rather are led there slowly. But how do we reach this state? While there is no clear marking point for the change, Brian Johnston has offered what seems a likely candidate: “From the moment Peer joins forces with the troll-woman to take part in the troll wedding feast, he allows forces from his inward world—what we might call his subconscious—to take control of him.”¹⁴ A strange and magical world itself, the troll kingdom presents Peer with an opportunity to see the world through a new (or at least altered) set of eyes. When Peer disparages the dance that his troll fiancé and her sister perform in his honor as “Something horribly ugly./ A cow

¹² Edvard Beyer, *Ibsen: The Man and His Work* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., 1980), 70.

¹³ Johnston, 200.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 186.

with a harp and a dancing sow” (67), the Old Man of the Mountains sees this as the last vestige of Peer’s human nature hanging on and vows to cure him of it:

In your left eye
 I’ll make a little cut, so that you’ll see awry.
 But all you see will seem bright and fair.
 Then I’ll nip out your right window-pane—
 . . .
 Then you’ll see that your bride is beautiful.
 And there’ll be an end to these illusions
 Of dancing sows, and cows playing harps— (68)

The passage seems somewhat contradictory. The troll king first suggests that the cut in Peer’s eye will make him see “awry,” but then calls the dancing sows and harp-playing cow, which Peer has just seen with his own human eyes, an illusion. This moment elucidates the complete subjectivity of perception in the play.

So what does it mean then, this dreamlike, or illusory world? Should the possibility that these experiences are not real discount the experiences that Peer has, or their possible significance? Certainly not. A major point of the troll wedding scene, and indeed of the entire play, is that thinking is not merely an innocuous, unproductive activity, but can in fact have serious consequences. In response to Peer’s denial of having taken “liberties” with the Greenclad One, the troll king mocks Peer’s naïve human view of thought:

Old Man: Can you deny

You desired and lusted after her?

Peer: (*snorts*) Is that all? Who the hell cares about that?

Old Man: You human beings are always the same.

You're always ready to admit an impulse,

But won't accept the guilt for anything

Unless you've actually done it in the flesh.

So you think that lust doesn't count?

Wait. You'll soon see with your own eyes—

...

My Peer, before the year's end you'll be a father. (70)

Peer is understandably skeptical of the troll king's claim, but when the Greenclad

One arrives at Peer's door with the child, the power of thought is reaffirmed:

Peer: (*clenches his fists*) And all this—!

Woman: For nothing but *thinking*?

It's bad luck on you, isn't it? Poor Peer!

(83)

In this world, thinking and doing are not so far apart, and thinking can be a powerful and productive activity as Peer is now forced to confront. The power of thought is what drives this play, as Peer well knows. When on his journey Peer is asked, "But who *is* yourself?" Peer responds confidently, "The world behind my

forehead's vaulted arch,/ By cause of which I am myself alone" (98). In *Peer Gynt*, as we shall soon see, Ibsen is obsessed with the idea of self. Thus, Peer's acknowledgement here that the self is a product of thought is of major importance.

Like so many of the Romantic closet dramas, *Peer Gynt* is a depiction of a hero in search of his own identity, his own self. In his world tour, spurred on by characters such as the Great Boyg and Begriffenfeldt, and a landscape teeming with signposts that point to the concept of selfhood, Peer insists, "I have always tried to be myself" (127), an assertion that he finds is repeatedly contradicted. This search for self comes to a head, not surprisingly, as Peer returns to his native Norway. It would seem by this point that Peer should have made a good deal of progress in figuring out just what his self is. However, as Peer comes upon the Button Moulder and offers the challenge of finding a witness who will swear that Peer has been himself, it is clear that he is really little closer to understanding what this truly means. His reunion with the troll king only serves to confuse him further after the troll king claims that Peer has, in fact, been a troll ever since their previous meeting, leading Peer to wonder, "You mean I could have stayed where I was,/ Living in peace and luxury on the Ronde?/ You mean all this worry and toil has been for nothing?" (168). Has Peer been himself? And indeed, just what exactly is Peer's self? This question is answered as Peer finally returns to Solveig and the hut:

Peer: Can you tell me where Peer Gynt has been

Since you saw him last?

Solveig: Been?

Peer: With the mark of destiny on his brow

As he sprang forth in the mind of God!

Can you answer me that? If not, I must go

To my home, down in the land of mists.

Solveig: (*smiles*) Oh, that riddle is easy.

Peer: Tell me, then?

Where was my self, my whole self, my true self?

The self that bore God's stamp upon its brow?

Solveig: In my faith, in my hope, and in my love. (179)

Perhaps Peer has indeed been at home in Norway all along. It is interesting to note Solveig's repetition of Peer's question. "Been?" Solveig asks, as if unsure of what Peer means. Peer finally must admit that this search for self that he has undertaken is (or at least seems to have been) a failure. And yet, it is in this very failure that Peer gets the answer to his question. Ultimately Peer realizes that after all his dreams of empire and prophethood, his true self exists here at home with Solveig. Upon seeing the hut for the first time upon his return to Norway, Peer exclaims, "Oh, here was my empire and my crown!" (157). Whether real or imagined, Peer's adventure has come full circle. Unready to commit to domestic life with Solveig before his journey, Peer now realizes that this is the place for him—not as an Emperor, but as a husband.

While the journey plot and the frequently problematic reality of Peer's world serve as possible indicators of the play's status as monodrama, there are additionally many stylistic elements in the play that would come to be typical of the genre. First, there is consistent use of repetition. Not only does Peer continually repeat (often with slight errors) phrases that he has heard or previously said, but often these phrases themselves are of great significance to the play. At several points in the play, Peer utters the phrase, "Forward or back, it's equally far./ Outside or in, I'm still confined" (72, 122, 151, 178). This saying, in tandem with Peer's consistent repetition of the Boyg's admonition to "Go round" (71, 72, 151), suggest that Peer's journey may well be a circular excursion, with a starting and ending point that are ultimately the same.

The disconcerting effect of the trope of repetition is reinforced by the presence of mysterious characters with either no names or merely descriptive names. Characters of this nature litter Peer's mental landscape—The Great Boyg, The Strange Passenger, The Button Moulder, and The Thin Person, all fit perfectly into a tradition of characters whose metaphysical status is uncertain. What's more, these characters all seem to have the ability to offer commentary that touches directly on Peer's mental state. This has already been seen in the case of the Boyg, but the Strange Passenger is the one who seems most directly to set Peer on the path that he will ultimately find true. "But everything you say has a double meaning," says Peer to the Strange Passenger, seemingly acknowledging the mysterious wisdom of this stranger (146). Double or not, the message of the Strange Passenger will ultimately become clear to the reader: "Have you once in

your life/ Won the victory that only defeat can bring?/ . . ./ Would you have found that victory/ In the warmth and comfort of your hearthside?" (146).

The victory won by defeat, as I have suggested, is Peer's inability to fulfill the goal of his journey—self-discovery—until he returns to Solveig at the hut, only to find that this was where the self was all along, and thus the Strange Passenger proves prophetic. While the words of the Strange Passenger, as well as many other of these mysterious characters, may seem to have a hidden meaning (or perhaps no meaning) within their context in the play, they often have a very different, and often enlightening meaning for the reader attempting to interpret the play. Brian Johnston offers an explanation for these characters that is very much in keeping with the theories of monodrama that appeared subsequent to the play: "All the figures Peer encounters in act five are aspects of himself: of his past and of his inward life; and much of their mysterious quality is due to the chaotic nature of Peer's subjectivity. Peer now is the inhabitant of a mental landscape where events and objects are as much psychological as physical."¹⁵

With the play focused so much on selfhood, it is worthwhile to ask which view of Peer seems a more accurate portrayal. Is it likely that Peer Gynt, a poor, stumbling dreamer, who receives little respect from the people of his own small village, goes out and conquers the world, becoming wealthy businessman, prophet and ultimately Emperor? Or is it more likely that the Peer we see at the beginning of the play, the man of whom it was said "All the great deeds he'd ever heard of,/ He pretended he'd done them" (154), imagines a series of events of questionable reality, only to find that his real self remained at home all the while? Perhaps

¹⁵ Johnston, 201.

Peer has been away for fifty years, or just a day. Perhaps he has been around the world, or maybe he just went up into the mountains. The real significance of the adventures of Peer Gynt lies in his progression as a person. In his initial encounter with Peer, the Great Boyg boasted of himself, “The Great Boyg wins by doing nothing” (73). In the end, so does Peer Gynt.

As we trace the genealogy of multi-character monodrama, it will become apparent that no figure plays a more significant role in the history of the form than August Strindberg. Although Strindberg expresses his contempt for Ibsen as a blue-stocking, evidence of Ibsen’s influence on Strindberg is not difficult to find, and this is certainly true of the strain of monodrama that appears in Strindberg’s post-*Inferno* period. An early instance of this influence may be found in one of Strindberg’s first proto-Expressionist plays, *Lucky Per’s Journey*, written in 1881-82. On the most basic level, Halvdan Koht has noted, “The first name Peer is an old spelling of Per, colloquial for Peder or Peter.”¹⁶ But the relationship between *Peer Gynt* and *Lucky Per’s Journey* goes well beyond similarly named protagonists. Gunnar Ollén’s characterization of *Lucky Per’s Journey* has proven highly influential: “This fairy play . . . tells of the Swedish Peer Gynt who goes forth into the world to find his luck—but only finds it after he has ceased to want happiness for himself.”¹⁷ John Gassner quotes Ollén in his assessment of the play: “The rapidly moving scenes of this play, which has been described as ‘a

¹⁶ Halvdan Koht, *Life of Ibsen*, trans. Einar Haugen and A.E. Santaniello (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1971), 229.

¹⁷ Gunnar Ollén, *August Strindberg*, trans. Peter Tirner (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), 38.

Swedish *Peer Gynt*,’ afford a kaleidoscopic view of the world, modified by disenchantment. The play, outwardly playful and rather facetious, has the external trappings of Romantic fairy-tale comedy and Strindberg once declared that he had intended it for children only.”¹⁸ Arvid Paulson, writing in the same collection, also cites Ollén, and draws an even more explicit link between Ibsen and Strindberg’s Expressionism:

While Strindberg’s original idea for this pilgrimage series may have been derived from his reading of the old medieval mystery and morality plays, Ibsen’s influence on him through *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* cannot be overlooked, as Dr. Gunnar Ollén (in his valuable manual *Strindbergs dramatik*) and others have noted. . . . Ibsen’s influence is especially noticeable in the first play of this series, *Lucky Per’s Journey*. The core of the idea for this play is essentially the same as *Peer Gynt*, although the characters, the plots, and the conflicts are entirely different.¹⁹

¹⁸ John Gassner, “Strindberg the Expressionist,” in August Strindberg, *Eight Expressionist Plays*, trans. and ed. Arvid Paulson (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 9.

¹⁹ Arvid Paulson, Preface to *Lucky Per’s Journey*, in August Strindberg, *Eight Expressionist Plays*, trans. and ed. Arvid Paulson (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 17.

Paulson's acknowledgement of the influence of medieval mystery and morality plays on Strindberg only serves to reinforce this connection to *Peer Gynt*, where similar influence can be noted, as we have already seen.

While my primary focus in examining Strindberg's Expressionist dramas will be on *To Damascus*, a brief look at *Lucky Per's Journey* will be helpful in demonstrating Ibsen's influence on Strindberg. *Lucky Per*, set in medieval Sweden, tells the story of Per, a boy who has been locked in a castle by his father, who wants to shield him from all of the misery and disappointment of life. Per, not surprisingly, wants to explore the world, and a Fairy and a Gnome appear to offer him the chance to do so. Per is given the Gnome's wishing ring, which, the Fairy tells him, "possesses the power to realize for you all your wishes—for your own benefit, yet to the detriment of no one."²⁰ Like the Troll King's offer to make a cut in Peer Gynt's eye, the ring offers Per the opportunity to see the world through a new set of eyes, and his wishes, desires, and thoughts can now transform the landscape. Per then uses his new-found power to rapidly progress from rich man (who soon finds himself poor), to civic reformer (whose zeal leads to his public humiliation by the elder figures of the town), and ultimately Per finds himself with a chance to become Caliph of an undisclosed country, an opportunity that can only come to fruition if Per agrees to sign a document forswearing the faith of his fathers—an analogue to the Troll King's insistence that Peer accept the cut in his eye that will permanently render him a troll.

²⁰ August Strindberg, *Lucky Per's Journey*, in *Eight Expressionist Plays*, trans. and ed. Arvid Paulson (New York: New York University Press, 1972), 27.

As Per returns home to his father after learning valuable lessons about the nature of life and love, the Shadow (another mysteriously named character), speaks to Per about his journey, laying bare its unreality far more explicitly than is ever suggested in *Peer Gynt*: “You have made no great stride through life. One does not go leaping through life with any phenomenal speed. Everything you have thought you have lived through has been nothing but a dream.”²¹ And finally, in terms reminiscent of Ibsen’s earlier play, the Shadow admonishes Per as he prepares to leave, “After having dismissed you and your dreams of youth with the wise man’s eternally young—and eternally old—exhortation: Know yourself!”²²

While Ibsen’s influence on Strindberg is apparent in *Lucky Per’s Journey*, the relevance of that influence to the future path of monodrama is perhaps best exemplified in Strindberg’s 1898-1901 *To Damascus*.²³ In this study, we will focus primarily on the first part of *To Damascus*, for several reasons. First, as Walter Johnson has noted, “Strindberg did not initially plan to write a trilogy. *To Damascus, I* was composed in less than two months in early 1898, apparently

²¹ Strindberg, *Lucky Per*, 72.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibsen biographer Michael Meyer notes, “In 1898 Strindberg had sent Ibsen the first two parts of his highly symbolic drama, *To Damascus*.” This does not seem to have been common practice for Strindberg, and would suggest that he may well have been aware of Ibsen’s influence on the plays, or at least that he thought Ibsen might have recognized a kinship with his work. See Michael Meyer, *Henrik Ibsen*, 785.

without any thought of writing a companion play.”²⁴ *To Damascus I* also provides the clearest link to the earlier *Lucky Per's Journey*, as Gunnar Ollén notes, “Strindberg described the first part of *To Damascus* as ‘a new genre, fantastical and luminous like *Lucky Per*, but taking place in the present, and in full reality.’”²⁵ Strindberg’s assertion that *To Damascus I* takes place in “full reality” may seem somewhat odd considering the extremely fractured and often bizarre feel of much of the play. However, Strindberg’s “full reality” likely refers to reality as experienced through the absolute subjectivity of the individual.

In discussing subjectivity in *To Damascus*, several critics have positioned the play, much as I have, as a foundational work for multi-character monodrama. Ollén, connecting the play to the Expressionist movement it is often credited with inspiring, notes, “*To Damascus I* became a model for that type of Expressionistic drama which portrays reality and its shapes, not as an objective observer sees them, but as they appear to the subject whose sovereign imagination enlarges or suppresses reality’s shapes at will.”²⁶ Carl E.W.L. Dahlström quotes Fredrik Böök, who sees the play as representing the world as seen through a particularly warped mind: “impressions of reality are transformed after having passed through

²⁴ Walter Johnson, “The Damascus Trilogy,” in August Strindberg, *Plays of Confession and Therapy: To Damascus, I; To Damascus, II; To Damascus III*, trans. and intro. Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 9.

²⁵ Ollén, 61.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

a confused intelligence and a sick sensitiveness.”²⁷ Walter Johnson, citing Eric Bentley’s view of Strindberg’s late works, notes: “The Damascus trilogy and many later Strindberg plays maintain an interplay between the outer and inner, objective and subjective, naturalistic and nonnaturalistic. Certainly the Damascus plays are a fusion of ‘reality’ and dream states.”²⁸ Johnson further focuses on the break from realism that *To Damascus* represents: “He dared to disregard the popular insistence on at least superficial verisimilitude in serious stage productions by insisting on what he believed to be a far more important verisimilitude—the inner life with its failures to abide by the rules and regulations of, say, external reality.”²⁹ Johnson later continues, explicitly arguing that *To Damascus* offers a different kind of realism:

What we get in the Damascus plays is a series of images, more rather than less connected with the nuances of experience rejected by the Unconscious in favor of distilled and distorted matters out of what from a naturalistic point of view may seem false—reverie or daydreaming, flashes of insight or vision, delusions, hallucinations, or deliberate extension through speculation and imagination. Perhaps the revelation of the workings of

²⁷ Fredrik Böök, quoted in Carl E.W.L. Dahlström, *Strindberg’s Dramatic Expressionism* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), 126.

²⁸ Walter Johnson, “Introduction to *To Damascus I*,” in August Strindberg, *Plays of Confession and Therapy: To Damascus, I; To Damascus, II; To Damascus III*, trans. and intro. Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 12.

²⁹ Walter Johnson, Preface to August Strindberg, *Plays of Confession and Therapy: To Damascus, I; To Damascus, II; To Damascus III*, trans. and intro. Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 4.

hidden forces within a human being in their intricate and apparently inseparable connections may, as Strindberg thought in 1898, give a truer and more accurate representation of life than the realism and naturalism of the 1880s had been able to do.³⁰

Apparent in all of these comments is the underlying concept that life as experienced by the individual is fundamentally different from the objective vision posited by Strindberg's earlier naturalist works, the photograph, and the movie camera. It is this reality, subjective rather than objective, that monodrama seeks to capture.

Just as critics saw the characters of *Peer Gynt*'s last act as aspects or creations of Peer himself, so the Stranger has frequently been seen as creating the world in which we find him. Walter Johnson notes, "In varying degrees every 'character' in *To Damascus* takes on actuality as conceived in the mind of the Stranger."³¹ Indeed, in a footnote to the character list, Johnson cautions the reader, "The characters are not individualized . . . but may, for want of a better term, be called types, or even abstractions of aspects of a single person."³² Johnson goes on to more specifically delineate the aspects of the Stranger that several of the characters represent:

³⁰ Johnson, "Introduction to *To Damascus I*," 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

³² August Strindberg, *To Damascus I*, in *Plays of Confession and Therapy: To Damascus, I; To Damascus, II; To Damascus III*, trans. and intro. Walter Johnson (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1979), 90 (translator's note).

The Beggar, the Confessor, and the Tempter are nothing more or less than other aspects of the central 'character' as exposed to humiliation through having to accept charity from others in order to survive, as exposed through self-conviction of sins to crushing moral demands and humiliating self-condemnation, and as led into doubt and intellectual speculation challenging the Creator and His Powers.³³

Carl E.W.L. Dahlström cites French critic Alfred Jolivet, who argues, "In *To Damascus* there is but a sole hero, the [Stranger]. . . . The drama is played entirely within him. . . . From one end to the other, the action is only a debate between the hero and the occult powers which are born of his delusions."³⁴

Dahlström concludes from this, "Not only does the play take place entirely within the psyche of the [Stranger]; it also derives from this source the complete embodiment of scenes, personages, and actions."³⁵ In his later book, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism*, Dahlström asserts, "From the Expressionistic point of view, however, the whole play [*To Damascus, I*] is a dramatic monologue, the monologue of the [Stranger], since the other characters are merely manifestations of his 'self.'³⁶ He continues, "The whole play is so evidently a radiation of the ego"³⁷ that "it is only natural that the Unknown should read the thoughts of the Lady, for she is a product of his mind."³⁸

³³ Johnson, "Introduction to *To Damascus I*," 15.

³⁴ Alfred Jolivet, quoted in Carl E.W.L. Dahlström, "Situation and Character in *Till Damaskus*," *PMLA* 53, no. 3 (September 1938): 889.

³⁵ Carl E.W.L. Dahlström, "Situation and Character in *Till Damaskus*," *PMLA* 53, no. 3 (September 1938): 889.

³⁶ Carl E.W.L. Dahlström, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1968), 123.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

Dahlström's reference to the dramatic monologue might have more fittingly been to monodrama, and despite this slight variance in terminology, the reference is particularly fruitful in that it helps to demonstrate the connection between the multi-character monodrama and its single-character progenitor. While the two forms may seem vastly different, they are connected by the idea that while the heroes of the single-character musical and poetic monodramas poured forth their hearts and minds directly to us in words, the multi-character monodrama dramatizes the psyche of the hero through both *mise-en-scène* and additional characters, while the source of these images remains, as with the verbal expression of the single-character form, the protagonist's mind. While the mode of presentation turns from verbal to visual, the idea of presenting the interiority of the protagonist remains the same.

In *To Damascus*, we find yet another hero frequently interpreted as a representation of the author. Walter Johnson introduces the trilogy as "these autobiographical volumes."³⁹ John Gassner more specifically identifies Strindberg as the Stranger: "In *To Damascus* Strindberg made an accounting of his personality and course of life and tried to understand the meaning of his existence. . . . The Stranger . . . is Strindberg himself."⁴⁰ Arvid Paulson agrees, stating simply, "Strindberg himself is the disguised protagonist."⁴¹ John R.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁹ Johnson, Preface, 4.

⁴⁰ Gassner, 5.

⁴¹ Paulson, 17.

Milton connects the autobiographical nature of the play to the dream quality so central to Strindberg's late plays: "Strindberg's dream plays give the appearance of being literal transcripts of his own dreams. . . . It is too difficult for the spectator to separate the dreamer from Strindberg."⁴² While Milton sees the conflation of Strindberg and the protagonist as problematic and perhaps even damning to the possible success of Strindberg's late works, the autobiographical nature of *To Damascus* once again is consonant with the nature of monodrama.

Milton's focus on the dream state is indicative of just how significant the idea of the dream is in Strindberg's post-Inferno plays. Writing these plays precisely as Freud and Bergson were producing their major works, Strindberg seems to have harbored similar ideas concerning the nature and importance of dreams, as Arvid Paulson notes:

To him a dream could seem as oppressive or as exultant as an experience in everyday life and at times seemed to have the reality of life itself. For what is life but a puzzling, chaotic, enigmatic dream? And does not the subconscious mind impartially reflect the thoughts and desires of the waking mind, without aid or hindrance of human impulses, unfettered by the material senses?⁴³

⁴² John R. Milton, "The Aesthetic Fault of Strindberg's 'Dream Plays,'" *The Tulane Drama Review* 4, no. 3 (March 1960): 115.

⁴³ Paulson, 16.

Furthermore, like Freud, Strindberg seems to have been a student of dreams: “Strindberg frequently commented on the difficulty of separating waking and dreaming, knew every kind of dream experience, and made use of every one of them in his thinking and his writing.”⁴⁴ The idea of the “difficulty of separating waking and dreaming” is reminiscent of Bergson’s concept of the continuity of lived experience in duration, an experience that Strindberg tried to reproduce on stage.

Certainly, the title of Strindberg’s best-known play from the period, *A Dream Play*, highlights the importance of the dream state to Strindberg’s late work. His thoughts on the matter, and the inherent connection between *To Damascus* and *A Dream Play*, is apparent in Strindberg’s own prefatory note to the latter play:

In this dream play, as in his earlier dream play *To Damascus*, the author has attempted to imitate the disconnected but seemingly logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and plausible. Time and space do not exist. . . . The characters split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere. But one consciousness is superior to them all: that of the dreamer.⁴⁵

Strindberg’s statement would seem to suggest that since *To Damascus* conforms to our definition of monodrama, then *A Dream Play* should as well. But it is not

⁴⁴ Johnson, “Introduction,” 12.

⁴⁵ Strindberg, “Author’s Note to *A Dream Play*,” 209 (see chap. 2, n. 121).

quite that simple. Harry Carlson raises “a question that has puzzled many: If this is a dream, who is the dreamer? The author’s preface says that ‘one consciousness is superior to all the others—the dreamer’s,’ but the identity of this consciousness is a matter of dispute.”⁴⁶ Christopher Innes argues, similarly, “unlike *To Damascus* there is no dominating ‘consciousness’ in the play itself.”⁴⁷ While this lack of a single clearly dominant figure in *A Dream Play* might seem to place the play at odds with one of the central tenets of my definition of monodrama, several scholars have isolated monodramatic elements within the play.

In her essay, “Nature’s Dream Play: Modes of Vision and August Strindberg’s Re-Definition of the Theatre,” Eszter Szalczzer acknowledges the complexity of identity in *A Dream Play*, while still seeking a central figure. In *A Dream Play*, Szalczzer argues, “the whole represented universe has its origin in a single consciousness, that of the dreamer, embodied in a cavalcade of characters who ‘split, double, redouble, evaporate, condense, fragment, cohere.’”⁴⁸ She continues, “The individual characters lacking separate and stable identities constantly switch roles and metamorphose into different shapes. All the *dramatis personae* apparently spring from a single consciousness, presenting a monodrama

⁴⁶ Harry G. Carlson, *Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 138.

⁴⁷ Innes, *Avant-Garde Theatre*, 34 (see chap. 2, n. 122).

⁴⁸ Eszter Szalczzer, “Nature’s Dream Play: Modes of Vision and August Strindberg’s Re-Definition of the Theatre,” *Theatre Journal* 53, no. 1 (2001): 46.

disguised as a monumental spectacle.”⁴⁹ Seeking the single consciousness of Strindberg’s Prefatory Note, Szalczzer infers that Agnes, Indra’s Daughter, is the dreamer of *A Dream Play*. In describing her as the focus of the monodrama, Szalczzer demonstrates the fundamental instability of Agnes’s character:

She finds herself in the midst of continuously transforming landscapes. The dream-quality of the journey is stressed by the repetitious split of her personality into a spectator of and an actor in the grotesque scenes taking place in the metamorphosing scenery. . . . She seeks in vain for a higher self, a unifying principle. Because she is unable to break out from the enchanted dream world, she loses her sense of identity. She sees herself dissolve in the constantly changing roles she assumes in her dream.⁵⁰

Agnes, then, rather than simply seeing a world through her own subjectivity, or projecting figures onto a landscape, actually becomes each of the characters in her vision. This would explain what appears to be the multiplicity of vision in the play. It would also raise the possibility that *A Dream Play* is actually a divided-self monodrama of the type I discussed in chapter four.

Szalczzer ultimately describes *A Dream Play* in terms that echo Evreinov’s vision of monodrama:

We are taken metaphorically inside the theatre of the mind, . . . a theatre in which the dreamer is the sole spectator. By the same token, the spectator

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48.

of *Ett drömspel* becomes the dreamer compelled to see things with the eyes of the protagonist. In the dream nothing is immutable, not even the dreamer's identity, and as our senses cannot but identify with those of Indra's Daughter, we experience with her the fragility and repetitious dissolution of the self.⁵¹

A similar observation is made by Dahlström, who notes, “[*A Dream Play*] gives us the dream dimness or dream sharpness of scenes floating swiftly before our eyes, scenes in which we are actors at the same time that we are seeing them as spectators.”⁵² This experience is close to that described by Evreinov—complete identification of spectator with protagonist, with the added feature that as the central figure fragments and divides, we do so as well.

Seeking a more unified dreamer, Harry Carlson points to a 1970 production of the play by Strindberg's countryman, Ingmar Bergman, in which “Bergman made the poet the dreamer.”⁵³ Such an interpretation is not unproblematic, considering the fact that the Poet is not present on stage through much of the play. Bergman saw a way around this issue: “Although the character does not appear in the text until half way through, the director had him enter at the opening and sit down at a small table downstage, there to remain for much of the

⁵¹ Ibid., 51.

⁵² Dahlström, *Strindberg's Dramatic Expressionism*, 176.

⁵³ Carlson, *Strindberg and the Poetry of Myth*, 138.

action as a kind of prompter or conductor.”⁵⁴ Bergman’s staging choice is striking for several reasons. First, it is reminiscent of an earlier monodramatic production, Edward Gordon Craig’s 1912 *Hamlet* at the Moscow Art Theatre. Laurence Senelick recounts an April 29, 1909 conversation between Craig and Stanislavsky, transcribed and translated by Ursula Cox:

Stanislavsky: I understand what you say about monodrama. Let us try by every means to make the public understand that it is looking at the play with the eyes of Hamlet; that the king, the queen, and the court are not shown on the stage as they really are, but such as they appear to Hamlet to be. And I think that in the scenes where Hamlet is on stage we can do this. But what are we to do with the characters when Hamlet is not on the stage?

Craig: I should like Hamlet to be on the stage always, in every scene, all through the play; he can be in the distance, lying, sitting, in front of the people acting, at the side, behind, but the spectator ought never to lose sight of him. I want the public to feel the connection between what is going forward on the stage and Hamlet.⁵⁵

Similarly, Bergman, it would seem, wanted the audience always to feel the connection between the action on stage and *The Poet*.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Senelick, *Moscow Hamlet*, 64 (see chap. 2, n. 59).

Bergman's staging also recalls the theoretical propositions of Edmond Picard and Fyodor Sologub, who called for the author to be seated at a table downstage, reciting his work as it was acted out onstage. The similarity becomes all the more striking when we consider the fact that it is The Poet, a character who would appear to be a likely stand-in for Strindberg himself, who was to be depicted in this way. The idea of Strindberg as The Poet is bolstered by the view that the dream of *A Dream Play* is that of the author himself: "The 'dreamer' is not properly established as an element *within* the play. The dreamer appears to be the author, superimposed over the structure of the play itself. It is too difficult to separate the dreamer from Strindberg."⁵⁶ Earlier, I noted that Evreinov's innovation in "Introduction to Monodrama" was to take Sologub's author/narrator and integrate him into the protagonist. It is this very move that Strindberg makes in *To Damascus*, but shies away from in *A Dream Play*, leaving both the author, in the guise of the Poet, onstage while simultaneously presenting a corresponding protagonist in Agnes. The extent to which this problematizes a reading of either character as the true "active participant" of which Evreinov speaks is clear in a dialogue between the two late in the play, as Agnes recounts her experiences:

Agnes: All these things were in my dreams . . .

Poet: All these things were in my poems . . .

Agnes: Then you know what poetry is . . .

Poet: Then I know what dreams are . . . What is poetry?

⁵⁶ Milton, 115. [Italics are Milton's.]

Agnes: Not reality, but more than reality . . . not dreams, but waking
dreams, reveries . . . ⁵⁷

The trope of *déjà vu*, typical of monodrama, of Strindberg's late work, and of the Expressionist movement that Strindberg so heavily influenced, is apparent here, as the same lines are repeated just pages later:

Poet: I think I've been through this before . . .

Agnes: Me too.

Poet: Maybe it was a dream.

Agnes: Or a poem.

Poet: Or a poem.

Agnes: Then you know what poetry is.

Poet: Then I know what dreams are.

Agnes: It seems to me we said these words before, somewhere else.

Poet: Then you'll soon know what reality is.

Agnes: Or dreams.

Poet: Or poetry. ⁵⁸

Whose dream is it: she who dreamt the dream, or he who wrote it? Ultimately, *A Dream Play* fails to offer the clear central protagonist characteristic of

⁵⁷ August Strindberg, *A Dream Play*, in *Five Plays*, Harry G. Carlson, trans. (New York: Signet Classic, 1981), 257.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 263-264.

monodrama. Nevertheless, the clear monodramatics of *To Damascus* and the monodramatic affinities of *A Dream Play* attest to Strindberg's predilection for the form, and the influence of these works on later experiments in the form ensures Strindberg a place in the history of monodrama at least as central as the one he holds in modern drama as a whole.

Although mentioned by Evreinov in "Introduction to Monodrama" as one of the plays bearing "the greatest similarity to monodrama as I interpret it,"⁵⁹ Maurice Maeterlinck's *The Blue Bird* might at first glance seem an unlikely companion to the more ponderous *Peer Gynt* and *To Damascus*. But a closer look at the structure and underlying concept of Maeterlinck's play reveals a close kinship between these works, and further evidence of the prevalence of monodrama at the turn of the century.

An immediate obstacle to a monodramatic reading of *The Blue Bird* lies in the fact that rather than a single hero or heroine, it has a pair of children, Tytyl and Mytyl, as its dual protagonists. In including it in his assessment of monodrama, Evreinov seems to consider that the two children, who share an identical experience can be seen as a single protagonist.

Accepting the possibility that several characters sharing an experience can be perceived as a single protagonist, Spencer Golub reaches a surprising conclusion. Speaking of Evreinov's mass spectacle, *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, Golub notes, "Through the use of a mass protagonist . . . Evreinov at least

⁵⁹ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 190.

partially realized the principle of monodrama.”⁶⁰ Golub suggests that like Nietzsche’s Dionysiac mass becoming one through the chorus, the performers of *The Storming of the Winter Palace* became united as a single protagonist in their reenactment of the events of the revolution. If such a unity in numbers was conceivable for the thousands of actors of *The Storming of the Winter Palace*, then surely we can accept that the little siblings Tytyl and Mytyl share a single consciousness in the course of *The Blue Bird*.

The opening scenes of *The Blue Bird* are similar to those of Strindberg’s *Lucky Per’s Journey*. Both plays are set on Christmas Eve, and as each opens, the respective protagonists peer out their windows, looking with envy on an idyllic Christmas scene (a Christmas tree, sweets and cakes, happy children) in a wealthy home out in the town. Just as Per is visited by the Fairy and the Gnome, so Tytyl and Mytyl are greeted by the Fairy Berylune. Per’s Fairy offers him the Gnome’s wishing ring, which “possesses the power to realize for you all your wishes—for your own benefit, yet to the detriment of no one,”⁶¹ while in *The Blue Bird*, the Fairy places a “dear little green hat” upon Tytyl’s head, and this hat prominently displays “the big diamond that makes people see.”⁶² When the diamond is turned, it “opens your eyes. . . . You at once see even the inside of things.”⁶³ As Tytyl turns the diamond for the first time, “a sudden and wonderful change comes over

⁶⁰ Golub, 201 (see chap. 2, n. 44).

⁶¹ Strindberg, *Lucky Per*, 27.

⁶² Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Blue Bird*, trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1910), 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

*everything. The old Fairy alters then and there into a princess of marvelous beauty.*⁶⁴ This further recalls Peer Gynt's visit to the Troll Kingdom, where the Troll King offers to make a cut in Peer's eye so that he might see the world more beautifully.

The Fairy sends Tyltyl and Mytyl out on a quest for the Blue Bird, the capture of which, she says, will bring happiness to her little girl. Like Per and Peer, Tyltyl and Mytyl embark on a journey on which they confront images both wonderful and frightening. The first stop on the children's pilgrimage is the Land of Memory, where Tyltyl and Mytyl have dinner with their dear but departed grandparents. The siblings learn that the dead live on in our memories, and as in *Peer Gynt*, the productive power of thought is emphasized:

Granny Tyl: But you thought of us. . . .

Tyltyl: Yes . . .

Granny Tyl: Well, every time you think of us, we wake up and see you again. . . .

Tyltyl: What, is it enough to . . .

Granny Tyl: But come, you know that. . . .

Tyltyl: No, I didn't know. . . .

Granny Tyl (to Gaffer Tyl): It's astonishing, up there. . . . They don't know yet. . . . Do they never learn anything? . . .⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 70.

The children and their personified, talking animal cohorts then voyage through the Palace of Night, where Night reveals his secrets; the Forest, where the animals and trees, led by the Cat, Tylette, into open revolt, threaten to kill Tytyl and Mytyl until Tylô, the faithful Dog, saves the day; and finally, the Kingdom of the Future, where they find hordes of little blue children whose day of birth has not yet come. At various points, the siblings appear to have captured the blue bird that they have been seeking, only to have it slip through their grasp, and they appear to return to the world of waking reality empty-handed. And yet, when their neighbor, Madame Berlingot (a double of the Fairy Bérylune) arrives, seeking Tytyl's bird for her sick child, the children realize that the blue bird has been in their possession all along. On their return, Tytyl and Mytyl now see their own home, and the people inside it, as more beautiful and welcoming than ever before, as their journey has taught them the true meaning of home and family.

In its pattern of the unsatisfied protagonist leaving home seeking fortune and self-fulfillment, only to find that true fulfillment was to be found at home to begin with, *The Blue Bird* is structurally and conceptually similar to *Peer Gynt*, *Lucky Per's Journey*, and *To Damascus*. At the same time, *The Blue Bird* has clear and unmistakable roots in the genre of children's fairy tales, a link with important implications for all of the plays we have discussed. In her article, "Magic Abjured: Closure in Children's Fantasy Fiction," Sarah Gilead examines a "device [that] recurs in many works of children's fantasy fiction: the adventurers

return home, the dreamer awakens, or the magical beings depart.”⁶⁶ It is worth noting that Gilead’s central example is *The Wizard of Oz*—L. Frank Baum’s book was published in 1900 and was presented dramatically on a Chicago stage in 1902 and on Broadway a year after that.⁶⁷ Film versions of *The Wizard of Oz* and *The Blue Bird* were produced within a year of one another, in 1939 (*Oz*) and 1940; both used the same device for the depiction of the shift between home, shown in black and white at the beginning and end of both films, and the fantastic journey, seen in bright, vivid Technicolor splendor.

Indeed, *The Wizard of Oz* has much in common with Maeterlinck’s play, as well as the other plays discussed above. A magical effect that can change the perception of reality (the Troll’s offer to make a cut in Peer’s eye, Per’s Gnome ring, the diamond on Tytyl’s hat) figures prominently in Baum’s novel, as Gilead notes:

The silver slippers of the dead Witch of the East [they are ruby slippers in the 1939 film version] take [Dorothy] on her real quest to accommodate her fantasy self to the exigencies of reality. The slippers’ hidden power is finally discovered to be the most arcane of all the powers of the imagination—the ability to make reality tolerable. . . .

⁶⁶ Sarah Gilead, “Magic Abjured: Closure in Children’s Fantasy Fiction,” *PMLA* 106, no. 2 (March 1991): 277.

⁶⁷ Eric Gjovaag, “*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* Website,” <http://www.eskimo.com/~tiktok/faq09.html> (accessed 26 April 2005).

The heart of the green world is the Emerald City, whose inhabitants and visitors, including Dorothy, wear green spectacles: altered perceptions, altered reality.⁶⁸

As we have noted of these other works, the journeys of the protagonist need not require a great deal of actual traveling, as the real source of every depicted locale is in the protagonist's mind: "In *The Wizard of Oz*, the journey out is really the journey in."⁶⁹ Gilead sees a pattern in fairy tale fiction that must by now seem familiar to us: "In each of these works the child hero enters a fantastic kingdom, performs symbolic tasks, and returns to his own room."⁷⁰ In his dissertation, "The Fairy Tale in Modern Drama," David Nicholson sees a similar pattern: "Experienced as a dream, the visit is often equivalent in time to one night's passing; we feel the thrill of fairyland as a liberating darkness, suggesting Dionysiac release, then wake up with the dawn, which re-establishes the normal light-filled world. After the disenchantment we see the effects of the visit in lives once again bound by the laws of ordinary reality."⁷¹ The renewed importance of home as the ideal locale is emphasized in *The Wizard of Oz* in a manner that closely recalls *The Blue Bird*, and offers a glimpse at the larger message of the fairy tale structure:

⁶⁸ Gilead, 279.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁷¹ David Nicholson, "The Fairy Tale in Modern Drama," (Ph.D. Diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 1982), 158.

Dorothy returns home to a Kansas transformed by her new perceptions. The farmhouse destroyed in the tornado has been rebuilt, and Aunt Em, now physically and emotionally energized, welcomes Dorothy effusively no longer as an orphan and a stepchild but as a beloved daughter. Both house and aunt have absorbed a modest, healing dose of Oz's green force. Dorothy's loss of the dreamworld is fully compensated by the reality she regains when she returns newly matured through the magic of fantasy. . . . The dissolution of the dreamworld implies that the dreamer has introjected the messages conveyed and can now achieve intrapsychic and communal integration.⁷²

Gilead's vision suggests the possibility of fairy tale structure as depicting a process of normalization, an idea which she further elucidates: "The return completes a history of psychic growth and interprets the fantasy narrative as a salutary exposure of forbidden wishes and emotions. . . . Obsessive inquiry, resentment, anger, or anxiety is symbolically enacted in the fantasy and thus reduced to an acceptable level, so that the formerly fragile or threatened ego returns as a more fully formed social entity."⁷³

Gilead seems to suggest that fairy tale structure is inherently conservative, an idea with significant implications for all of the monodramas we have looked at so far in this chapter. In each case, the ending is marked by a nostalgic return that

⁷² Gilead, 280.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 278.

seems to advocate a maintenance of the status quo, if only in a personal rather than a political sense: Peer Gynt sets out in search of fame and fortune only to return home with the realization that his true self was to be found at home with his wife; Lucky Per sets out to explore the wide world, but comes home having learned to be obedient and respectful of his father; The Stranger (in *To Damascus*), finishes his circular journey at the same street corner bench at which he started, realizing he should have remained here all along and with the option of entering the church with the Lady; and finally, Tytyl and Mytyl's jealousy of the wealthy children is replaced after their journey by a new-found appreciation of the comforts of home and all those who dwell within. Of all of these, *To Damascus* might be said to offer the greatest deviation from this conservative nostalgia, and the hope of spiritual renewal offered by the entry into the church suggests that the play, despite its structural similarities to these other works, might be more closely linked to the medieval morality play and its narrative of the pilgrimage towards redemption, a possibility we will explore further as we turn to look at monodramas of the German Expressionist movement.

Bruno Bettelheim, a foundational thinker in the area of the fairy tale, takes a somewhat different view on the object of these stories. For Bettelheim, the fairy tale is an important and necessary tool in the process of maturation, as children become able to face their fears and take their places in society: "This is exactly the message that fairy tales get across to the child in manifold form: that a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets

unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.”⁷⁴ Invoking the pattern of the hero’s return, Bettelheim notes, “The fairy story ends with the hero returning, or being returned, to the real world, much better able to master life.”⁷⁵ This is achieved, Bettelheim argues, by a process of externalization of interiority: “In a fairy tale, internal processes are externalized and become comprehensible as represented by the figures of the story and its events.”⁷⁶

Bettelheim’s analysis of the fairy tale is replete with analogues to monodrama, as first becomes evident when he looks at literary analysis of the form: “Literary critics such as G.K Chesterton and C.S. Lewis felt that fairy stories are ‘spiritual explorations’ and hence ‘the most life-like’ since they reveal ‘human life as seen, or felt, or divined from the inside.’”⁷⁷ And yet, the connection between the fairy tale and monodrama becomes most clear when the form is approached through the lens of child psychology, the focus of Bettelheim’s study: “The child . . . identifies with the hero in all his struggles. Because of this identification the child imagines that he suffers with the hero his trials and tribulations, and triumphs with him as virtue is victorious. The child makes such identifications all on his own, and the inner and outer struggles of the hero imprint

⁷⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

morality on him.”⁷⁸ This positioning of the fairy tale as monodrama for children is particularly interesting considering that Bettelheim takes this point further, arguing that to be truly effective the fairy tale must be read to the child or read by the child in text form, without illustrations: “The pictures divert from the learning process rather than foster it, because the illustrations direct the child’s imagination away from how he, on his own, would experience the story. The illustrated story is robbed of much content of personal meaning which it could bring to the child who applied only his own visual associations to the story, instead of those of the illustrator.”⁷⁹ Bettelheim’s objection, then, to illustrated fairy tales is essentially identical to the rationale behind closet drama—the ideal locale for these stories to occur is not onstage or in printed pictures, but in the mind of the reader/spectator.

In considering these varied views on the nature of the fairy tale, it must be noted that both Gilead and Bettelheim are basically concerned with the impact of fairy tales upon the primary audience for those tales—children. It is considerably less certain that these stories will have the same impact on the fully formed mind of an adult as they do on the developing psyche of their intended child audiences. It is true that like the fairy tales as analyzed by Gilead and Bettelheim, these multi-character monodramas contain a narrative of personal growth and self-fulfillment, and yet the implications of that narrative would seem starkly different in the cases of a child, for whom the process of acculturation is a necessary stage of development, and an adult, for whom if this process is still necessary, it must be seen as indicating a deficiency in the person taking the journey, one that must

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 60.

be corrected in order to bring them back into conformity with the norm. It may well be the case that the surprising predilection towards fairy tale form in multi-character monodrama may have less to do with the possible conservative or socializing messages of the fairy tale genre than it does with the form's effectiveness in placing the reader/spectator in the inner world of the protagonist, which is, ultimately, the goal of monodrama.

As we have already seen, Arnold Schoenberg's compositions *Erwartung* and *Pierrot Lunaire* have a special place in the genealogy of monodrama as transitional works. Schoenberg's 1913 "drama with music," *Die glückliche Hand*, is further evidence of the composer's significance in the history of monodrama. While *Die glückliche Hand* was not completed until late in 1913, Schoenberg began writing the music in 1908 and had a first draft of the lyrics ready by June 1910, while he was still working on *Erwartung*. Michael Robinson sees the link between these two works as going beyond the temporal, calling the play, "In effect a monodrama like *Erwartung*."⁸⁰ Tom Beck, similarly, refers to *Erwartung* and *Die glückliche Hand* as "Schoenberg's two monodramas."⁸¹ The plot of both works is a love triangle: the Woman of *Erwartung* may have killed her lover in a dispute over his infidelity, while the Man in *Die glückliche Hand* struggles to gain

⁸⁰ Michael Robinson, "Strindberg and Musical Expressionism in Vienna," in *Studies in Strindberg* (Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1998), 178.

⁸¹ Tom Beck, "The Literary Sources of 'Die Glückliche Hand,'" *Tempo* (New Series) 189 (June 1994): 20.

and keep the love of the Woman against the machinations of the Gentleman. The themes and methods of the two works are also similar:

Schoenberg does not represent the outer, but the inner; he gives no likeness of the external, but is concerned with insight; he writes no realistic dramas, but dramas of ideas. *Erwartung* is the psychological reflex of the inner life, the sphere of which can be as well dream as actual experience; *Die glückliche Hand* is the fate of a life, something ever repeating itself, symbolically brought together in the course of several minutes.⁸²

The focus on the inner life, fundamental to both of these works, inclines Schoenberg to monodrama. Schoenberg himself commented on the aspect of interiority in his work in discussing how it should be labeled (as opposed to calling it Expressionist): “I also gave it a name, which did not become popular, however. I said it is the *art of the representation of inner occurrences*. But I must not say that loudly, for all that is despised today as Romantic.”⁸³

Schoenberg here reinforces the centrality of interiority in his work as well as the underlying link between Romanticism and what was to become known as Expressionism, no matter how unfashionable the earlier movement had become.

⁸² Karl H. Wörner, “Arnold Schoenberg and the Theatre,” *The Musical Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (October 1962): 447.

⁸³ Arnold Schoenberg, quoted in John C. Crawford, “*Die glückliche Hand*: Schoenberg’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (October 1974): 598. [Italics are Schoenberg’s.]

Despite the similarities between these pieces, one striking difference stands out—while in *Erwartung* we see only the Woman in her fit of madness, *Die glückliche Hand* depicts Man, Woman, and the Gentleman all on stage, as well as a chorus of six men and six women, and a group of workers. And yet, other than the chorus, the Man is the only character with a vocal part. Furthermore, while the Woman and Gentleman mime their parts on stage, they interact almost not at all with the Man, as the stage directions note, “*He is not allowed to look behind; he gazes always ahead; she remains always behind him.*”⁸⁴ The Man, however, reacts to these figures as though he is interacting with them—he becomes pained and distraught at the exact moment at which the Woman embraces the Gentleman, despite the fact that he cannot see them, and when she is on the opposite side of the stage, “*He stretches out both his arms as if she were standing in front of him.*”⁸⁵ This device would seem to suggest that these other figures are, as Michael Robinson suggests, “projections of the Man’s thoughts and the events that give rise to them.”⁸⁶

Such a projection suggests another important link between the single and multi-character versions of monodrama. While the single-character monodramas represented the protagonist expressing his or her emotions and perceptions in a stream-of-consciousness verbal explosion, the multi-character form attempts to

⁸⁴ Arnold Schoenberg, libretto to *Die glückliche Hand*, in liner notes for Arnold Schoenberg, *Die glückliche Hand*, Variations Op. 21, and *Verklärte Nacht* (sound recording), Pierre Boulez, conductor (Sony Classics, 1993), 18-19.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁶ Robinson, 178.

embody the experience felt by that protagonist in palpable characters who play out the situation with the “active participant” Evreinov envisioned. Evidence for this theory is apparent in Schoenberg’s work; the plots of *Erwartung* and *Die glückliche Hand*, written concurrently, are strikingly similar in several ways, and yet utilize these two different methods of approaching the same goal.

As in the earlier examples of Ibsen and Strindberg, many critics have suggested the presence of “strong autobiographical elements”⁸⁷ in *Die glückliche Hand*. First and foremost, the similarity between Schoenberg’s life and the events of the libretto are apparent in the love plot, as the triangular relationship of the Man, the Woman and the Gentleman can be seen as a reflection of Schoenberg’s actual experiences. John C. Crawford explains, “In real life, Schoenberg’s wife Mathilde had left him and their two children in 1908 and gone to live for a short time with the Austrian Fauve painter Richard Gerstl, later returning to the composer.”⁸⁸ A link to Schoenberg is also to be found in the play’s subplot, in which the Man forges a precious diadem with one powerful blow of a hammer, earning him the jealousy and anger of all the other workers. Through this act, according to Crawford, “The Man reveals himself as an artistic creator, while the jealous artisans represent either Schoenberg’s fellow composers or, more probably, the music critics, whom Schoenberg despised at this period.”⁸⁹

Schoenberg confirms this view in a letter to Alban Berg in which he remarked,

⁸⁷ John C. Crawford, “*Die glückliche Hand*: Schoenberg’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” *The Musical Quarterly* 60, no. 4 (October 1974): 583.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 584.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

“One thing you must grant me (I insist on that): everything I have ever written bears a certain intrinsic similarity with myself.”⁹⁰ The protagonist who encapsulates the autobiographical element is centrally positioned; the Man, as previously noted, spends the entire play downstage, with essentially all of the action occurring behind him—a device that may once again be seen as a link to the Picard/Sologub author-based theories of monodrama.

Like the German Expressionist dramatists who began writing at this time, Schoenberg appears to have been deeply influenced by August Strindberg. Nowhere is this influence more apparent than in *Die gluckliche Hand*: “Perhaps the most important literary influence on Schoenberg’s libretto is that of Strindberg—specifically, Strindberg’s three-part autobiographical play, *To Damascus*.”⁹¹ As Michael Robinson notes, “In October 1912, Schoenberg asked [Alban] Berg if he had thought of adapting Strindberg for musical theater, but added, ‘Just see that you don’t take the dream plays away from me, for I’m considering them myself.’”⁹² In his own essay, “Art and the Moving Pictures,” Schoenberg directly referenced *To Damascus* as an example of the type of work that renounced the “unity of time and space.”⁹³ Crawford notes that, “Like Strindberg’s [Stranger], Schoenberg’s Man is a success in his art, as symbolized

⁹⁰ Schoenberg, quoted in Robinson, 183.

⁹¹ Crawford, 584.

⁹² Robinson, 172.

⁹³ Arnold Schoenberg, “Art and the Moving Pictures,” in *Style and Idea*, ed. Leonard Stein, trans. Leo Black (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 154.

in the workshop scene, but a disastrous failure in life. The battle of the sexes is similarly a theme in both works, and both the [Stranger] and the Man share the faculty of second sight.”⁹⁴ Beck notes that as in *Die glückliche Hand*, the characters of Strindberg’s dream plays “are not given names, but merely appellations such as ‘The Officer,’ ‘The Attorney’ and the like.”⁹⁵ But perhaps the strongest connection between the two works is structural. Both plays, as both Crawford and Robinson note, follow a mirror pattern in which the hero returns to his place of departure (see Figure 2). While these two works are certainly notable for the rigidity of their mirror structures, both utilize the device towards the same motif of the return of the protagonist that we have seen repeatedly in this chapter. The influence of Strindberg on Schoenberg serves as evidence of the interrelationship of the musical and spoken forms of monodrama.

The pattern of influence between Strindberg and Schoenberg takes on added significance when we consider the role the two men played in regard to the German Expressionist movement, rising just as Schoenberg was working on *Die glückliche Hand*, as Crawford notes: “In its concentration on a single central character, the unnamed *Mann*, the libretto resembles and, in fact, antedates the Expressionist ‘Ich-Drama,’ since Reinhard Johannes Sorge’s *Der Bettler*, usually accepted as the first example of the genre, did not appear until 1911, while

⁹⁴ Crawford, 585.

⁹⁵ Beck, 20.

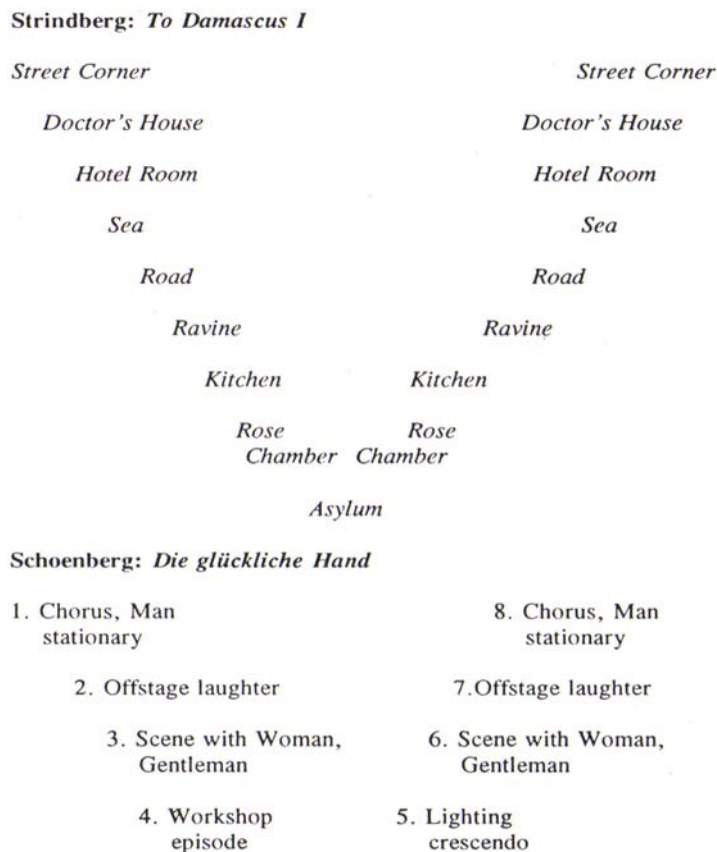


Figure 2. Structural chart of Strindberg's *To Damascus* and Schoenberg's *Die glückliche Hand*. Excerpted from Michael Robinson, "Strindberg and Musical Expressionism in Vienna," in *Studies in Strindberg* (Norwich, England: Norvik Press, 1998), 181.

Schoenberg completed the first draft of his libretto in June, 1910.⁹⁶ While the connection between Schoenberg's work and Sorge's may be coincidental, it undoubtedly bears witness to a similar set of influences and a worldview shared by the varied artists of the German Expressionist movement.

As we turn to look at the monodramas of German Expressionism, I think it important to begin by examining the view, advanced by J.M. Ritchie, among others, that Expressionist drama is, in its entirety, monodramatic: "Egocentricity

⁹⁶ Crawford, 583.

and solipsism become another hallmark of his [the Expressionist dramatist's] works, expressed in formal terms by the long soliloquies of the one central figure, about whom all the other figures cluster like satellites around a major planet."⁹⁷ Ritchie continues, voicing some consternation with this method, "It must be admitted, however, that a potential source of weakness in Expressionist drama is the almost exclusive focus on one central protagonist, while all the other figures in the drama are reduced to mere reflections of his central position."⁹⁸ While the dramaturgy Ritchie invokes is undoubtedly a feature of a number of Expressionist dramas, it is not, it must be noted, a suitable description of the breadth of the Expressionist movement. Mel Gordon, in the introduction to his collection *Expressionist Texts*, offers a taxonomy of Expressionist categories that more accurately and specifically defines the movement:

These three categories are 1) the *Geist* (purely spiritual or abstract) *performance*, which could be viewed as an ultimate vision of pure expression without the conventional intervention of dramatic characters or intricate plot—a sort of absolute communication between the playwright/director's *Seele*-mind and his audience; 2) the *Schrei* (scream or ecstatic) *performance*, which could be likened to an actual, if hazy, intense dream-state where movement, exteriors, language, motivation, and inner logic were uniformly and bizarrely warped; and 3) the *Ich* (I or ego)

⁹⁷ J.M. Ritchie, *German Expressionist Drama* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976), 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

performance, which resembled the second type in certain ways, but focused upon a central performer who acted less—or *more*—grotesquely than the other, often stereotypical, characters and who was the subject of the playwright's and audience's identification.⁹⁹

Into the *Geist* category, we might place works such as Oskar Kokoschka's *Murderer*, *The Women's Hope* and Vassily Kandinsky's *Yellow Sound*. The *Schrei* would seem the category most fit to include plays like Strindberg's *A Dream Play* which, the theories we discussed earlier notwithstanding, may well be seen as a dream without a dreamer. Among the German Expressionists, Kaiser's *Gas* trilogy and Toller's *The Machine Wreckers* can be seen as *Schrei* drama. It is the *Ich* category that most closely conforms to monodrama as I have defined it in this study.

Although his work influenced all aspects of the Expressionist movement, Strindberg, and particularly *To Damascus*, seems to have had an overwhelming impact on the genesis of the Expressionist *Ich* dramas, an influence that has been noted by many critics. Ritchie notes that Strindberg "has been called, with some justification, the real father of German Expressionist drama."¹⁰⁰ Renate Benson suggests specific ways in which Strindberg's influence took hold:

⁹⁹ Mel Gordon, "Expressionist Texts" in *Expressionist Texts*, ed. Mel Gordon (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 16.

¹⁰⁰ Ritchie, 24.

Expressionist drama can be traced back to Wedekind (the *Lulu* dramas), Sternheim (*Die Hose*), and especially to Strindberg. His *To Damascus*, 1898, structurally and thematically anticipates many features of German Expressionist drama: the *Stationentechnik* (a non-traditional dramatic technique presenting the various stages of the protagonist's development), the transfiguration motif and the introduction of types instead of individual characters. . . . This drama . . . belongs to the category of the *Ich*, or *Bekennnisdrama* (the I, or Confession drama). Sorge's *Der Bettler* follows Strindberg closely.¹⁰¹

Benson's emphasis on the *Stationentechnik* has been echoed by many commentators, including Ritchie: "The drama becomes a *Stationendrama*, following the ancient religious model of the stations of the cross. . . . Essentially, the dynamic, episodic structure mirrored the inner turmoil and awareness of chaos in the soul of the central figure, who, following the religious model, often goes through a total transformation."¹⁰² However, he traces the link directly to the original source: "The idea suggested is the far older one of the quest, involving the equally religious possibility of revelation or transformation in the course of this path through life."¹⁰³ As I suggested earlier, the choice of the medieval drama as a model has consequences for the type of denouement possible, for

¹⁰¹ Renate Benson, *German Expressionist Drama: Ernst Toller and Georg Kaiser* (New York: Grove Press, 1984), 7.

¹⁰² Ritchie, 18.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

while the fairy-tale model that we saw in *Peer Gynt* and *The Blue Bird* results in dramas of maturation that bring the hero or heroine back to the existing social order and facilitate an accommodation to it, the Expressionist dramas fundamentally reject the status quo, ending either in redemption (as in *To Damascus*), death (*From Morn to Midnight*), or the hope of a movement towards a new society, led by the freshly forged New Man (Toller's *Transfiguration*).

Another major aspect of Strindberg's influence on Expressionism is the use of dream logic in the drama, as Ritchie points out, "Time and place were ignored by the Expressionist dramatist so that he could feel free to create his own subjective universe. The dream, with its associations apparently lacking in cause or logic, was substituted for normal reality. For this practice there was a model to hand in Strindberg."¹⁰⁴

Walter Sokel concurs, "The extremism and distortion of Expressionist drama derive from its closeness to the dream,"¹⁰⁵ adding, "The projection of abstract idea and psychic situations into symbolic images and happenings is one of the most basic features of Expressionist drama."¹⁰⁶ Sokel, however, sees this aspect of Expressionist dramaturgy as arising from a familiar combination of influences: "The influence of Strindberg coincided with that of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis had decisive significance for Expressionism. . . . Even those Expressionists who were not conversant with the actual works of Freud and Jung

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁵ Walter H. Sokel, "Introduction," to *Anthology of German Expressionist Drama*, ed. Walter H. Sokel (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1984), xiv.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., xviii.

could not help but be familiar with the climate of thought that had given rise to psychoanalysis in the first place.”¹⁰⁷

The Expressionist concern with psychology throughout the movement is readily apparent as the *ego*, so central to Freud’s work, becomes the center of the dramatic world: “Expressionism is basically the subjective expression of an inner world (vision); in representing his personal reality the artist has to free himself from all academic rules and traditional aesthetic concepts (especially traditional norms of beauty). The experience of the reality must be ‘immediate’ and ‘genuine’; consequently the artist’s *Ego* becomes a primary element in his work.”¹⁰⁸ In her reference to the “immediate,” Benson reminds us of the psychology and philosophy of perception we discussed in chapter two. Mel Gordon ascribes a similar significance to the immediacy of perception in Expressionist drama:

No books of philosophy or psychology could instruct the New Man in this cosmic understanding; instead, he would have to seek it directly.

Sometimes this could be accomplished through the exploration of his unconscious in dream, hypnotic, trance, or drug-induced states.

Occasionally, in physical states of pure action where the brain’s censor would not function adequately, the New Man could discover that ecstatic, ineffable condition of “absolute Rapture.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

¹⁰⁸ Benson, 2.

¹⁰⁹ Gordon, 9.

Both Benson and Gordon seem to refer to a state of being much like the pre-analytical level of experience referred to as duration by Bergson, and akin to Merleau-Ponty's idea that "Perception is always in the mode of the impersonal 'One.'"¹¹⁰ Indeed, the generic appellations of Expressionist characters, in addition to invoking a universality, may also suggest the impersonality of direct experience of which Merleau-Ponty speaks.

Of Strindberg's many contributions to the Expressionist drama, Ritchie sees one as the most significant: "The essence of the new drama, however, as Strindberg recognized, was the presence of the 'single-minded consciousness' which holds the whole play together. This was certainly to become a crucial feature of Expressionist drama and the source of its strengths as well as weaknesses."¹¹¹ This "single-minded consciousness" of the *Ich* drama has, as Ritchie suggests, produced its share of criticism about the form. These complaints are strikingly similar to those originally leveled at Evreinov's theory of monodrama. Ritchie leads the charge:

At its best, as for example in Kaiser's *Von morgens bis mitternachts* (*From Morn till Midnight*), the solipsistic drama could be extremely successful in the way all other characters in the play mirror and reflect the problems of the Cashier. Less successful is a more lyrical drama like

¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, 279 (see chap. 2, n. 93).

¹¹¹ Ritchie, 26.

Sorge's *The Beggar*, where even the hero's mother, father, and girlfriend seem to have been introduced simply in order to illuminate significant aspects of the young hero's soul.¹¹²

Ritchie continues, restating his point: "The dangers of such self-centered, subjective, lyrical monologue drama become obvious, as all the other characters become diffuse—mere extensions of the central ego."¹¹³ Walter Sokel takes a similar tack, again echoing Russian critics of Evreinov: "Expressionist drama does not allow genuine conflict to arise. . . . The other 'characters' are not so much characters as functions in his mission or martyrdom. They represent his opportunities, obstacles, parallels, variations, and counterpoints. Genuine antagonists do not exist."¹¹⁴ Expressionist works are thus accused of being undramatic and static, the precise accusation leveled at earlier theories of monodrama.

Finally, before we turn to briefly look at two examples of Expressionist monodrama, it is worth noting that Walter Sokel proposes Romanticism as a source of German Expressionism:

With their concept of the writer as visionary and savior, the Expressionists renewed the old dream of Romanticism. Shelley's definition of the poets as 'unacknowledged legislators of the world' could have been their motto.

¹¹² Ibid., 17-18.

¹¹³ Ibid., 26.

¹¹⁴ Sokel, xxi.

The mission themes of Expressionist plays projected the author's Romantic self-pity and isolation in the modern world, as well as their equally Romantic self-glorification, their dream of changing the world into a place in which they would feel at home.¹¹⁵

While the Romantics may not have had as significant an impact on Expressionism as Strindberg and the medieval drama, they undoubtedly contributed to its development. We might add to Sokel's analysis of the Romantic roots of Expressionism the element of autobiography, as well as the intense focus on the individual as the center of experience.

A representative example of the Expressionist *Ich* drama that reveals its relationship to monodrama is Georg Kaiser's 1912 *From Morn to Midnight*. "Among the earliest examples of Expressionist *Stationendrama*,"¹¹⁶ *From Morn to Midnight* declares its relation to medieval dramaturgy by its subtitle, "a modern mystery in seven scenes,"¹¹⁷ and demonstrates clear affinities with Strindberg's *To Damascus* and many of the monodramas we have looked at.

Kaiser's protagonist, the Cashier, begins the play as a mundane functionary in a local bank, until, at the touch of an alluring Lady, "he is almost literally switched on, comes to life for the first time, and sets out on his quest for

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, xxiii.

¹¹⁶ Benson, 107.

¹¹⁷ Georg Kaiser, *From Morn to Midnight*, trans. Ashley Dukes, in *Expressionist Texts*, ed. Mel Gordon (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 47.

his soul and for ultimate values.”¹¹⁸ After being rejected by the Lady for whom he robbed the bank, the Cashier embarks on his journey, passing from a snowy field, to his home, a cycling track, a cabaret, and finally a Salvation Army center. Along the way, the Cashier continually meets characters whose actions and comments bear remarkably upon his own mental state. At the track, for example, at the very moment that the Cashier pulls out his wad of banknotes, silence falls over the previously rowdy crowd. The Cashier, who had been reveling in the crowd (“There we have it. The pinnacle. The summit. The climbing hope fulfilled. . . . Humanity—free humanity, high and low, untroubled by class, unfettered by manners. Unclean, but free.”¹¹⁹) is informed that the silence has fallen because “His Royal Highness has just entered his box.”¹²⁰ The audience, however, sees nothing of the sort, and it would seem that the Royal Highness to which Kaiser refers is the Cashier’s money. The Cashier, disillusioned by the show of deference both to the Royal Highness and to his money from a crowd that he thought was above both class and greed, runs off to his next adventure.

In the play’s final scene, the Cashier believes that he finally has found a kindred spirit in the Salvation Lass. In a scene reminiscent of *Major Barbara*, the penitents come to the podium and tell their stories of sin and woe, and remarkably, each seems to tell the story of the Cashier, as he is all too well aware. Softened by the Salvation Lass’s assurance, “I’m with you, I’ll stand by you,” the

¹¹⁸ Ritchie, 130.

¹¹⁹ Kaiser, 74.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

Cashier confesses his crime to the assembled crowd.¹²¹ Convinced of her fidelity by the fact that she alone does not chase the banknotes that he has scattered into the air, the Cashier is stunned as she opens the door to allow entry to the police—she has turned in the Cashier for the reward money. Recalling his one-sided discussion with death from earlier in the play, the Cashier surrenders to his fate: “I’ve made the path hard where it might have been easy. I took the longest way round. . . . From morning to midnight I run raging in a circle.”¹²²

The “longest way round,” and the circularity of the journey have antecedents in *Peer Gynt* and *To Damascus*. Recapitulating the play’s title, Kaiser also seems to utilize the trope of an entire lifetime being passed in short moment. In his questioning the sense of existence, Kaiser presages existentialist philosophy and its counterpart in the Theatre of the Absurd. Indeed, although he is speaking most directly of *Die glückliche Hand*, Michael Robinson might just as well be speaking of *From Morn to Midnight* when he cites “an anticipation of Beckett’s *Endgame* or *Play*, where . . . a whole life . . . is depicted in the course of a few minutes.”¹²³

While the Cashier’s death is certain, the play’s ending remains ambiguous. After the Cashier shoots himself, the lights come up to reveal his body hanging limply on the Cross, uttering his final words, “*His husky gasp is like an Ecce, his*

¹²¹ Ibid., 85.

¹²² Ibid., 86.

¹²³ Robinson, 180.

heavy sigh is like a Homo.”¹²⁴ Have the Cashier’s disillusioning adventures lead him to a higher plane of knowledge and enlightenment? Is Kaiser calling to question what mankind has learned from the experience of Jesus? While the Cashier’s earthly existence is over as the play ends, the final line, coming after he has already passed, continues to bear on his mental state—“There must be a short circuit in the main.”¹²⁵ Unable to find the good in humanity that he had sought on his journey, the Cashier is reduced to despair and death, and the Policeman’s final thought might just as well have been the Cashier’s.

From Morn to Midnight, like so many of the divided-self monodramas we examined in chapter four, ends in the suicide of the protagonist. As in the divided-self monodramas, the Cashier is faced with a world that seems beyond his control, in which forces of repression stifle him at every turn. And while *From Morn to Midnight* appears to depict the protagonist in contact with an outside world, it also shows a soul struggling to reconcile the sad state of the world in which he lives with the utopian vision of which he dreams. When he understands that this struggle is one he cannot win there remains only one way out—death.

A play that even more clearly straddles the line between multi-character and divided-self monodrama is Franz Werfel’s 1920 *Mirror Man*. Although “time has told against Werfel,”¹²⁶ and his works are little-known, especially in the United States, this was not always the case, as a 1926 article by Edward Franklin

¹²⁴ Kaiser, 86.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ritchie, 151.

Hauch amply demonstrates: “Among Germany’s younger dramatists Franz Werfel is beyond question the most significant. *Spiegelmensch*, which he calls a magical trilogy, is his most significant piece of work,”¹²⁷ and just a few years earlier, Marian P. Whitney considered it “the Expressionist play most likely to endure.”¹²⁸ J.M. Ritchie, writing fifty years later, concurs with Hauch: “There is no doubting the preeminence of Werfel’s earlier play, *Mirror Man* (1920), as the closest he came during his Expressionist period to creating a masterpiece.”¹²⁹ Werfel’s major accomplishment in *Mirror Man* is the total integration of these two modes of monodrama, an achievement that Ritchie suggests may be attributed to Werfel’s designation of the play as a “magical trilogy”: “For magic has the power to fuse the otherwise disparate worlds of dream and reality, subject and object, appearance and essence.”¹³⁰

Mirror Man’s hero, Thalmal, enters a monastery, hoping to be initiated into the mysteries of life. His spiritual guide, the Abbot, warns Thalmal of the dangers he is about to face, sending him on his path with the invocation, “By this breath, this kiss you are made prey of the mystery that is your self.”¹³¹ Locked in

¹²⁷ Edward Franklin Hauch, “Franz Werfel’s Dramas,” *The Drama* 16, no. 5 (February 1926): 165.

¹²⁸ Marian P. Whitney, “German Drama since the War,” *The Modern Language Journal* 7, no. 5 (February 1923): 281.

¹²⁹ Ritchie, 148.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ Franz Werfel, *Mirror Man, A Magic Trilogy*, trans. Ruth Langner (1926), I.i.3. Unpublished manuscript. New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, Special Collections.

his room, given a potion to prepare him, and assigned a monk to watch over him, Thalmal is left alone with his own image in the mirror. Disgusted by this picture of himself, Thalmal pulls out a gun and shoots the image, but is shocked to find that he has killed only the mirror, not the image, which now comes to life before him. This image, the Mirror Man of the title, convinces Thalmal of the latter's great importance: "You alone are reality, the focus is you, from whom all gushes, to which all things return, through which creation flourishes."¹³² Puffing him up with pronouncements of his greatness (even his Godliness), Mirror Man convinces Thalmal to flee the Monastery, and as in *Lucky Per* and *The Blue Bird*, Thalmal escapes through the window with his companion out into the wide world.

Clearly a *doppelgänger* for Thalmal, Mirror Man is portrayed, as in so many divided-self monodramas, as Thalmal's absolute opposite. Ritchie suggests that Werfel "portrays his two main characters not as individuals or types but as allegorical figures. The dramatic heart of the play," he continues, "is the Faustian motif of the 'two souls within the human breast.'"¹³³

As the two embark on a fantastic journey whose breadth and exoticness equals even the loftiest flights of *Peer Gynt*, Thalmal rejects his father, finds and abandons love and children, betrays friends, acts as a savior to a town under siege, and goes from wildly wealthy to poor and enslaved. At each step along the way, Mirror Man acts to convince him to take the basest, most profitable path, and at the point that Thalmal refuses to do so (and as a result becomes poor and

¹³² Werfel, I.i.13.

¹³³ Ritchie, 148.

enslaved), Mirror Man assumes his wealthy identity, appearing fat and dressed extravagantly. Finally, Thalmal is arrested, at which point Mirror Man, in a scene that would appear impossible to stage, magically shrinks back to his normal size. In the ensuing scene, entitled “Judgment,” Thalmal is confronted with all of the misdeeds he was led to commit by Mirror Man. Realizing the error of his ways, Thalmal condemns himself to death.

As Thalmal waits in his cell for death, a Man enters, telling him to enjoy the pleasures of the world, and to exploit his power by torturing puppies and drowning children. Thalmal tears off the Man’s cloak and mask to reveal Mirror Man, who immediately disappears. A Woman now enters to tempt him. Thalmal removes her mask. It is once again Mirror Man, who again disappears. The Turnkey announces a Monk, who tells Thalmal of the horrors of death, throws open the door of the cell and offers Thalmal freedom, then reveals himself as Mirror Man, exclaiming: “Let’s leave this myth of a prison quickly.”¹³⁴ Thalmal responds with a brief monologue invoking both the internal struggle repeatedly seen in the divided-self monodramas, as well as the motif of circularity so central to the multi-character form:

Thank you God for the vision of truth you’ve granted me. He is the axis of the circle that flows back through itself with horrible persistence; with him I must tread the vicious circle built of guilt and blood and pain. No escape that does not double back to him, and no open door through which

¹³⁴ Werfel, III.v.7.

I can flee him. How foolish to shoot at that mirror to release myself. Now I know the only way I can be free of him is death.¹³⁵

Thalmal proceeds to drink a glass of hemlock from a chalice that appears identical to the one he drank from before shooting the mirror, making a toast with his suicidal beverage similar to the cry of Saint-Pol-Roux's Young Man and Old Man as they took their final leap into the torrent: "To life!"¹³⁶ With this, Mirror Man disappears and Thalmal finds himself back in his cell in the monastery—the mirror he had shot intact and in place. As he is greeted by the Monk, Thalmal realizes that he has seen the Monk at every phase of his journey appearing as "Judgment, always. The Turnkey . . . demon . . . tumbler . . . captain . . ." ¹³⁷ Like the Fairy Bérylune/Neighbor Berlingot of *The Bluebird* and Dorothy's family and neighbors in *The Wizard of Oz*, Thalmal has taken a vision of his reality with him on his fantastic journey, confirming the introspective nature of that journey. As Ritchie notes, "The play thereby moves *out* into the world, while at the same time creating the impression that everything is contained *within* the poetic imagination of the single protagonist."¹³⁸

Mirror Man has repeatedly been seen as bearing a distinct resemblance to several of the plays we have discussed. Marian P. Whitney referred to *Mirror*

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., III.v.9.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ritchie, 148.

Man as “a new version of the eternal problem of Faust and Peer Gynt.”¹³⁹ J.M. Ritchie notes that “*Mirror Man* was compared with . . . Goethe’s *Faust*, Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt* . . . and Strindberg’s *To Damascus*,” although this assessment is not necessarily a positive one, as Ritchie deems these resemblances responsible for the play’s ultimate failure: “It proved too easy to dismiss *Mirror Man* as derivative and merely imitative.”¹⁴⁰ A crucial thematic contrast with *Peer Gynt* is suggested by *Mirror Man*’s last line, delivered by the Monk: “You must direct your soul toward selfless goals through cares, new vision, duties. Only then may you try to scale the jagged cliffs of that love which drove you here, to find at last your true completion in sweet oblivion and escape from self.”¹⁴¹ While Peer’s journey was one of finding and embracing his true self, Thalmal, it seems, must learn to abandon all concern with self towards a new vision of selflessness, very much in keeping with the ideals of German Expressionism. Nevertheless, whether the goal is finding or losing it, the key to both plays is an obsession with the concept of self.

In addition to the literary genealogy that connects *Mirror Man* to the plays that I have designated as monodramas earlier in this study, the staging Werfel envisioned for *Mirror Man* corresponds to Evreinov’s concept of what monodrama should look like in performance:

¹³⁹ Whitney, 281.

¹⁴⁰ Ritchie, 150.

¹⁴¹ Werfel, III.vi.3.

By constantly changing scenery and by the use of lighting Werfel hoped to create the atmosphere of a magically remote unreal world, an aim reinforced in practice on the stage (as it turned out) by the use of back-projection and filmed material. . . . Werfel's aims go beyond mere entertainment. He clearly intends to transport each member of the audience out of himself into another world, making the theatre into a magic place, which has its own power over him, freeing him, as a heathen cult, from the tensions of the real world. . . . Just as Thalmal in the play loses himself in order to find himself, so too each member of the audience must lose himself and learn to reject the false temptations of a real world.¹⁴²

Werfel was putting into practice Evreinov's ideas regarding the complete identification of the spectator with the protagonist, and did so through the methods of staging of which Evreinov spoke: "Nowadays, with the invention of transparent scenery, veritable 'magic lanterns,' improvements in techniques of lighting in all possible hues and intensities, . . . excellent screening effects and so forth, we can boldly discuss monodrama as a concept that is wholly feasible."¹⁴³ Building upon the theories of Appia and Craig, and making use of the innovations of major directors such as Leopold Jessner and Max Reinhardt, among others, the German Expressionist theatre likely came closer than any movement before or

¹⁴² Ritchie, 148-149, 150.

¹⁴³ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 192.

since to successfully realizing the vision that Evreinov set forth in “Introduction to Monodrama.”

A variation on multi-character monodrama comes in the form of plays that present a character reaching back into the depths of his or her own mind and calling forth the events that dwell within. In these cases instead of projections onto an outside world, we see prior memories of an actual outside world reinscribed into the present experience of the mind. These plays bear an interesting relation to the genre of solo performance in that both often consist of the performer guiding the audience on a tour through his or her memories. However, while solo performances transmit these memories to us in narrative form, these “memory monodramas” present a character searching the recesses of their mind, and truly re-living these memories, an experience that is thus fully shared with the audience.

Arthur Miller first conceived of an experiment with this style of monodrama in early drafts of his canonical 1949 work, *Death of a Salesman*. A 1990 Miller interview with Christopher Bigsby indicates the extent to which the play was intended to be a monodrama:

Bigsby: You mean that Happy and Biff together are aspects of Willy’s mind.

Miller: Exactly. It was done up in Minneapolis by Guthrie and I sat with him and he said, “You know, I was never aware before but this is a lyric;

this is a long poem by Willy.” It is, you know. John Proctor’s voice is not all the voices but in a certain sense Willy is all the voices.

Bigsby: Is that why the play was originally to be called *The Inside of His Head*?

Miller: Yes. I conceived it as taking place inside his head and that’s why it is different from any other play.

Bigsby: So the gulf I was suggesting between the physical attention on Willy and the moral resolution through Biff would not have occurred in the original because they would all have been aspects of Willy’s mind.

Miller: Yes, that’s right.¹⁴⁴

The literary aspect of Miller’s monodrama was to have been matched by its staging concept. In the author’s words, “The first image that occurred to me, which was to result in *Death of a Salesman*, was of an enormous face the height of the proscenium arch which would appear and then open up, and we would see the inside of a man’s head. In fact, *The Inside of His Head* was the first title.”¹⁴⁵ The vision of interiority called for by Miller here has its analogues in Evreinov’s *Theatre of the Soul*, with its chest-cavity setting, and also Beckett’s *Endgame*, described by several critics as taking place inside of a skull. Ultimately, as

¹⁴⁴ Christopher Bigsby, “Arthur Miller: An Interview,” in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 504-505.

¹⁴⁵ Arthur Miller, “Introduction to the *Collected Plays*,” in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 135.

Ronald Hayman notes, while “Originally the play was conceived as a monodrama. . . . Later Miller found it was better to present parts of the action from viewpoints other than Willy’s.”¹⁴⁶

Although Miller may have abandoned the idea of monodrama for *Death of a Salesman*, his vision of a play taking place entirely inside the head of the protagonist would ultimately come to fruition in his 1963 *After the Fall*. Miller makes clear the monodramatic nature of *After the Fall* in his opening stage direction, “The action takes place in the mind, thought, and memory of Quentin. . . . People appear and disappear instantaneously, as in the mind. . . . The effect, therefore, will be the surging, flitting, instantaneousness of a mind questing over its own surfaces and into its depths.”¹⁴⁷

As the play begins, Miller’s protagonist, Quentin, appears alone on stage, but quickly begins what seems to be a dialogue with an invisible Listener, who, Miller notes, “*if he could be seen, would be sitting just beyond the edge of the stage itself.*”¹⁴⁸ This kind of “Listener” occurred in the single-character plays we discussed in chapter three in which a single actor appeared on stage in feigned conversation with others. Indeed, the convention echoes the style of Richard von Meerheimb and his successors: “We do not see the Listener, nor do we hear his (her?) words although we can deduce from Quentin’s responses what they must

¹⁴⁶ Ronald Hayman, *Arthur Miller* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1972), 39.

¹⁴⁷ Arthur Miller, *After the Fall* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

have been.”¹⁴⁹ But while von Meerheimb’s absent characters were assumed to have an objective reality, despite their invisibility, such a reality is considerably less certain for the Listener in *After the Fall*, as Miller himself has noted, “The ‘Listener,’ who to some will be a psychoanalyst, to others God, is Quentin himself turned at the edge of the abyss.”¹⁵⁰

The Listener, then, may be looked at simply as a convention, almost like the confidant figures of the neoclassical stage, providing a rationale for Quentin’s soliloquies, or, the Listener may be seen as akin to the Auditor in Beckett’s *Not I*, as an aspect of Quentin’s divided self, judging Quentin as he attempts to justify his life thus far. Support for such a view comes from Miller himself, who notes, “This play, then, is a trial; the trial of a man by his own conscience, his own values, his own deeds.”¹⁵¹ *After the Fall* is likewise viewed as a divided-self monodrama by Neil Carson, who echoes the psychological concept that formed the basis for many of the plays we looked at in chapter four: “He begins as a deeply divided individual with a profound sense that he has become a ‘stranger’ to his life.”¹⁵² Leonard Moss invokes a variation of another familiar phrase as he suggests that the play “assumed the form of an *interior dialogue*, a progress in

¹⁴⁹ Neil Carson, *Arthur Miller* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1982), 113.

¹⁵⁰ Arthur Miller, “Foreword to *After the Fall*,” in *The Theatre Essays of Arthur Miller*, ed. Robert A. Martin and Steven R. Centola (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 257.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Carson, 115.

self-discovery accomplished without a psychiatrist.”¹⁵³ Consideration of the device of the Listener in *After the Fall* suffices to reveal the play’s affinities to both the single-character and divided-self forms of monodrama. It is the introduction and acting out of memory that places the play in the category of the multiple-character form.

As Quentin confesses to the Listener (and thus the audience) his thoughts, dreams, and fears, a character suddenly appears on stage as a reflection of Quentin’s state of mind, whether or not Quentin was actually thinking of that person. He then alternates between interacting with that character and offering commentary to the Listener. Furthermore, Quentin’s memories often become intertwined, as Quentin begins to understand the interrelatedness and repetition of his patterns of behavior. For example, as Quentin considers leaving his second wife, Maggie:

Maggie: (*her eyes narrowing—she is seeing him anew*) Look. You don’t want me. What the hell are you doing here?

(*Father and Dan enter, above them.*)

Quentin: I live here. And you do too, but you don’t know it yet. But you’re going to. I—

Father: Where’s he going? I need him! What are you?

Quentin: (*not turning to Father*) I’m here, and I stick it, that’s what I am. And one day you’re going to catch on. Now go to sleep. I’ll be back in ten minutes, I’d like to take a walk.

¹⁵³ Leonard Moss, *Arthur Miller* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), 57. [Italics are mine.]

(He starts out and she comes to attention.)

Maggie: Where you going to walk?

Quentin: Just around the block. *(She watches him carefully.)* There's nobody else, kid; I just want to walk.

Maggie: *(with great suspicion)* 'Kay.

*(Father and Dan exit.)*¹⁵⁴

Thus, as Quentin begins to feel guilt over the possibility of leaving Maggie, his guilt over feeling that he has abandoned his family becomes embodied in the presence of his father and brother.

With its suggestion that the characters in the play appear and disappear as they enter Quentin's thoughts, *After the Fall* becomes part of the legacy of Strindberg's prefatory note to *A Dream Play* and its rejection of realism. At the same time, however, echoing our earlier discussion of the idea of monodrama as a different type of realism, Carson notes, "In his determination to get as close to 'reality' as possible, Miller has gone inside the head of his protagonist to dramatize Quentin's subjective life. In the process, the objective world virtually disappears to be replaced by a fluid, timeless 'consciousness' into which memories come and go at the prompting of will or passion."¹⁵⁵ Indeed, evidence of the play's status as monodrama is manifold. Hayman notes the play's

¹⁵⁴ Miller, *After the Fall*, 98.

¹⁵⁵ Carson, 110.

“telescoping of time,”¹⁵⁶ while Carson, once again invoking a familiar term, notes, “Miller wanted to create a theatrical equivalent for the ‘stream of consciousness’ in which memories and associations follow one another in quick and bewildering succession.”¹⁵⁷

As in several of the monodramas we have discussed, Miller’s use of the mode has engendered its share of criticism. Carson complains that the audience is not permitted enough distance from Quentin:

Drama conventionally presents an “objective” view of reality which enables the audience to distance itself from the protagonist by comparing his actions with those of the other characters around him. . . . In *After the Fall*, no such distancing devices exist. The play presents only Quentin’s experience, and there are few unambiguous signposts to show where Miller’s view as playwright diverges from Quentin’s as protagonist.¹⁵⁸

This leads Hayman to bemoan “the failure to give objective validity to Quentin’s subjective equations.”¹⁵⁹ Similarly, Carson voices the familiar complaint that “It is too easy for the audience to become involved in the personal dialectics of the drama without realizing that the other characters have no objective reality.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Hayman, 93.

¹⁵⁷ Carson, 111.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 120-121.

¹⁵⁹ Hayman, 87.

¹⁶⁰ Carson, 116.

These concerns are such that Hayman feels compelled to warn, ominously, “The monodrama method is a very dangerous one.”¹⁶¹ He continues, citing the familiar concern that monodrama would be boring: “Any attempt to dramatize a stream of consciousness is bound to be a compromise because consciousness selects memories and impressions very quickly and very undramatically.”¹⁶²

One of the more interesting critiques of the play, cited by Neil Carson, concerns the nature of memory:

It is not at all clear how certain insights gained into his own actions in the past affect his memory of various characters in the present. His recollections of his early happiness with Maggie are curiously unclouded by his knowledge of what subsequently happened. In other words, the incidents in the play are only partly released from their continuum in time. The strict chronological treatment of the past seems sometimes at odds with the convention of a universal present in the speaker’s memory.¹⁶³

Carson’s concern is of relevance to a discussion of the relationship between monodrama and the memory play. The question can be formulated in these terms: when we see Quentin engage one of his memories on stage, are we seeing a sort of flashback—a recording of the actual event—or are we seeing the memory

¹⁶¹ Hayman, 87.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁶³ Carson, 113.

as it now exists in Quentin's mind, inevitably colored by all that has passed since? In 1945, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, pondering the problem of memory's alteration over time, argued, "although my present draws into itself time past and time to come, it possesses them only in intention, and even if, for example, the consciousness of my past which I now have seems to me to cover exactly the past as it was, the past which I claim to recapture is not the real past, but my past as I now see it, perhaps after altering it."¹⁶⁴ Quentin's interaction with these memories would seem to place them in the "universal present of the speaker's mind," of which Carson speaks. Quentin's recollection of his early happiness with Maggie, which so concerned Carson, could conceivably be explained by a sense of nostalgia. In either case, Carson's concern is a significant one, for if these memories are, as he seems to suggest, trapped in their "continuum in time," then we would lose the sense of the continual present that is so much a part of monodrama.

The most consistent criticism of *After the Fall* from the time it was first produced to the present—that the play is overwhelmingly autobiographical—ties it yet again to the genealogy of monodrama. Carson notes "the disconcertingly autobiographical nature of the play,"¹⁶⁵ while one of the early reviewers of the play, Leslie Hanscom, goes even further, calling it "undoubtedly the most nakedly autobiographical drama ever put on public view."¹⁶⁶ Miller replied indignantly to

¹⁶⁴ Merleau-Ponty, 80.

¹⁶⁵ Carson, 120.

¹⁶⁶ Leslie Hanscom, "After the Fall: Arthur Miller's Return," *Newsweek* 63 (February 3, 1964), 50.

this charge (and the further implication that he was profiting from the death of Marilyn Monroe), “That man up there isn’t me. A playwright doesn’t put himself on the stage, he only dramatizes certain forces within himself.”¹⁶⁷ Despite Miller’s denial, the similarities between himself and Quentin are difficult to ignore: Marilyn Monroe, Miller’s second wife, seems a perfect analogue for Quentin’s second wife Maggie, just as Miller’s third wife Ingeborg Morath seems to be mirrored by Quentin’s current love interest, Holga. And Quentin’s friends and associates are deeply embroiled in Joseph McCarthy’s communist witch hunt, just as Miller and his friends were.

In one final note on *After the Fall*, Leonard Moss offers an assessment of the play that once again places it within the line of earlier monodrama, particularly in this case, Ibsen’s *Peer Gynt*:

His mother saw him as “a light, a light in the world,” and later admirers compared him to a “pasha,” “grand duke,” “king,” and “god.” Negatively, he was called a merciless “judge,” a “little boy,” an “idiot,” a “fraud,” a “stranger,” a “fag,” an “ogre,” a “liar,” and a “son of a bitch.” “But where is *Quentin*?” he asks; “do you know who I am? . . . I can’t find myself.” He ponders the angry remark his father directed to him as a youth: “Chrissake, *what are you?*” His goal now is to “stop

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 51.

impersonating,” to go “disguised no more,” and to “show what Quentin, Quentin, Quentin . . . is!”¹⁶⁸

Despite Miller’s avowed admiration for Ibsen, it would be difficult to prove a direct link between *Peer Gynt* and *After the Fall*. And yet, Moss’s compendium of things said of Quentin is quite similar to the list of things that were said of Peer Gynt. And in his quest to find himself (indeed, in the whole obsession with selfhood), Quentin treads the same path as Peer before him. Indeed, like the Romantic heroes, Peer Gynt, Strindberg’s *Stranger*, and in a certain sense all the heroes of monodrama, “Quentin is meant to be seen in the process of achieving a saner, if saddening, adjustment to reality.”¹⁶⁹

A final, and most recent example of the form, Margaret Edson’s 1995 play *Wit*, presents a variation on memory monodrama in which a terminally ill cancer patient recalls the events that have lead to this, the moment of her death. While Miller concocts the Listener to provide a motivation for Quentin’s ruminations in *After the Fall*, Edson allows her protagonist, Dr. Vivian Bearing, to speak directly to the audience. Thus, as the play begins, Dr. Bearing informs us that she is afflicted with ovarian cancer in its most advanced stage and that she hasn’t long to

¹⁶⁸ Moss, 58.

¹⁶⁹ Hayman, 88.

live, or to tell her story, “They’ve given me less than two hours. . . . Then: curtain.”¹⁷⁰

While *Wit*, like the other monodramas in this study, shows us the passage of thoughts and emotions through its protagonist, Dr. Bearing, unlike the other monodramatic heroes we have seen, is largely in control of how these thoughts and images come to life. After her initial address to the audience, Dr. Bearing muses, “I’ll never forget the time I found out I had cancer,” and immediately a big desk appears behind which Dr. Kelekian informs her “You have cancer.”¹⁷¹ As Kelekian begins his clinical exposition of Dr. Bearing’s condition and the treatment for it, Dr. Bearing mutters out loud her mental reactions to his words, sometimes relevant, sometimes demonstrating her mind wandering: “Must read something about cancer. . . . ‘Pernicious’ That doesn’t seem— . . .”¹⁷² From this point forward, Dr. Bearing relives the eight months of her cancer treatment with us, condensed into the two hours of which she had informed us in advance. And while that would seem to indicate that the entire play is actually occurring in the past, we learn that these time frames—the eight months and the two hours—are in fact intermeshed. For instance, at one point near the middle of the play, Vivian has transported herself and us to her classroom before her illness. Now powerful and in command, Dr. Bearing is instructing her class in her specialty—the work of John Donne, when suddenly Susie, the nurse, breaks her reverie:

¹⁷⁰ Margaret Edson, *Wit* (New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 1999), 6-7.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 9.

Susie: Ms. Bearing?

Vivian: (*continuing*) Will the po—

Susie: Ms. Bearing?

Vivian: (*crossly*) What is it?

Susie: You have to go down for a test. Jason just called. They want another ultrasound. They're concerned about a bowel obstruction—Is it okay if I come in?

Vivian: No. Not now.

Susie: I'm sorry, but they want it now.

Vivian: Not right now. It's not *supposed* to be now.

Susie: Yes, they want to do it now. I've got the chair.

Vivian: It sould not be now. I am in the middle of—this. I have *this* planned for now, not ultrasound.¹⁷³

It might be said that, as for Strindberg, “time and space do not exist.” This event occurred before the speech with which Vivian opened the play, and yet here we are, with her, in the midst of a reverie that places her in her classroom, only to be interrupted by a test that also must have occurred before the play's opening speech. As in *After the Fall*, it would seem that what we have here is one reverie interrupting another, and as her illness progresses, Dr. Bearing is less in control of the images she projects to us.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 51.

In her struggle to tell her story, Dr. Bearing is painfully aware of the difficulty of truly sharing an experience: “I want to tell you how it feels. I want to explain it, to use *my* words. It’s as if . . . I can’t . . . There aren’t . . .”¹⁷⁴ But while it is understandably difficult, if not impossible, to communicate to her audience the pain she feels, the extent to which the play’s dramaturgy is linked to Vivian’s state of mind is apparent as she says, “I apologize in advance for what this palliative treatment modality does to the dramatic coherence of my play’s last scene. It can’t be helped.”¹⁷⁵ Thus, as Vivian is increasingly medicated, and increasingly incoherent, so she no longer is able to control the vision she conveys to us, and the play, like Dr. Bearing, drifts to its inevitable conclusion.

As in so many of the monodramas we have looked at, *Wit* depicts the final moments of its protagonist’s life. In the play’s final scene, as the doctors work frantically on her expiring body, Dr. Bearing rises from the bed, unnoticed by the doctors: “*She walks away from the scene, toward a little light. She is now attentive and eager, moving slowly toward the light. She takes off her cap and lets it drop. She slips off her bracelet. She loosens the ties and the top gown slides to the floor. She lets the second gown fall. The instant she is naked, and beautiful, reaching for the light—Lights out.*”¹⁷⁶ While the doctors have failed to save her body, the audience has the opportunity to share with her the ascension of her soul. Indeed, redemption, such a central theme in *To Damascus*, plays a

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 70.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 85.

similar role in *Wit*, although, as Martha Greene Eads notes, “*Wit*’s final scene depicts a redemptive moment devoid of any specific religious association.”¹⁷⁷ Dr. Bearing’s redemption is a personal one; a coming-to-terms with a life shortened by disease. This redemption is facilitated by the re-membering of a life, and by sharing that life with an audience.

Multiple-character monodrama is the broadest category of the form, and the one that provides the most possibilities for application. There are surely additional dramatic subgenres (akin to the memory monodramas we just looked at) and innumerable examples of plays that would also fall under this category.¹⁷⁸ I have certainly not catalogued all the plays that might be said to operate in this manner, and doubt such a comprehensive list is even possible. I have, however, demonstrated a tendency towards a mode of monodrama (and delineated the traits that comprise that mode) that has recurred in western drama over the past two hundred years, and will, undoubtedly, continue to appear, as dramatists attempt to depict the world as it is seen through the subjective experience of the individual.

¹⁷⁷ Martha Greene Eads, “Unwitting Redemption in Margaret Edson’s *Wit*,” *Christianity and Literature* 51, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 241.

¹⁷⁸ One possible area for further inquiry is the monodramatic mode in Spanish drama. Federico García Lorca’s *Once Five Years Pass* might well be interpreted as monodrama. And Antonio Buero-Vallejo’s concept of the “immersion effect,” exemplified by his play *The Foundation*, bears marked similarities to theories of monodrama. Such a study, which would certainly require an examination of the Spanish manifestations of the form in relation to the genre of magical realism, would be beyond the scope of this project.

Conclusion

In its necessary limitation to theatre and drama, this study has largely avoided discussion of significant parallels to monodrama in other media. As the discussion of Romantic poetry in chapter one suggests, there is a tradition of works of poetry and prose that shares monodrama's goal of aligning the spectator with the subjective experience of a protagonist. Lucas Aykroyd has recognized this potential and applied a monodramatic analysis to Hemingway in his 1997 essay, "'Homage to Switzerland' as Monodrama: A Microcosm of Hemingway's Autobiographically Inspired Fiction."¹ Similar applications of monodrama might well be fruitful in analysis of authors such as James Joyce (as discussed in chapter two in relation to the *monologue intérieur*), Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner (whose *The Sound and the Fury* might well be seen as four consecutive monodramas), and Vladimir Nabokov, among others.

As suggested by Spencer Golub and Sharon Carnicke, film has provided an apt medium for attempts at monodrama. Saint-Pol-Roux, one of the principal early theoreticians and practitioners of monodrama, was also an early theorist of film, as seen in his collection of essays, *Cinéma Vivant*.² And although extremely little has been written as of yet on monodrama in film, the concept could prove a

¹ Lucas Aykroyd, "'Homage to Switzerland' as Monodrama: A Microcosm of Hemingway's Autobiographically Inspired Fiction," *Hemingway Review* 17, no. 1 (Fall 1997): 38-48.

² Saint-Pol-Roux, *Cinéma Vivant* (Paris: Rougerie, 1972).

useful tool in the analysis of works as diverse as Maya Deren's 1943 avant-garde experiment *Meshes of the Afternoon*, to more popular films such as Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut*, and Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation*. Further exploration of monodrama in literature and film will prove a rich basis for further study.

In the theatre, I have shown how monodrama has been used as a method of interpretation both in critical and performance contexts. But does monodrama still stand as an impetus for new work, or perhaps even new forms, and if so, how?

One particularly interesting example of monodrama in a contemporary experimental context is Rinde Eckert's 2000 piece, *And God Created Great Whales*. Eckert's music-theatre work places him in the role of Nathan, a composer at work on an operatic adaptation of *Moby Dick*, who is afflicted with a disease that is progressively destroying his memory and will soon take his life. Nathan has dedicated himself to finishing the opera before he is incapacitated. To help him in this process, he has devised a complex, color-coded system of tape recorders that remind him of everything from who he is ("Your name is Nathan. You are suffering memory loss. Today you will continue to work on your opera: *Moby-Dick*,"³) to what he was thinking when he was last at work on the opera. Nathan has also created a muse for himself in the form of a former opera diva

³ Rinde Eckert, *And God Created Great Whales*, quoted in Jeffrey Insko, "Art After Ahab," Review of *And God Created Great Whales* by Rinde Eckert, The Culture Project, New York, 9 September 2000, http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.901/12.1.r_insko.txt, 5 (accessed 22 June 2005).

named Olivia, to whom, one of his tapes instructs him, he “is to be obedient . . . in all matters concerning his opera.”⁴ Olivia pushes him forward in his work, tries to get herself written into the opera, and ultimately plays the other roles to Nathan’s Ahab and Ishmael as the two of them play the opera as Nathan composes it. As Jeffrey Insko has argued, “The audience is thus treated to a glimpse inside the creative process, which is to say, inside Nathan’s faltering consciousness.”⁵ Indeed, Eckert seems to have created a remarkably complex manifestation of the author/protagonist conflation suggested by Evreinov. We see Eckert, the creator of the opera we are watching, perform as the creator of an opera that we are also, in a sense, watching. We are thus thrust into the consciousness of Eckert/Nathan in the process of the composition.

Eckert, it should be noted, also wrote the libretto for a 1998 music-theatre work, *Ravenshead*, that was designated a monodrama by its composer, Steven Mackey. *Ravenshead*, with a single character, more closely follows the Rousseau/Benda form than does *And God Created Great Whales*, but shows a similar concern with interiority and subjectivity. The confluence of the formal and conceptual aspects of monodrama manifest in Eckert’s work is evidence of monodrama’s continued appeal to the avant-garde.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Jeffrey Insko, “Art After Ahab,” Review of *And God Created Great Whales* by Rinde Eckert, The Culture Project, New York, 9 September 2000, http://www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.901/12.1.r_insko.txt, 6 (accessed 22 June 2005).

Perhaps the field offering the most potential for the future development of monodrama is the intersection of theatre and technology, particularly in the emerging medium of Virtual Reality. In his article, “Where the Senses Become a Stage and Reading is Direction: Performing the Texts of Virtual Reality and Interactive Fiction,” J. Yellowlees Douglas reminds readers of the entertainments offered to inhabitants of the future world created by William Gibson in his 1984 *Neuromancer* trilogy, in which “real-but-vicarious sensations are interiorized as audiences turn to an entertainment implant called ‘simstim’ that completely immerses its users in a role that they have chosen as part of an adventure. They become the characters instead of simply watching them. The sensations they experience are neither empathetic nor vicarious but ‘real.’”⁶ Douglas sees Gibson’s fictional medium coming to life in explorations of virtual reality, noting that in VR “we do not simply project our own emotions into a text, but actually experience another world within the text—live this world experientially. Rather than simply watching Maggie Smith emote and Arnold Schwarzenegger destroy, identifying with their circumstances and projecting our own feelings onto the scenarios before us, we assume their roles.”⁷ Douglas sees this as the future of our

⁶ J. Yellowlees Douglas, “Where the Senses Become a Stage and Reading is Direction: Performing the Texts of Virtual Reality and Interactive Fiction,” *The Drama Review* 37, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 18.

⁷ Douglas, 19. It is particularly interesting that Douglas chooses Schwarzenegger as an example in light of his 1990 film *Total Recall*, directed by Paul Verhoeven. The film, which might well be read as a monodrama, presents Schwarzenegger as Douglas Quaid, a normal businessman on a future Earth who seeks to escape from his mundane life with a virtual reality adventure vacation. Quaid chooses to become an agent in a rebellion on Mars, and specifies the desired characteristics of his female companion. As the scientists begin the process of drawing him into his fantasy world, Quaid goes berserk, killing the scientists and escaping the

entertainment experiences, and defines such experiences in terms certain to call monodrama to mind:

When we conceive of a dramatic, evolutionary leap forward in our experience of performed texts—of plays and films—we imagine replacing emotions that are felt vicariously in the confines of the theatre or cinema with emotions that both seem and feel real in an interactive environment that stands in for the “real.” . . . Through Virtual Reality and new performance environments like it, we can temporarily and willingly step over the line between Text and Self, between performance and life, and, for the space of a few hours at least, escape the constraints of our own consciousness.⁸

This concept of escaping our own consciousness in order to enter into that of a character must remind us of Bergson’s call in *Introduction to Metaphysics* for absolute identification with the hero of the novel (discussed in chapter two), James Huneker’s statement that Schoenberg’s work causes a “dissociation of

facility. However, the plot soon conforms to exactly the fantasy that Quaid had constructed, even down to the traits of his female companion, Melina. As the film ends, Quaid and Melina look out over the landscape of Mars now viable and free of tyranny thanks to their efforts. Quaid becomes suddenly skeptical: “I just had a terrible thought: What if this is a dream?” Melina provides the perfect Hollywood ending as she delivers the film’s last line: “Well then kiss me quick before you wake up.”

⁸ Douglas, 19.

one's ego,"⁹ and Evreinov's assertion that "To induce the illusion in the spectator that he is turning into the participant is the chief task of monodrama."¹⁰

Douglas is careful to note that while such texts offer a greater degree of interactivity than earlier forms, the nature of the text does not radically change, only the experience of it: "The line between actor and viewer may blur, along with the once-concrete divide between inside and outside, and interior and exterior, but the text itself remains stable. . . . I can't hijack the script. My role is neatly circumscribed by a prewritten text."¹¹ Thus, like Evreinov's co-experiencing spectator, the VR spectator as posited by Douglas becomes not a creator of the story, but is instead immersed in it, subject to its twists and turns just as the heroes of monodrama have been. Douglas calls this "interior performance,"¹² and it essentially, as I suggest above, brings monodrama as a theory of spectatorship into the twenty-first century.

Monodrama is ripe for further investigation, and I offer this study as a starting point, not an all-encompassing statement of the form. I believe that by setting out the historical and theoretical background out of which monodrama has developed I provide a basis from which a new understanding of the form can emerge. It is my hope that this dissertation will serve as the impetus for wide-ranging discussion and debate about the significance and potential of monodrama.

⁹ Huneker, SM9 (see chap. 3, n. 31).

¹⁰ Evreinov, "Monodrama," 191 (see chap. 2, n. 39).

¹¹ Douglas, 19-20.

¹² *Ibid.*, 21.

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