Bridging the Gap Between Traditional and Experimental Poetry: Dramatic Monologue and Dramatic Lyric in Contemporary New Zealand Poetry

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Aleksandra Lane

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Abstract

This study examines contemporary innovative dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics; it is based on close reading and analysis of Bill Manhire's and Lynn Jenner's work. Typical dramatic monologues allow for what some critics call a "split" voice, where the poet's views can be sensed behind the character's and poem's words. Dramatic lyrics are poems in which the emotional distance between the poet and the speaker is not as significant, where the speaker could conceivably be the poet, but the title or circumstantial details reveal that someone other than the author is supposed to be the speaking "I" of the poem. This study examines and demonstrates ways in which traditional genres—dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric—can be used in contemporary, questioning and critical ways, resulting in a postmodern lyric poem: exhibiting aural and structural properties of a lyric poem, combined with a purely linguistic, textual postmodern voice.

The creative portion of the thesis applies many of the strategies discussed in this critical part to explore the range between the lyric "I" and dramatic speaker; focusing on subjective expression while experimenting with diction, form and "found" material.

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Introduction

Since the 1970s post-structuralist literary theory has influenced many innovative poets' work, most notably the Language poets in the US, resulting in poetries which rejected subjectivity and self-expression, questioning the notion of a consistent and coherent self "creating" a poem. As Reginald Shepard explains in the introduction to his anthology *Lyric Postmodernisms*, various experimental non-realist strategies were used in modernism in "pursuit of the whole. . . to try and achieve a new and more true synthesis", but in some of the "thoroughly postmodernist" poetry—even some texts included in Shepard's anthology—poets "employ such devices to refute the very possibility of synthesis" (xiv). This kind of postmodern experimental poetry is defined by "a lyric voice that is fluid and fractured, its subjectivity a product of the slipperiness and duplicity of language" (Brewster 108). It often involves "the assemblage of heterogeneous fragments of text and image, and the use of unattributable pronouns that deny a single perspective or point of identification for the reader" (Brewster 108). Douwe W. Fokkema, in his book *Literary History, Modernism, and Postmodernism*, explains that postmodernism "aims at destroying the idea of connectivity by inserting texts that emphasize discontinuity" (44). This kind of fragmentation reflects the postmodernist's view of the self, seen as "a social and ideological construct which is endlessly in process, and identity as being constituted performatively, by what the self does" (Gregson 41).

Most critics agree that Language (and Language-writing influenced) poets' work was

experimental and innovative; however, there seems to be a degree of confusion when it comes to defining exactly what characterises "experimental" (or "innovative") poetry today. Some critics consider all non-realist, non-representational poetry experimental. What one sometimes encounters is a seemingly clear-cut division: either/or. Either a poem is a coherent first-person utterance, or it must be a disjunctive, syntactically challenging text, working as a post-structuralist demonstration, with a completely different frame of reference. To quote Jessica Lewis Luck:

> As Marjorie Perloff points out, the 'us-versus-them rhetoric' of Language poetry's founding manifestos has become complicated by many contemporary avant-garde poetries that seem to manifest a personality within the procedures. The theorists of lyric and Language poetics have certainly drawn the battle lines: inspiration or systematization, lyric "I" or language function, voice or noise. But contemporary experimental poetries often tell a different story. Perloff rightly wonders, 'must it be either/or'? The complicated interaction of procedure and personality in Language-influenced poetic creation has yet to be adequately theorized. (Luck 358)

In New Zealand, similar divisions exist, and similar dissatisfactions have been expressed by both academics and poets, highlighting the need for (and often arguing the existence of) contemporary poetry that demonstrates some of the issues postmodern writing is concerned with—post-structuralist questioning of subjectivity, language unreliability etc.—while preserving the lyric traits of poetry. Paula Green and Harry Ricketts, for example, see postmodernist writing as "suspicious of the ability of words to fix meaning, to achieve unity, to represent grand notions such as Truth and Beauty, and to write the self as anything but

fragmented and on the skids"; however, talking about experimental poetry, they regard it as having been "absorbed into the literary landscape over time to be made more familiar, less shocking" (357). CK Stead, while acknowledging its acceptance and popularity in some circles, sees the local influence and application of theory on the whole more moderately as "an escape from forms and methods which have become 'literary' in the bad sense", and "as a revivifying of language, a polishing of the glass of perception" (97).

The postmodernist approach, in its constant questioning of the existence of a stable and consistent self, let alone subjectivity (necessary for the lyric genre), seemingly leaves lyric poets with very little to hold on to. Marjorie Perloff, in 1996, suggested "discarding" the lyric altogether, paraphrased here by Lazer:

> Perloff demonstrates that the critique of bourgeois subjectivity in poetry is inevitably linked to a rethinking of the possibilities and nature of the lyric. She argues persuasively for the displacement of the lyric, either through radically rewriting it or by discarding it altogether, as a significant development in contemporary (innovative) poetry. (68)

However, a decade later Perloff's position seems less radical. In her 2007 essay "After Language Poetry: Innovation and Its Theoretical Discontents", she places Language poetry and its initial goals and somewhat restrictive rules in their historical context:

> The lasting contribution of language poetics, I would posit, is that at a moment when workshop poetry all across the United States was wedded to a kind of neoconfessionalist, neorealist poetic discourse. . . language theory reminded us that poetry is a making [poien], a construction using language, rhythm, sound, and visual image, that the subject, far from being simply the poet

> speaking in his or her natural "voice", was itself a complex construction, and that—most important—there was actually something at stake in producing a body of poems, and that poetic discourse belonged to the same universe as philosophical and political discourse. (21)

With this statement Perloff appears to "allow" back into contemporary poetry the traditional lyric elements: "rhythm, sound, and visual image" (21). In the post-language context, Perloff, among others[1], is now writing about Language poetry as an influencing, rather than current or innovative, movement, and acknowledging contemporary poets who incorporate in their writing both traditionally lyric and postmodern concerns. While there seems to be no agreed definition of post-language poetry, other than as, in some way, aware of or influenced by the Language movement, it is clear that, in the US in particular, critics are increasingly interested in poetry bridging the gap between traditional and experimental poetry, poetry which does not align itself fully with either Language or personal lyric goals, but adopts a position—one of many—of being both, of hybrid verse. Often the way this new, post-language poetry is viewed or described by critics is reliant on historicist, new historicist, social and political terminology and concepts, and/or in relation to Language poetry and even the New York school[2].

Stephen Burt, on the other hand, in his essay about the Elliptical poets[3], focuses more on some of these poets' relationship with language through the performance of (notional) first-person speaker(s) in and through the poetic text. He observes that these younger "elliptical" poets "treat voice and self and identity neither as givens nor as illusions, but as problems,

[1] See Christopher Nealon's "Camp Messianism, or, the Hopes of Poetry in Late-Late Capitalism", Jenny Goodman's "Politics and the Personal Lyric in the Poetry of Joy Harjo and C.D. Wright", or Lynn Keller's 'Post-Language Lyric': The Example of Juliana Spahr".

[2] I am referring to Christopher Nealon's essay, in which the post-language poets he is writing about (Rod Smith, Lisa Robertson, Kevin Davies) he claims are "most indebted" to "the Language poetry of the 1980s and the New York school of the 1960s and 1970s", "both understood in American literary history as signally 'postmodern'". He explains that the poetics the post-Language poets articulate are understood "so far primarily in terms of their relationship to Language writing rather than to the New York school, perhaps because the Language poets developed a large body of critical writing (and because they are the more immediate precursors). " (583)

[3] Stephen Burt includes poets such as C.D. Wright, Susan Wheeler, Liam Rector, Thylias Moss in this category.

phenomena, poems can explore and limn" (Burt 346). He adds that they "believe provisionally in identities (in one, or at least one, 'I' per poem), but they suspect the I's they invoke: they admire disjunction and confrontation but they know how a little can go a long way" (346). This thesis explores some of the same techniques and creative problems evident in the work of Elliptical poets, however it looks specifically at contemporary poems that can also be classified as dramatic monologues or dramatic lyrics. It contributes to the broader discussion of the (post)postmodern and post-language lyric by examining contemporary poetry which contains some elements of the lyric, can be classified as post-language (temporally, as well as thematically and/or structurally), and yet, where the speaker, addressing his or her auditor (and reader), is explicitly identified as someone other than the poet. The poems examined in this thesis are, therefore, best described as contemporary innovative dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics.

As a genre, the dramatic monologue is, by definition, capable of exposing the speaking "self" in a poem as artificial and constructed, while making it possible to retain some of the characteristics of the traditional lyric. In the following sections, I discuss some of the characteristics of the dramatic monologue of interest to me in the context of contemporary innovative writing.

Dramatic Monologue and the Lyric

The dramatic monologue, according to most definitions, is a poem in which the speaker is signalled to be someone other than the poet; it usually includes some dramatic action, and the speaker (often inadvertently) reveals something about himself or herself provoking reader-

sympathy and/or judgment. My interest, for the purposes of this study, is in how different critics perceive and define differences between the (first-person) lyric and the dramatic monologue, and the corresponding speaking "I" or "voice" of the poem.

According to Ina Beth Sessions' 1947 definition, the "perfect" dramatic monologue exhibits the following characteristics: "speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present" (Sessions qtd in Byron 8). Most dramatic monologues, however, do not include all of the elements listed, and subsequent critics tend to focus on features they consider important, depending on the theoretical framework and poems they choose to examine. Robert Langbaum, for example, places dramatic monologue alongside other forms and genres in what he calls "poetry of experience", stating that the "combination of sympathy and judgment makes the dramatic monologue suitable for expressing all kinds of extraordinary points of view. . . sympathy frees us for the widest possible range of experience" (96). Elisabeth Howe, starting with the characteristics of a typical dramatic monologue (i.e. "My Last Duchess" by Robert Browning), then broadening the definition to include poems which do not necessarily contain all the elements of Robert Browning's poems, rejects some aspects of Langbaum's approach because "a tendency to sympathize with a first-person speaker is characteristic of any genre, not of the dramatic monologue alone" (4).

Howe emphasises instead the voice of the speaker in a dramatic monologue (dichotomy or "split" in the words of the speaker being "simultaneously those of an identified individual and of the poet") (8). She also discusses the "novelistic" qualities of the dramatic monologue, as well as "the dramatic element"; both contributing to moving away from Romantic subjectivity, and avoiding "the confessional nature of the Romantic 'I' without

forgoing the reader-sympathy associated with first person discourse" (22). Glennis Byron, in her 2007 book *Dramatic Monologue*, states that

> much of the subsequent debate centred on distinguishing the dramatic monologue from the lyric, in particular determining the different natures of the respective speaking 'I's to the actual poets. While Abrams calls lyrics 'fragments of reshaped biography' (Abrams 1973:123), closely linking speaking voice to poet, from the start the speaker of the dramatic monologue has been distinguished from the figure of the poet. (11)

She adds that, despite the New Critics' attempt to "eliminate all differences between the lyric and the dramatic monologue" because according to them all poetry maintained certain dramatic features,

> most critics would now agree, however, that while both lyric and dramatic monologue present a first-person speaker, there are some significantly different tendencies in the two forms, and they have different effects, even if, in some texts, they begin to merge. (11-12)

Byron claims that in the lyric there are no signals on the page "that the speaker should be distinguished from the poet, on the contrary, there are more likely to be signals that encourage conflation of poet and speaker" (12).

Lyric poetry, according to some critics and theorists like Ann Williams, includes poems generally considered to be dramatic monologues; her definition of the lyric is much broader than Byron's. Williams classifies lyric poems according to the ratios "between the speaker; the implied poet, and other possible characters in a lyric poem":

> in the 'primitive' lyric any sense of implied poet is absent; he has no particularized identity because the speaker portrays archetypal experiences in conventional, often formulaic, language. In the 'pure' lyric, the speaker is implicitly or explicitly identified with the implied poet, who is to some extent individualized. In the 'displaced' lyric the speaker either assumes a mask separating him unequivocally from the implied poet ('performed' lyric), or else disappears, leaving the experience portrayed to bear the entire weight of meaning ('impersonal' lyric). (21)

Within the three types of lyric poems (pure, performed and impersonal), Williams identifies further distinctions depending on whether the poem is "'private', in which the speaker's energies (whatever his relation to the implied poet) are essentially turned inward, concerned with himself, with thought, feeling, memory, perception"; "'rhetorical', where the speaker's energies are "directed outward—toward an audience, specific or not, real or imagined"; dramatic, when the listener "*interacts* in some way with the speaker"; or "narrative", in which "the speaker tells a story about others" (21-22). While Williams' classification is worth noting as an alternative approach to the study of lyric poetry (which includes dramatic monologue within its broad lyric definition), for the sake of brevity and focus I adopt a more conventional view of what is considered a lyric poem: a poem exhibiting musical properties, usually short, condensed and subjective, expressing emotion or perception. My definition of the lyric for the purposes of this study endorses Byron's observation that (typical) lyric poems tend to contain "signals that encourage conflation of poet and speaker" (12).

As my focus is specifically on contemporary dramatic monologue, and ways in which the genre can be used for subjective expression in linguistically experimental, innovative

contexts, Byron's views on later applications of the genre seem particularly pertinent. Byron claims that after the changes in critical theory of the 1980s and 1990s, the illusion of a character remains as "a textual effect"; "we are offered a subject to be scrutinised but we simultaneously see this subject in process" (25). According to Byron, this is not for the sake of "dramatic effectiveness", but because "it allows us to observe the self as both process and product. The very fact that the dramatic monologue is by its nature a temporal fragment, focusing upon a particular occasion, emphasises that what we observe is only part of a larger process" (25). Byron, discussing more recent examples of the dramatic monologue, notes in contemporary revisionary monologues "their increasing emphasis on the poet's controlling mind and their consequent exposure of issues of representation", adding that "later poets often overtly provide an incongruous mixture of their speaker's world and their own world" (136).

Degrees of Distance and Dramatic Lyrics

Dramatic monologues, as Elisabeth A. Howe points out, "assume a certain separation or distance between poet and speaker on the one hand and between reader and speaker on the other" (7). She explains:

> The split resulting from the fact that the poem's words are simultaneously those of an identified individual and of the poet represents a distinctive characteristic of the dramatic monologue in general and one of its most interesting features. Rogers sees this linguistic anomaly as a way of distinguishing between lyric poems and dramatic monologues (which he calls 'lyrics of anomalous voice'). (9)

Byron elaborates on that distance between what the speaker says and what he or she inadvertently reveals:

> For some critics, a sense of division or splitting is specifically linked to the emergence of dramatic irony as a result of the disjunction between the limited understanding of the speaker and the wider awareness of the poet and the reader. The speaker's meaning can always be distinguished from the poem's meaning, or, as Robert Langbaum puts it, 'the meaning of the dramatic monologue is in disequilibrium with what the speaker reveals and understands. . . we understand, if not more, at least something other than the speaker understands'. (15)

The degree and nature of that distance (or "splitting") and irony, is what, in some critics' view, determines the difference between a dramatic monologue and a dramatic lyric. According to Sinfield, dramatic monologues are poems in which the speaker's circumstances, provided the speaker is established as someone other than the poet, seem closer to fiction than the world of the poet. Sinfield adds that "[i]f, alternatively, the speaker is relatively unlocated in time and place so that there is little beyond the title, say, to remind us that it is not supposed to be the poet speaking, then the feint is closer to the poet's 'I'", and these poems can be more accurately described as dramatic lyrics" (25).

The genre of dramatic monologue, in its most ironic form, is well suited to social critique. The distance between the speaker's world (however realistic or not) and the poet's is what makes the dramatic monologue useful for critiquing a character's views and attitudes, which often reflect and are representative of the group or class the speaker belongs to. Historically, the dramatic monologue appeared in response and as a reaction to the Romantic "I" and its heightened subjectivity, and as such it seems useful today for linguistic play and

speaker (de)construction, while maintaining a degree of coherence and, in Luck's words, "personality" (358). Herbert F. Tucker makes a compelling argument for the "return" of the dramatic monologue in "Dramatic Monologue and the Overhearing of Lyric":

> In its charactered life the dramatic monologue can help us put in their places critical reductions of opposite but complementary and perhaps even cognate kinds: on one hand, the transcendentally face-saving misprisions that poetry has received from Victorian romanticizers, Decadent purists, and New Critical impersonalists alike; on the other hand, the abysmal disfigurements of a deconstruction that would convert poetry's most beautiful illusion—the speaking presence—into a uniform textuality that is quite as 'purist', in its own way, as anything the nineteenth century could imagine. (243)

Dramatic monologues, therefore, offer a way of accommodating postmodern irony and linguistic explorations of voice, while preserving the illusion of what Tucker calls "the speaking presence" (243). Dramatic lyrics, on the other hand, can be used to edge closer to the traditional lyric, allowing for expressions of heightened emotion which would seem outdated in a contemporary lyric poem where the speaker is not signalled to be anyone other than the poet.

Contemporary Context

One solution to what Hank Lazer and Marjorie Perloff call "rethinking of the possibilities and nature of the lyric" in the context of postmodern poetry is the dramatic monologue (Lazer 68). As discussed in the opening sections, dramatic monologue seems closely aligned with the idea of a constructed and artificial "self", and provides enough room to explore the "voice" behind

the text. As part of this research I examine recent, experimental poetry by contemporary New Zealand poets Bill Manhire and Lynn Jenner, looking at strategies and techniques they use in their dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics to preserve "poetry's most beautiful illusion—the speaking presence" (Tucker 243).

There are several reasons for confining the critical part of this thesis to dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric poems written by these two New Zealand poets. First, there is a lack of critical writing concerned with post-language poetry in New Zealand and about contemporary New Zealand poets; second, by selecting poets whose work is sufficiently different, and contains and demonstrates a range of techniques and creative choices, both within a single poem and in a collection of poems, I have plenty of scope to focus on the central concerns, mainly dramatic first-person speaker and voice. On a more personal and practical level, while my own writing is not necessarily situated in, or influenced as thoroughly as Manhire's and Jenner's by its New Zealand origin, I am a New Zealand poet, and, like Jenner, graduate of the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University in Wellington, therefore the creative part of this thesis geographically and aesthetically exists in the same creative context as Manhire's and Jenner's work.

Unlike many contemporary dramatic monologues which are more accessible and used for direct social critique—Carol Ann Duffy's poetry collection *The World's Wife* being one of the more popular and widely read recent examples—both Manhire's and Jenner's dramatic monologues are less explicit in purpose and complicated by linguistic explorations of voice; their work is held together less by any semblance of a stable narrative than lyric devices.

Though both Manhire and Jenner use the dramatic monologue genre to revive the lyric in what on the surface appears to be experimental poetry, their approaches differ. Manhire's

concern is with language, and his seemingly postmodern take on the genre of dramatic monologue results in a voice which itself becomes what holds the poems together, despite their unreal, purely linguistic nature. Unlike the more typical postmodern poetry of John Ashbery or Michele Leggott, where disrupted syntax and shifting pronouns are used to destabilise the text, Manhire's dramatic monologues discussed in Chapter 1 are deictically accessible as well as emotionally coherent. In Jenner's case, the structure of the book, as well as her inclusion of highly subjective dramatic lyrics, are what makes *Dear Sweet Harry* a contemporary post-postmodern collection of poetry. Compared to some equivalent recent books of poetry (that is, book-length poems or sequences)—Jenny Bornholdt's *The Rocky Shore* or Ashbery's *Girls on the Run,* for example—in *Dear Sweet Harry* it is neither the realist first-person stability and assurance of voice as in Bornholdt's book, nor the underlying narrative (chaotic and complicated though it may be) as in Ashbery's Henry Darger story, which hold the book together. Jenner's book is an experimental non-narrative text, which includes found material and a variety of characters and diction, and which is held together primarily by lyric devices.

While this study of Manhire's and Jenner's poetry touches on and uses aspects of certain theoretical frameworks, specifically McGann's views on non-narrativity, Furrow's deictic analysis and, most importantly, various definitions and history of the dramatic monologue genre, it intentionally avoids situating itself within any of the contemporary critical approaches to literary texts—Marxist, feminist, post-structuralist, historicist. This is partly because the poetry examined here would be difficult to classify and contain within such frameworks—which is precisely the reason it is of interest to me—and partly because the overall thesis is concerned with matters of craft more than ideology, as its larger portion (the

creative part) is a book of poems, so the close-reading approach, keeping in mind the lessons of postmodernism, seemed in this case most appropriate and fruitful. As my key interest is in the possibilities and options the dramatic monologue offers now, after postmodernism, I worked in parallel on examining strategies each of the poets use, and applying some of the findings to my own poems (the creative part of this PhD thesis).

Chapter 1 of this thesis examines Manhire's dramatic monologues which seem postmodern and experimental in their rejection of a realist(ic), consistent, coherent "self" behind the poem, yet (despite their apparent heteroglossia) are composed in a voice—that is, structured in a way—which is both consistent and coherent, albeit non-representational. This study of Manhire's work contains close readings and analysis of his dramatic monologues, leading on to my articulation of what defines Manhire's constructed (post-language) "voice". To do that I rely to some extent on Manhire's own writing about poetry and poetics, and I look at lyric devices Manhire uses to achieve the unsettling effects of an unrealistic speaker, while maintaining coherence and subjectivity. As part of the analysis, I examine Manhire's use of syntax, rhythm and repetition, as well as themes and corresponding variations in diction and technique.

Chapter 2 contains close readings of several poems from Lynn Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry*, which are best described as contemporary dramatic lyrics, as well as an overarching analysis of the structure of the book. As part of the analysis I look at literary devices Jenner uses to unify the collection and give it coherence (motifs, repetition, time/place parallels), in the context of a non-narrative, oppositional contemporary text.

The two chapters, read together, illustrate the range available within the dramatic mode; my analysis of Manhire's work focuses on the genre of dramatic monologue which he uses

innovatively in some of his poetry, and it offers insights that are useful at the level of a poem, whereas Jenner's book demonstrates some of the options available within and across a collection, where poems of differing and often disparate complexity, diction and voice coexist and interact.

For the purposes of my own analysis and innovative application of the dramatic monologue, close reading and discussion of these two poets' work provides me with a sufficient range of findings to demonstrate both how the genre has been and is applied, as well as to suggest new uses and further possibilities the dramatic mode offers in post-language poetry.

Chapter 1—Bill Manhire's Dramatic Monologues: Between the City and the Forest

Introduction

Bill Manhire, a contemporary writer and academic and former New Zealand Poet Laureate, tends to be regarded by critics as an example of a postmodern poet. Manhire himself acknowledges varied and wide-ranging influences on his work—from British and European modernism to American postmodernists—but these influences have been steadily (and selectively) absorbed and assimilated over the years. His collections reflect the changing poetic landscape, but they form a recognisable and continuous body of work. In the context of contemporary New Zealand poetry, Bill Manhire's work is remarkable not only because of the unique space his poetry inhabits, but also because of the sturdiness and longevity of his poetic achievement. While my main argument in this chapter is centred around Manhire's approach to a particular genre—the dramatic monologue—and attempts to trace his evolving attitude towards it, it also highlights the constants: techniques and themes which remain present in his work, regardless of both internal and external poetic developments. I focus on Manhire's specific, recognisable style or "voice", in the context of experimental and innovative dramatic monologue, exploring the tension that develops in his poetry between lyric devices and postmodern goals.

A number of critics have reviewed and examined Manhire's work over the years and noted uncertainties and flux. John Newton talks about the "hesitation" that characterises

Manhire's poems (164). Andrew Johnston focuses on "uncertainties", stating that Manhire "instead of taking uncertainty itself as the subject of his poems. . . wittily takes advantage of the possibilities that exist when we are uncertain about something. The poet exists not as a creator, but a re-creator; the poems are his recreation, where he entertains possibilities while entertaining the reader" (643). When other critics focus on the uncertainties and playfulness of Manhire's verse, it may seem an odd choice to argue for continuity and meaning. But as Roger Horrocks concludes:

> [F]rom our 'language' (or 'reading') point of view, even poems as interesting as Manhire's and Wedde's lose some of their alertness, because of certain nostalgias—a nostalgia for 'the natural gearing-together of poem, language, and context'…a nostalgia for some of the old representations they are subverting (so the poets have their cake and eat it, while talking diets); and a nostalgia for lyricism. (123)

It is my intention to explore that "nostalgia", or Manhire's position at the "edge of the (poetic) universe"—to paraphrase a line from his poem "Milky Way Bar", that never lets him entirely abandon either the modernist yearnings for coherence and closure or the lessons of postmodernism. Unlike Horrocks, whose opinion reflects the early enthusiasm for language poetry of the 1980s, I regard Manhire's "nostalgia for lyricism" more positively, as a way of preserving or reviving the lyric impulse in what are otherwise linguistically complex, experimental poems.

It is important at this point to clarify the terminology I intend to use, and place my examination of Manhire's work in the context of the genre of dramatic monologue. Dramatic monologues, as Elisabeth A. Howe points out, "assume a certain separation or distance

between poet and speaker on the one hand and between reader and speaker on the other" (7). What Alan Sinfield, Robert Langbaum, Constance Hasset and Elisabeth Howe agree on is that the relationship between the poet, speaker, auditor and reader, and the resulting interplay of unintended revelation, poet's views and reader sympathy are crucial for understanding (and using) the form. There are varying degrees of accord over what is or is not necessary to call a poem a dramatic monologue (i.e. realistic speaker and setting, dramatic action, reader sympathy or judgment), but my arguments in this chapter focus on the linguistic construction of the speaker as an unrealistic character and its effects on the reader. To quote Glennis Byron:

> The pressure of the poet's controlling mind, frequently felt in the Victorian monologue through the poem's form, is now intensified through the poem's language. This emphasises the act of representation, exposing the speaker as nothing more than a construct. And this in turn draws attention to the culture which has produced that speaker, the world of the poet, allowing for social critique. (137)

The speaker's linguistic nature in Manhire's poems does seem to serve that exact purpose—it draws attention to the literary and wider culture which has produced the speaker—but that is not all that happens in his poetry. Rather than be content with exposing and subverting the implied power and position of the speaker in his dramatic monologues, Manhire's poems go a step further (or back) towards more traditional lyric goals. While Manhire's verse may appear playful, it is no less engaged than some more conventional, realist work in conveying both emotion and literary concerns.

In "Unconsidered Trifles: The Writer as Thief", published in 2009, Manhire talks about categories of theft—ways of writing that help a poet find his or her voice. One of these

categories is "stealing other people's lives" in poems which are "versions of the dramatic monologue, where the poet appropriates the experience and voice of another human being, real or imagined. You'll all know famous examples like Robert Browning's 'My Last Duchess' or Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus'. 'A Martian Sends a Postcard Home' . . . is a kind of dramatic monologue" (Manhire *Unconsidered Trifles* 12). Manhire includes his own poems "My Childhood in Russia" and "My Childhood in Ireland" in this category. While "My Childhood in Russia" and "My Childhood in Ireland" are adopting the obvious guise of dramatic monologue, there is very little to differentiate between them and Manhire's earlier "Milky Way Bar" or "On Originality", where the speaker is not clearly identified as "another human being", someone other than the poet (Manhire *Unconsidered Trifles* 12). These speakers are not only unreliable, they are unreal(istic); we watch them being constructed as a kind of a hand puppet for the poet to perform with, but with fingers very much protruding and visible.

In this chapter, as well as offering close readings of some of Manhire's dramatic monologues, I examine the post-language effects evident in his work: reader involvement and language instability—what Horrocks calls "a wobble" (Horrocks 117). To do that I rely to some extent on Manhire's own writing about poetry and poetics—as Andrew Johnston remarks, "the best person to read on the subject of Bill Manhire's poetry is Bill Manhire" (643). I argue that the tension between the (linguistic) persona Manhire adopts and his own lyrical "voice" is what makes these dramatic monologues appropriate and useful examples of contemporary (post)postmodern lyrics. What transpires is an unusual, yet thoroughly engaging take on the dramatic monologue genre, where the speaker, by being in a sense "twice-removed" from the poet (due to Manhire's use of fragmentation and disjointed narrative, as well as using a traditionally unreliable speaker), paradoxically achieves a degree of reader-

sympathy and even identification. This closes the circle, allowing subjectivity back into the form, and that kind of poem now appears closer to its lyric origins, resembling some critics' definition of the dramatic lyric, i.e. where irony is more subdued than in a typical Browningesque dramatic monologue.

Lyrical Foliage in Manhire's Post-Language Dramatic Monologues

I begin by looking at "On Originality", published in 1977 in *How to Take Off Your Clothes at the Picnic*, before moving on to discuss some of Manhire's more recent dramatic monologues. The reason for this largely chronological approach is twofold. I trace the recurring themes and concerns over time, but also show that Manhire in later collections more overtly embraces the dramatic monologue genre. Yet the concept of a persona and archetypal, representative (almost symbolic) speaker appears early in Manhire's work.

As Bill Manhire himself states in "Unconsidered trifles: the writer as thief", his poem "On Originality" "aims to indicate how influence and tradition work. . . .It's a poem about influence, and the anxiety of influence—the poet as metaphorical killer, thief, and mugger" (Manhire *Unconsidered Trifles* 6). I quote the poem in full:

On Originality

Poets, I want to follow them all,
out of the forest into the city
or out of the city into the forest.

The first one I throttle.
I remove his dagger

and tape it to my ankle in a shop doorway.
Then I step into the street
picking my nails.

I have a drink with a man
who loves young women.
Each line is a fresh corpse.

There is a girl with whom we make friends.
As he bends over her body
to remove the clothing
I slip the blade between his ribs.

Humming a melody, I take his gun.
I knot his scarf carelessly at my neck, and

I trail the next one into the country.
On the bank of a river I drill
a clean hole in his forehead.

Moved by poetry
I put his wallet in a plain envelope
and mail it to the widow.

I pocket his gun.
This is progress.
For instance, it is nearly dawn.

Now I slide a gun into the gun
and go out looking.

It is a difficult world.
Each word is another bruise.

This is my nest of weapons.
This is my lyrical foliage.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 62-63)

The first half of the poem is written in deliberately plain and formulaic language, and the poem itself is seemingly narrative. It starts by showing us the speaker clumsily (perhaps hesitantly) "throttle" the first poet, and not wanting to get caught he steps into the street picking his nails. The speaker catches the next poet in the (poetic) act of removing the girl's clothes; he then uses the first poet's dagger to "slip the blade between his ribs" (line 15). The

precision of that phrase, as well as the suggestion in the preceding lines of his actions being premeditated imply that the speaker is becoming smoother, more proud of his actions—or at least less concerned about being caught. "Humming a melody", the speaker takes the second poet's gun and "carelessly" dons his scarf, and the next poet is murdered from a distance; the speaker drills "a clean hole in his forehead" (20). "Clean" suggests ruthlessness and precision. He doesn't take the poet's wallet, but he does "pocket his gun". The word "pocket" signals that this has become an everyday activity, poetic routine. That line, at the start of stanza 8, is also where a significant shift in diction occurs. The second half of the poem (stanzas 8-11), after the speaker metaphorically pockets the gun, is where Manhire starts complicating the language of the poem by combining clichés and common phrases with lyrical tone and poetic diction.

One of the most memorable lines of the poem, line 27 ("Now I slide a gun into the gun"), illustrates and conveys the comment by one of the helicopter crew in Antarctica after hearing Manhire read, quoted in *Doubtful Sounds*: "It's like you're somehow putting words inside the words" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 245). By selecting words with contradictory—or what one could call inappropriate—connotations for the context, he draws attention to those words. Manhire elaborates on that in *Doubtful Sounds*: "Logopoeia is a kind of poetry where language draws attention to itself, where different tones of voice, different registers, different sets of associations inhabit the same moment of utterance" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 50). Sliding "a gun into the gun" in the context of the poem not only describes this poetic strategy, by way of metaphor, but applies it too. Manhire uses logopoeia to provide a sense of (at times discomforting) emotional coherence. By drawing attention to particular, odd words, he disorients the reader, making the reader sense a kind of overarching, despairing irony behind

the interrupted and seemingly fragmented narrative. For example, his choice of the adjective "fresh" in line eleven ("Each line is a fresh corpse"), suggests and at the same time demonstrates that the poet is indeed striving for originality by using dead metaphors in a new ("fresh") way.

The final two stanzas of the poem provide further evidence for the speaker's literary "progress": his claim that "it is a difficult world" is complicated by a surprising metaphor that follows: "Each word is another bruise" (30). The first line of that stanza is a cliché, phrase often used in prosaic contexts; however, the metaphor that immediately follows it and concludes the stanza adds weight and new meaning to the statement, because it unexpectedly reveals something about the speaker's relationship with words, with language as a source of pain and difficulty. As Wootten observes, "Manhire will often seek out coinages sullied by use in order to examine the forces and attitudes behind them" (55). Or, as Manhire himself explains, talking about "found" poetry:

> [A] text changes when its context changes, and often the process with found poems is that material is taken from quite banal contexts, and given fresh interest through being presented as a poem. . . There is also the pleasure of two competing sets of meanings, for the new text never entirely abandons the old text. (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 186)

One of the reasons why stanza ten ("It is a difficult world./ Each word is another bruise") makes sense connotatively is because it conveys a lot about Manhire's relationship with poetry and language: The world is bruised by words, so he must protect it, and protect himself within it. To do that he constructs his "lyrical foliage"—lyrical foliage (in close proximity to

"a nest of weapons") suggests both a place to hide and ambush—it can be used to both attack and defend. That final stanza, combining anaphora (repetition of the words at the start of each line) and two aurally similar, but quite different in terms of comparison, metaphors, changes the tone and mood of the poem. It illustrates how Manhire's unexpected use of lyric language and traditional literary devices can, in only one or two lines, make linguistically complex and challenging poems emotionally resonant and connotatively coherent.

The idea of the poet hiding in the poem is useful when reading Manhire's work. In the context of the dramatic monologue, it exposes the tension between the speaker's and poet's voice, and this tension cannot be easily resolved or "settled", to quote Constance W. Hasset, discussing the classical features of the genre (135). "On Originality" is an early example of Manhire hiding in "lyrical foliage" and at the same time demonstrating his speaker's "nest of weapons"; it marks the beginning of Manhire's edging towards dramatic character and performance—and the genre of dramatic monologue.

In Manhire's early collections first person poems are often more intimate "I-You" lyrics, even when the structure of the poem is complicated by sudden shifts in diction and setting. Some examples of his more traditional lyric "I" (which is very rare in Manhire's later books, where majority of the poems seem to be second- or third-person lyrics) are "Poem", "Love Poem", "The Contract", "The Elaboration", "Your Absence"[4]. The techniques Manhire uses to combine what are on the surface unrelated images and diction, are present in all of them, even in some highly lyrical first person poems; however, the tone and suggestion of the speaking "I" being close to the poet's own voice is what seems to almost disappear in Manhire's later work. In later collections there are fewer first person poems overall, with an

[4] All these poems are in included in Appendix A.

increase in impersonal, third person (singular or plural) poems, or unspecified, generic "you". The importance of "On Originality" in the context of Manhire's dramatic monologues is that it is an early example of some of the possibilities a dramatic character offers, which Manhire explores more fully in his later poetry, where the tone he adopts ranges between ironic and self-mocking, and elegiac (as in "False William" or "My Childhood in Russia", discussed further on in this chapter).

"Milky Way Bar", the title poem in Manhire's 1991 collection, is an example of the speaker as a linguistic persona, performed by language. I quote the poem in full:

> **Milky Way Bar**
>
> I live at the edge of the universe,
> like everybody else. Sometimes I think
> congratulations are in order:
> I look out at the stars
> and my eye merely blinks a little,
> my voice settles for a sigh.
>
> But my whole pleasure is the inconspicuous;
> I love the unimportant thing.
> I go down to the Twilight Arcade
> and watch the Martian invaders,
> already appalled by our language,
> pointing at what they want.
>
> (Manhire *Collected Poems* 146)

When examined in the context of the "Martian" poetics of the 1970s, which Manhire discusses in *Doubtful Sounds*, it is not surprising that the final lines of "Milky Way Bar" deliver the image of the "Twilight Arcade" and Martian invaders "already appalled by our language, / pointing at what they want" (lines 11-12). The "Martians"—British poets of the 60s and 70s, most notably Craig Raine and Christopher Reid—used series of metaphors as a

way of looking at familiar things in a fresh way. Manhire says that Raine's "Martian speaker is an artist-figure who misconceives ordinary reality in ways which defamiliarise it, thus making it fresh and interesting again. His misconceptions are metaphorical, and there are many moments of alert, exuberant metaphor in Raine's work" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 176). He adds that "a powerful sadness inhabits Raine's best poems and seems to have more to do with his image-making procedures than with the situations he attends to" (176-177). Similarly, Manhire's own "Milky Way Bar" reads as a series of seemingly disconnected, incongruous statements.

It starts with the speaker proclaiming he lives "at the edge of the universe, / like everybody else" (1-2). This slightly deflated (almost teenage) statement is then complicated by the speaker thinking "congratulations are in order", as his "eye" ("I") merely blinks a little, and his voice is absent, "settles for a sigh" (6). The poem ends with the image ("gun inside the gun") of children playing video games and "pointing at what they want", and at least part of the reason why these lines make sense connotatively is because they are already infused with literary context and meaning, with Raine's "Martian" and Reid's "Arcadia", creating a sense of coherence between the seemingly disjointed thoughts and images of the poem.

The speaker's contradicting and contrasting statements and syntactic and connotative disjunctions in "Milky Way Bar" are a way of drawing attention to the unreal, linguistic speaker's presence in the poem—a presence nevertheless. Even though there is no clear direct address in this particular piece, the dramatic nature of the discourse implies an auditor. Manhire's use of heightened diction and over the top statements (even when they are subsequently deflated), indicates the speaker is addressing someone. In addition to the obvious clues that the speaker cannot be real and is not the poet, this is another pointer in the direction

of the dramatic monologue, experimental and contemporary in its manifestation. In this particular case, we do not need the title to signal the dramatic nature of the poem, the language of the poem reveals it.

More recent examples of this kind of poem by Manhire spoken by a crudely (and somewhat humorously) constructed linguistic puppet are: "False William" and "My Childhood in Russia" (*Lifted* 2005) and "My Childhood in Ireland" (*The Victims of Lightning* 2010). These are also the most obvious and clearly identifiable dramatic monologues in Manhire's work. Again, in these poems also, Manhire's long-standing poetic concerns and preoccupations come through. Even the title of "False William" contains a multitude of associations: it is the title of a traditional ballad, it winks at a number of other literary Williams (Wordsworth, Yeats), William is a royal name, and the title is indeed suggestive of some sort of autobiographical, quasi-confessional material. The poem itself appears to comment on the argument about purity of poetic language, where Manhire's position is one of ambivalence. As Wootten observes, Manhire "responds to Eliot's Mallarmean wish to 'purify the dialect of the tribe' by declaring 'I want to go and stand in the corner with all the impure people'. Yet, though part of him has always been fond of getting dirty in the corner, with or without the company of pseuds, he has also spent considerable time washing with the pure" (Wootten 55). Evidence for Wootten's statement can be found in Manhire's *Doubtful Sounds*. He states: "Pure subjects need pure diction, words without sweat glands. It's a tall order—a desire for innocence that can only exist if the body doesn't—but of course the fact that something is unattainable doesn't stop people yearning and making their gestures" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 53). But he then adds, "Perfection, purity, innocence—they seem to have very little to do with inhaling the actual human atmosphere" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 53).

"False William" opens with a linguistically "pure", seemingly Romantic statement: "Sadness entered my life so early" (line 1). The opening line is almost believable, carefully balanced on the edge of melodrama. However, the two lines that follow push the speaker's statements over that edge, towards exaggeration, impossibility, and irony. We could almost accept that "[t]he sky was only the sky sometimes" but when we get to the final line of the stanza ("I was never going to die"), the poem has—in three short lines—already established its fictional, ironic nature (2-3).

The second stanza is where language is thoroughly destabilised:

> My friends opened their heads
> to show the vile, invisible anger.
> They stood and glittered in the yard. (4-6)

Here we are confronted with the speaker's friends opening "their heads". The statement is unsettling because it suggests some kind of mechanical action, and at the same time it echoes (via Manhire's use of logopoeia) another common phrase—warm and emotionally charged "opening one's heart". It is the contrast that develops within the line, within the words themselves, that adds to the shock of "vile" and "anger" in the line that follows. The second stanza ends with the friends who stood and "glittered" in the yard, offering another clash in diction with the use of "glittered", which seems out of place, yet at the same time echoes and reflects "the sky" from the opening lines, echoed again in the third stanza ("birds", "flight", "wings"), though the language and diction here return to (mock-)lyricism and are apparently more stable again. However, this stanza, like the previous two, ends with a surprising,

unexpected statement that the speaker's father was "the history of sound":

> Everywhere birds were in flight and vanishing
> my father's wings were sick in bed,
> he was the history of sound. (7-9)

The faux-Romantic language is pushed further in the next stanza, but now it is clear that the speaker is addressing someone. He exclaims that all the time someone was watching his "clumsy feet", and asks his auditor to "remove them" and "hollow them". The stanza ends with a powerful repetition: "Remove them now" (12). At this point it seems like the poem has (linguistically) completed its circle of mockery and is returning to the despairing, lyrical language of the opening lines.

"False William" is seemingly playfully treating Romantic aspirations by letting the speaker declare that he "was never going to die", or that his feet are "shoes/for the king who must not touch the ground" (13-14). This is both typical of and mocking the characteristics of the dramatic monologue we recognise as "Browningese", to borrow Alan Sinfield's term (64). In this poem, particularly in the final two stanzas, there is a stronger sense of the presence of an auditor; the speaker is addressing someone in lines eleven and twelve ("Oh remove them and hollow them. / Remove them now"). This brings "False William"—and Manhire's more recent dramatic monologues, discussed further on in this section—closer to the origins of the genre, to Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" or "My Last Duchess". Manhire's "False William" is almost a parody, yet the lyricism he injects into it prevents us from judging the speaker for his pretentiousness and Romantic language. It is difficult not to feel the tension, not to feel torn

between sympathy and judgment, because the poem starts and ends with almost believably lyrical language and uses poetic devices typical of lyric poetry throughout.

"My Childhood in Russia" superficially does what it announces in the title—it offers an account of a childhood in Russia. However, Manhire's references to the city and the forest, which is, we recall, where his earlier speaker-murderer (in "On Originality") was following other poets, are suggestive of another set of associations building in this poem. "And the city grew, while the forest just crept away further, / inspecting for somewhere to hide" (lines 30-31) is—to my ear—suggestive of lyricism retreating and post-modernist irony and experimentation taking over. The forest "inspecting for somewhere to hide" sounds very similar to Manhire's "lyrical foliage". Manhire's "forest" is, it seems, used to stand in for subjectivity, and his city to represent postmodern irony. As Michelle Leggott put it reviewing Ian Wedde's *Castaly* in 1981, associating "the inner city" with postmodern literary devices: "You move in the inner city. You shift into the second person, become derisive, defensive, and above all evaluative. . ." (Leggott *Certainties and Aches* 168). I will return to this quote, as I believe it is important, not only in the context of Manhire's motifs, but also because it highlights why and how these particular first-person poems, these experimental dramatic monologues, manage to create the illusion of immediacy, intimacy, and subjectivity.

"My Childhood in Russia" starts as a plain, relatively stable narrative, where the linguistic uncertainty is caused by the tension between the fairy-tale beginning showing the father going out "to cut wood, to cut wood" (2), and the contemporary, modern setting and language of the story unfolding in the lines that follow ("rented rooms", "suburbs", "seventeenth floor"). The lines ending the first stanza strongly suggests Russia, and its cold, austere twentieth century, and this suggestion continues in the second stanza, deliberately

employing clichés (i.e. poverty, alcoholism) in lines seven and eight: “My sisters quarrelled, my brother got drunk. / Our mother shed tears, surprised to be lonely” (7-8). However, in the middle of stanza two there is a sudden shift; the poem shocks us by the image of the children singing in the stairwell after their mother died. The speaker then retreats back to fairy-tale diction, using a child’s language and perspective, ending that stanza with a question to which there is no answer (“How could he ever return?”) and reminding us of, and echoing, the mystery from the opening stanza. This childlike complaint continues in the next stanza, where the speaker is “seeing” the father’s axe and unfolding the narrative with a series of out of context, yet thoroughly convincing statements:

> This was my one source of strength:
> seeing the forest, recalling his axe.
> I knew I would not leave our city
> where the smallest things were so prized—
> a piece of chalk, a particular ribbon—
> while so much of my father was missing. (13-18)

The contrast of the “smallest things” being prized in the city—and this is where we recall “the unimportant thing” from “Milky Way Bar”—while “so much of my father was missing”, demonstrates Manhire’s ability to employ lyric devices to make us momentarily believe and sympathise with the speaker. The child-speaker’s narration continues in the first two lines of the fourth stanza, but midway through line three the poem’s language changes again, and we are now hearing a contemporary adult speaker (“chit-chat”, “bike”, “take that”); the speaker’s discourse becomes more forceful, rebellious. The stanza opens with Moscow being shaped like “a wheel”, and the boys taking “turns” to read; which before we even get to the second

half of the stanza suggests (through its images, in an associative way) revolutions; this stanza introduces the harsh realities of "our town", showing us the man on the bike "shaking his fist" at it—and the poem itself seems to be rebelling through its language.

The final stanza of this poem suggests growing up, coming of age:

> Yes, each of these men could bleed!
> And always one thing succeeded another.
> A girl took my cock and raised it towards her.
> Where were the steppes? Where the Urals?
> And the city still grew, while the forest just crept away further,
> inspecting for somewhere to hide.
>
> Where was some paper on which I could write! (25-31)

Manhire uses "impure" language and puns ("girl took my cock and raised it towards her. / Where are the steppes? Where the Urals?"), depicting the panic of having to grow up. This linguistic coming of age is re-enforced by the innocence and awe of "childhood" of the previous stanzas being replaced by mere "chit-chat"; postmodern city growing while the (lyrical) "forest just crept away further". The town in "My Childhood in Russia" is "shaped like an axe" and the simile echoes the father's axe from the opening stanza, but this axe "chopped at its people", who, each of them, "could bleed". And "always one thing succeeded another" suggests that the narrative impulse survives, is more robust than the lyrical. "Where was some paper on which I could write!" is an unexpected ending, but this exclamation feels earned. In this poem Manhire makes use of a foreign landscape and literary associations to comment on both the local and the universal, to disclose perhaps some of his own disenchantments with poetry too detached from humanism, from subjectivity ("Yes, each of these men could bleed!"). In "My Childhood in Russia", more than in Manhire's other dramatic monologues, he provides references to a specific place and time (regardless of how

ironic this portrayal really is), which according to some critics is one of the more significant features of the genre. According to Sinfield, "[t]he varying degrees of dramatic realization. . . have the effect of moving the feint either towards the poet's 'I' or towards fiction. If there is a heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail which establishes for the speaker a world which we know is not the poet's, then the feint begins to approximate fiction" (25). Though the concept may be familiar, Manhire's application of it adds another layer of complexity, namely, the unstable linguistic surface, emphasising the fictional aspect of the monologue further.

"My Childhood in Ireland" is even darker and bleaker. It starts with a series of negations, with all that the speaker did not do or experience:

> I never climbed the hill
> or strolled to the end of the pier
> to see what the walkers in rain
> might be finding out there.
>
> Nor did the book fall open
> where Maeve had secretly signed it.
> In fact, it never fell open. (1-7)

Again, just like in "My Childhood Russia", the opening lines feel almost lyrical, almost convincing, but that quickly changes in lines three and four where the speaker seems to be actively disengaging, refusing to find out what the walkers in the rain "might be finding out there". The tone of feigned indifference continues in the second stanza, though the topic is more personal and the repetition of "fall open" gives these lines the appearance of lyric verse. The final line of the stanza and the continuation of that thought in the next stanza hint at the unimportance of the speaker and his small, provincial environment, which the world ("beyond knowing") simply passes by, streaming away. And this is where the main shift in both

language and setting happens in the poem; there is a sudden move towards action, and we find ourselves in the middle of a (contemporary sounding) narrative. The speaker "walked to the house", leaving us with unanswered questions (whose house, where from?). We are then, in the two stanzas that follow, shown the speaker's family: the sister's child "chained to her breast", while she "drifted", echoing the ships from the previous stanza, but she is not at sea, she is inside "a dark forest". There is a strong sense of judgment when the father is introduced, enforced by an awkward rhyme ("opined"/"whined") and diction which is intentionally plain, domestic. The final stanza offers another change in tone. It ends with three short sentences, which in both language and rhythm seem to clash with the first half of the poem. The speaker "went on the Net" and "wandered", which ironically contrasts the speaker's statement in the opening stanza that he "never strolled to the end of the pier".

The speaker at the start of the poem lacks curiosity, he is resigned to not knowing, yet he now goes "on the Net" (and "the Net" may be his only path to the wide world "streaming away"), which is probably why "Asian bukkake" seems like an appropriate ending for this poem because the overall tone of the poem is unsympathetic, unfulfilled (lines 23-24). It is no stretch to go from a life that begins with negation (similar to disowning your parents "because they always said *after*"[5]) to pornography centred on humiliation. A contemporary kind of loneliness and isolation is hinted at here. What Manhire manages to do through sudden shifts in diction and setting and seemingly illogical narratives, is expose the speaker as non-existent, unrealistic. The poem's tone is at times completely at odds with its (literal) statements, particularly in the final stanza which begins with: "Well, you manage to find / what might make you happy" (21-22). This statement is unconvincing, as is the speaker's claim in stanza

5 A line from "An Outline" by Bill Manhire, *Collected Poems* 122.

two that he didn't mind not knowing. In fact, the entire poem is based on the understanding it establishes with the reader not to believe the voice, going a step further than the traditional monologue where the speaker, the character, is simply unreliable.

In all the poems discussed in this section the speaker is non-existent, linguistic, changing with each change of tone and diction, with each new setting. We find ourselves having to keep re-adjusting our expectations, and through the act of acceptance of the shifts and changes we allow the speaker to exist in language, to be continually constructed and never "real", we stop imagining "another human being" behind the text (Manhire *Unconsidered Trifles* 12).

Constructing the Speaker, Constructing the Reader

Roger Horrocks, in his analysis of McQueen's, Wedde's and Manhire's work, considers "the ways in which a poem creates an implied or (as it's sometimes ironically called) 'ideal' reader" (Horrocks 117). Manhire touches on this in *Doubtful Sounds*: "A good deal of the poem's meaning lies in how it treats you . . . how the reader is tempted and led through the poem . . . constructed by the poem" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 146). Manhire never entirely abandons "meaning". He confesses, "[A]ggressive opacity leaves me cold, as does aggressive transparency. More positively, I think a poem simply has to be alive in its language" (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 284). There is a difference, though, between a poem "alive in its language" and language "observed at play rather than put to work" (Johnston 642). Manhire, like John Ashbery, is interested in wordplay, games, sound and composition; he skilfully uses a variety of discourses and tones in his poems and it is very difficult to identify the theme with

certainty. Manhire's pronouns are shifty and unreliable, and any interaction between them is momentary and unstable. In "The Old Man's Example: Manhire in the 70s" John Newton discusses Manhire's "I-you" poems and compares them with Wedde's and Edmond's poems of "personal address" and says that the obvious difference is that the reader is not "encouraged to attach that second person to a proper name" (Newton 170). However, the difficulty with Manhire is not so much the slipperiness of "you", but the deliberate vagueness of "I". It is true that we cannot attach a proper name to Manhire's "you", but we cannot attach a proper name to his "I" either. His "I" is equally changeable and changing, in the state of perpetual construction—and performance.

Lesley Jeffries, in "The Role of Style in Reader-involvement: Deictic Shifting in Contemporary Poems", explains that "the use of first person in a narrative both identifies the narrator and also provides a perspective for the reader to enter the text world" (71). As Furrow explains:

> Deixis in literature applies to the shared quality of a class of words with certain logical peculiarities, varying according to the speaker and the speaker's location in either space or time. . . Results suggest that the more deictics in a narrative passage, the stronger the link with the reader, who is treated as a listener, as someone who can be made to picture & respond to the same events as the narrator has seen &, in the act of narration, is seeing again (Listening *Reader and Impotent Speaker: The Role of Deixis in Literature Abstract* 1).

The use of generalised second person (found in many of Manhire's poems) which "superficially hints at an addressee" cannot be considered deictic, Jeffries claims, quoting and paraphrasing Furrow; such uses of the second person form are "colloquial stand-ins for the

indefinite pronoun *one*. In fact, they are ways of avoiding using the pronoun *I*" (Furrow qtd in Jeffries 78). I would like to briefly return to Michele Leggott's comment: "You shift into the second person, become derisive, defensive, above all evaluative. . . " (Leggott 168). What Leggott draws attention to is the (very postmodern) trend of using the second person simply to avoid the embarrassment of "I", which seems to have the effect of distancing readers, of making it more difficult to (emotionally) enter the text. Manhire's first-person poems discussed in this chapter are easier for readers to "enter", and yet at the same time he avoids the embarrassment of appearing sincere or autobiographical by making the structure, surface and logic of the poem disjointed, "wobbly".

In Manhire's case, argues Horrocks, the "ideal reader seems simultaneously aware of language and world occupying the same space at the same time, but there's a wobble (word/world), an instability, a sense of displacement like colours slightly out of register. The reader is thereby trained to stay alert, to be ready to make quick lateral moves to get back in touch with this world that's 'always on the move'" (Horrocks 117). Looking closely at "Milky Way Bar", the "wobble" is caused by the way Manhire composes sentences of stark contrast. "I live at the edge of the universe" is a grand, over-the-top statement, followed by "like everybody else", deflating the sentence, causing tension within the first syntactic unit of the piece (lines 1-2). This tension (or "wobble") continues in the lines that follow. "Sometimes I think" reflects consideration, hesitation, uncertainty, but this is followed by "congratulations are in order", again signalling a great, grand achievement of some kind, where surely no uncertainty should exist (2-3). This battle between the grand and all-encompassing, and the "unimportant thing", "the inconspicuous", continues throughout the poem (7-8). "I look out at the stars / and my eye merely blinks a little" exhibits the same contrast, the same tension (4-

5). “The stars” are large, distant, evocative, poetic, but the speaker’s eye(/I) “merely” blinks “a little”—both “merely” and “a little” serve to contrast and diminish the effect of the expansive sky. Further on in the poem, “my whole pleasure” clashes, in the same way, with “the unimportant thing” (7-8).

In each of the poems discussed here Manhire manages to signal to the reader that the speaker is not only unreliable, but utterly linguistic. “My Childhood in Ireland” opens with a negation: “I never climbed the hill” (line 1). In “False William” Manhire uses over-the-top lyricism to start the poem—it is demonstrated in diction, but also through rhythm and line breaks in relation to syntax, and rhyme (“sky”/”die”). The poem exhibits very regular stress patterns (four stresses in first two lines of each stanza, followed by three stresses in the third and final line), until we get to the final two lines of the poem where the stress pattern changes and is reversed (2, 4); the rhythmical pattern of the poem looks like this: 443, 443, 443, 443, 24. Through this regularity of rhythm, as well as over the top, Romantic statements, the poem keeps the reader emotionally engaged. Manhire employs quite a few temporal indicators (e.g. “early”, “sometimes”, “never”, “all the time”, “now”) to let the reader into the poem, to make it deictically accessible. This is contrasted with disconnected, disjointed “narrative” and the apparent incoherence of the literal language used. “My Childhood in Russia” opens with a similarly regular rhythm, and a song-like repetition in line two (“to cut wood, to cut wood”) reminiscent of folk literature or children’s tales. This kind of set-up immediately communicates to the reader that what follows cannot be taken literally (or seriously); it invites the reader to accept this performance and linguistic construction. It also, indirectly, asks us to look at the text below (or past) the surface, to wait for clues and try and solve the riddle (what Johnston calls “suggestive of allegory”) (643). Manhire is, therefore, a double-agent of sorts:

he subverts our expectations of a lyric poem, but can never abandon them entirely, so the poem eventually fights it out with the poet, and a degree of "meaning" accumulates; that promise of allegory which sets out to tease the reader and tease traditional lyric expectations in the end does turn into allegory. As argued elsewhere in this chapter, Manhire combines postmodernist fragmentation and shifts with the traditional lyric elements to achieve the unsettling effects of an engaging linguistic presence and behind-the-scenes subjectivity.

Bill Manhire's work seems very aware of the power of the speaking I; however, Manhire appears to reject—or at least mock and subvert—that power. When Leggott talks about Manhire's "play", she talks about "mock-seriousness": "For poets bent on misplacement of the appropriate, there are few better expressions to assume than the tongue-in-cheek, and few more useful tones to adopt than the apparently authoritative" (Leggott *Playing Poetry in the Eighties* 161). She adds:

> As readers we should trust the attractiveness and assurance, think about the kinds of offences the play is perpetrating, and see what this has to tell us about our expectations of a poem. As critics we should do all these things and then join in the game. (Leggott *Playing Poetry in the Eighties* 163)

What Leggott touches on in her essay is the importance of humour. As Bakhtin explains:

> The serious aspects of class culture are official and authoritarian; they are combined with violence, prohibitions, limitations and always contain an element of fear and intimidation. These elements prevailed in the Middle Ages. Laughter, on the contrary, overcomes fear, for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and

> authority. (209)

In Manhire's case, his humour and playful treatment of language—using exaggeration, as in "False William", or puns, as in "My Childhood in Russia"—help liberate it and liberate the poem. As Barbour puts it, in his discussion of "On Originality", "[t]his 'I' lives in the margin, in between, yet that is where he can 'slide a gun into the gun' and go on looking, go on writing. . ." (84). This kind of poetry seems to be seeking ways to balance lyricism (and tradition) and experimentation (including randomness, procedures and play). Or as Leggott puts it:

> This poetry sits down with itself, in cool control of poetic tradition but also with the idea of getting from under the cargo of received response. It looks hard at its own processes and keeps pointing to them, so that what is usually invisible because of familiarity is made visible, opaque; even obstructive. And where the play has paid attention we pay attention, drawn because these poems are engaging, funny, readable, baffling, exasperating, *lively.* (Leggott *Playing Poetry in the Eighties* 163)

While I agree with Leggott's comment, I would add that in his dramatic monologues it is the simultaneous presence and absence of a stable "voice" that makes Manhire's work "exasperating", yet "lively". The kind of voice Manhire constructs is similar to what Sinfield describes in the following passage:

> If the poet can cultivate a poetic 'I' which is sufficiently elusive and impersonal to suggest the mysterious and incalculable nature of the human psyche; which heads off the Romantic assumption that the poet's self may be encapsulated, and truth with it, in a

> single language act; which possesses an ironical self-awareness but does not inhibit commitment; then he will no longer need dramatic monologue. He will have found his way back to the flexibility of first-person voice enjoyed before the Romantics—though not with the innocence of earlier poets. (71)

Manhire uses the dramatic monologue in complex ways in his already challenging poetry, seemingly adding another layer of distance between the speaker and the poet. What this research shows is that the effects can, in fact, be opposite; though Manhire's speakers in dramatic monologues are linguistic, the way he makes use of various lyric devices turns these poems into lyrics, creating a productive kind of tension internally, within the poems. Close reading and analysis of Manhire's dramatic monologues show that the tension between the (linguistic) persona Manhire adopts and his own lyrical "voice" is what makes these poems appropriate and useful examples of simultaneous lyrical and post-language effects; the speaker, by being "twice-removed" (due to Manhire's use of fragmentation and disjointed narrative, as well as a traditionally unreliable speaker), paradoxically manages to bring subjectivity back into the form, and that kind of poem now appears closer to its lyric origins, resembling some critics' definition of the dramatic lyric.

Between the City and the Forest

To conclude, Manhire seems to be perpetually stuck between the "forest" and the "city"—though his poetry is situated in the (textual and postmodern) city, the (lyrical) forest beckons. As Crisp observes, in Manhire's case "the conventions of the lyric, and an array of

‘influences’, may suggest new, even subversive, uses”, which is what this chapter demonstrates in the context of Manhire’s application of the dramatic monologue (Crisp 192). Even when Manhire tries to mock poetry’s (Romantic) expectations, his poems keep returning to these expectations and meeting them. Or as Cochrane puts it, what is to be valued in this poetry “transcends all ideologies, including those created by the poets themselves. It relates to the unique perspective brought by the individual transforming consciousness which the true poet possesses: to his individual speaking voice” (59).

The dramatic monologue seems to have developed fully in Manhire’s latest collections—and this development, moving chronologically from “On Originality” to “My Childhood in Ireland”, can be seen as his recognition and acknowledgment of the increasing difficulty of using the lyric “I” in contemporary poetry. As well as looking at Manhire’s postmodern take on the genre of dramatic monologue, this study demonstrates that his lyric “voice”, his composition technique, making use of various lyric devices (metaphor, prosodic and aural effects, contrast and similes), is what holds these pieces together and engages the reader, despite the “hesitations” and “uncertainties” surrounding both the speaker and his (often implied) auditor.

By examining Manhire’s postmodern use of the genre of dramatic monologue, this chapter suggests that it is possible to use traditional genres in contemporary, questioning and critical ways, and remain “present” in the text. It identifies key characteristics of a postmodern lyric voice, which exhibits aural and structural properties of a lyric poem, combined with the linguistic nature of a postmodern text. Manhire’s poems are both playful and challenging, but they are, as this study shows, very much lyric poems, demonstrating ways contemporary (post-postmodern) poets can approach subjective expression, which most

critics agree is at the core of lyric poetry, without the use of traditional (realist) first-person voice and setting.

Chapter 2—Lynn Jenner's Dramatic Lyric Speakers in *Dear Sweet Harry*

Introduction

In *John Ashbery and You* John Emil Vincent, talking about Ashbery's later books as projects rather than collections, claims that "John Ashbery utilizes the unit of the book to orient his reader in his otherwise often disorienting poetry" (161). While Lynn Jenner's poems (unlike Bill Manhire's) are not "disorienting" in quite the same way as Ashbery's, there is enough opacity and variety in individual pieces included in Lynn Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry* that the concept of "the unit of the book" seems useful when discussing and analysing the work.

Dear Sweet Harry is Lynn Jenner's first poetry collection, published in 2010, for which she received the Adam Foundation prize at the International Institute of Modern Letters[6], Victoria University, Wellington, for the best manuscript in 2008, and NZ Post Awards Best First Book in 2011. Iain Sharp describes the book as a "mixed-media assemblage", which includes "items that would be classified in the art world as 'ready-mades': a letter by Houdini to the New York Times, a recipe for cough mixture, a World War I letter from [Jenner's] own family, a 'code of whistles' to be used by locomotive drivers working for the Wellington and Manawatu Railway Company" (221). The main characters in the book are Harry Houdini, Mata Hari and Katherine Mansfield, and most of the poems are set in the early decades of the twentieth century; however, there are numerous other dramatic and lyric speakers situated in

[6] It is worth noting that Bill Manhire was the International Institute of Modern Letters (IIML)'s founding director, thereby acknowledging the possibility of some stylistic and aesthetic commonalities between the two poets as a result of Lynn Jenner attending that particular creative writing course.

language and plot signalling later time periods and suggesting personal and often autobiographical material. While the structure of Jenner's book may initially appear simply arbitrary, the collection overall exhibits the same level of resistance to coherent, well-rounded narratives as found in experimental and language-writing influenced work. Mata Hari's story has no closure—she is executed, but her body remains a mystery, as Jenner tells us on page 44 in "These are the facts":

> Her body was unclaimed. A head with her name on it was deposited at a museum for the criminally insane. The head has been lost. (44)

Our final encounter with Houdini is on the "mental mantelpiece" in Jenner's lyric poem "Dear Sweet Harry" on page 56, or in Houdini's words as having been "tired for a long time" (53), which is where we part with Houdini's voice, and we never hear "what happened after that" (64), to quote a line from the closing poem of the collection. Jenner's parents, too, we meet at the start of the book but never read about them again, except as part of a childhood photograph at the very end of the collection, on page 63. Even Jenner's grandfather Harry is last mentioned on page 32, and only as the owner of a Houdini postcard and war survivor. This rejection of closure and narrative itself which McGann sees as "a way of legitimating established forms of social order as well as the very idea of such established forms", is why the structure of *Dear Sweet Harry* makes it an oppositional, as well as innovative book of poetry (McGann 630).

Jenner does not encourage the reader to believe the stories in *Dear Sweet Harry;* on the contrary, she uses a range of devices—including lack of closure and overt questioning of "the

official story", as well as more subtle, lyric devices—to let the reader relish the minor notes, while making him or her consider and reconsider both emotional truths and historical fictions the collection in its entirety contains (Middleton 252). To achieve that, Jenner juxtaposes "found", biographical and fictional texts and facts about Houdini and Mata Hari with recollections of events from her own life and her grandfather's WWI experience and stories.

Jenner demonstrates a range of styles and approaches to the dramatic mode; however she uses the dramatic lyric genre in *Dear Sweet Harry* for highly subjective dramatised speech similar to what Eliot defines as the "third voice" of poetry (as discussed below on p.64-65), that of "a dramatic character speaking in verse" (89). Dramatic lyrics, as discussed in the Introduction, are poems which are closer than dramatic monologue to the traditional lyric, allowing for expressions of heightened emotion which would seem outdated in a contemporary lyric poem where the speaker is not signalled to be anyone other than the poet. In this chapter I look at the structure of *Dear Sweet Harry* and Jenner's use of lyric devices and placement of poems to construct and convey meaning; and I examine in detail several dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics, in the context of personae as contemporary versions of the lyric "I".

When I say the word train

> Language as social practice is local, complex and open to resistance. Poetry can help, but then we always knew that—it was the language that let us down, for that language claimed that there was nothing we could add to the official story of our lives, the story of how progress brought wealth, work and welfare. A poetry that suspects language of collusion can start

> where it finds itself, where you, and I, they and we find ourselves, if we start arguing and listening. To words, words and their actions. (Middleton 252)

Lynn Jenner's treatment of "found" language in *Dear Sweet Harry* demonstrates ways in which contemporary poetry can "suspect language of collusion" without resorting to extreme fragmentation or rejection of a coherent voice, characteristic of most experimental, language influenced poetries. As Bryan Walpert notes, "[s]ome poems—notably those associated with or influenced by language writing—expressly deconstruct the very notion of voice by explicitly refusing to craft the illusion of a persona" (Walpert 30). While Jenner's collection as a whole demonstrates many of the techniques considered postmodern and experimental—fragmentation, inclusion of disparate texts and found material—Jenner's approach to voice often gestures towards a more traditional lyric "I".

Jenner questions the language used in contemporary depictions of the famous characters she includes in her book, and she does that by juxtaposing memories and lyric moments with fiction and found (prosaic and/or cinematic) material. When we directly compare pieces in *Dear Sweet Harry* dealing with the "official" WWI stories and those more personal, told by or about Grandfather Harry, the difference in tone and structure of the poems draws attention to and undermines the dramatised glamour of popular historical figures, in this case Mata Hari and Houdini. A clear example of the kind of personal, subjective language Jenner uses to support the strategy of contrast and duality of discourse are grandfather Harry's war memories on page 31. The poem is short and compressed, set in New Zealand, in Grandfather Harry's house. The opening image of a pipe band playing "a song you think you know" which is "a thin wail, fading in and out with the wind"

imaginatively places us in the audience of an All Blacks rugby match, so the next stanza (quoted below), where Grandfather Harry recalls the band marching alongside the soldiers, seems at odds with the preceding paragraph.

> *We were so tired*
> *when we were marching.*
> *Sometimes a pipe band would come along*
> *and march with us for a while.*
> *To lift our spirits.* (31)

We are quickly shifted from an open, outdoor space to someone's memory, someone's (colloquial) voice speaking about a different time and place, and a pipe band playing in very different circumstances. This sharp transition disorients and startles the reader, before the poem moves on to the image of Harry's dog and clock "which has stopped" (par. 3).

Judging by the year (1978), and the stopped clock on the mantelpiece, the poem could be about Grandfather Harry's death, but the next sentence allows for other possibilities: "In his house a fire burns, although it is December" (par. 3). As fire connotes life, and taken literally this sentence does describe an old person's home, the poem could be about the speaker visiting her grandfather in his final years, while he and his dog were still alive, but living in silence "so deep it could have an astronomical name" (par. 3). The structure of the piece is unusual, it zooms in from an open space (rugby field) to someone's living room and domestic objects found there (clock, fireplace); then it zooms out again by its sudden evocation of something as vast as the universe. The way the poem progresses, with its sharp shifts in setting, mimics the workings of memory, connecting past and present. The poem's intentional ambiguity about

whether Grandfather Harry is dead or living in "deep silence" implies that there is not much difference between the two, and while they were at war, fighting or marching, music would occasionally "lift" these soldiers' "spirits", but now nothing does, and these actual, real-life veterans are surrounded by silence and are forgotten. The "thin wail" of the song "fading in and out" (in paragraph one) could be seen as another metaphor for memories, in the context of the collection as well as the poem. As the book progresses, memories "fading in and out" prove to be—in all their unreliability—the most reliable historical source in *Dear Sweet Harry*.

The poem discussed above ("The year is 1978") is in direct contrast with the language and strategies used in "The Day Before the Battle of the Somme" (28-29), for example, which reads as a movie script. "The Day Before the Battle of the Somme" is wordier, longer, full of exaggeration and sharp irony. In the section of the piece describing the morning of the battle, Jenner complicates what is already an anachronistic, convoluted narrative:

> This is either the first infantry advance on the first morning of the Battle of the Somme, or the first time men are filmed in the act of fighting and dying. (29)

This sort of questioning, by offering two approaches, two viewpoints, presenting contradicting information found in film and fiction, is a strategy used throughout the collection. Another example of that strategy can be found in "These are the facts" on page 44, which ends on the following paragraph:

> This blurry photograph may, as most people believe, be a photograph of the execution of

Mata Hari. It may also be a reconstruction filmed years later, as part of a movie about Mata Hari. (44)

By contrast, most of the poems in *Dear Sweet Harry* which are set in New Zealand or are based on Jenner's family's WW1 stories and memories are grounded in concrete language and detail. On page 27, for example, another war poem, "There is a room. . .", about great-uncle Bertie, shows what being enlisted would have been like. It stands in direct opposition to Houdini's: "Hurrah, now I am one of the boys", on page two.

In "There is a room. . ." the room in which great-uncle Bertie walks towards the Army Doctor's table is bare, simply "a room with a wooden floor". The poem is written in the present tense, making it deictically accessible, and even though the "I" of the poem is somewhat difficult to locate—the speaker's circumstances and actual surroundings are omitted—we understand it is a memory retold. The image is frugal, stripped of all ornamentation (the only adjective in the entire poem is the "wooden" floor), which reflects the period and the (sombre, serious) situation. The second stanza, however, reveals the emotional centre of the poem:

My great uncle Bertie walks towards
this table. He does not feel Duty,
as the other men say they do.
He feels [a Yiddish word]
which translates literally as
Gratitude-for-having-been-
allowed-a-place-to-live. (27)

The speaker does not tell us the "Yiddish word", instead we are given the bracketed off substitute for the actual word signifying, as we learn in the final lines, a complex emotion, something for which there is not an equivalent word in English. The feeling of "gratitude for having been allowed a place to live" is one most immigrants can relate to; it inevitably includes memories of the place the person came from, the feeling of not quite belonging and wanting to fit in. It is, therefore, understandable that Bertie's feelings are not the usual patriotic, assumed "duty" the other soldiers (say they) feel. That the word is missing from the poem could mean the speaker cannot recall it, or that the poet is trying to alert us to the omission itself, showing us that by displacing just one word we are losing a complex mix of emotions it signifies.

These lyric poems based on family members' recollections allow the reader to go beyond "the official story", juxtaposing concrete images and tangible objects of the period with fantastical narratives and reconstructions of the famous characters' lives (Middleton 252). With these poems Jenner keeps reminding the reader of human realities of war and immigration, making us look beyond the stories and fragmented narratives, and pay attention to the lyric voices.

As well as treating some of the language of the "official stories", particularly language and stories which glamourise WW1, as one-dimensional and emotionally lacking, the structure of Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry,* which in itself questions narrativity, is what makes it an oppositional and innovative book of poetry. Jerome McGann, clarifying the difference between antinarrative and non-narrative in "Contemporary Poetics, Alternate Routes" says that

> while non- and antinarrative both move counter to regularized, normative and 'accommodating' orders, they exemplify distinct forms of discourse. Antinarrative is problematic, ironical, and fundamentally a satiric discursive procedure. It engages a dialectic, and its critical function is completed in a structure of antithesis which may include the double irony of a self-antithesis. Nonnarratives on the other hand, do not issue calls for change and alterity; they embody in themselves some form of cultural difference. . . [n]onnarrative is the 'contrary' (rather than the negation) of narrativity. (630)

Dear Sweet Harry illustrates the principles of nonnarrative by its inclusion of disparate characters and beginnings of narratives with no closure, resulting in a text which questions the concepts of historical writing and our society's tendency to reduce and diminish complexities of character and to be able to easily classify narratives. The very difficulty of paraphrasing the stories in *Dear Sweet Harry* reveals something about the movement of these texts, both individually and relative to one another. However, while the book is comprised of numerous beginnings of narratives and possibilities of plots as well as a remarkable number of characters for a short collection of poems, some of the themes and motifs are repeatedly evoked, which is how Jenner manages to create a sense of unity and coherence despite the book's nonnarrativity, and the linking of the pieces is done subtly, using lyric devices. For that reason, as well as the fact that most pieces in the book are untitled, we could even claim that *Dear Sweet Harry* is, in fact, a long (fragmented) poem.

While Jenner's subversion of narrative works across and between poems and for that reason it is necessary to look at the collection in its entirety to appreciate the range (and scale) of the techniques she employs, one particular poem demonstrates her ability to manipulate narrative so it continually resists interpretation, while maintaining emotional coherence. The poem is on page 60—it is a prose poem best described as a lyric link between WWI and the speaker's (contemporary) life:

> If France in 1917 was just one painting, it would cover a gallery wall and be the colour of mud. A million French soldiers dead. Defeat after defeat. Half the divisions in the French army refusing to go up to the front. The men so careful to say that they wished their commanding officers no harm. They were not refusing war, they said, but 'a certain way of waging it'. Olive drab and the skeletons of trees. Everyone knows this painting.
>
> Every day this winter I visited this huge dark painting and saw only mud and suffering until, alerted by a passage from Proust concerning yellow, a brushstroke down near the bottom caught my eye. That flick of movement, beginning with a round pink shape the size of a pearl, and ending in a tail, like Japanese calligraphy, could be many things. I believe there are specks of other colours too. Perhaps one is Mansfield's tangerine silk dress.

The opening sentence asks of the reader to imagine what a country at war looks like, in this case France in 1917. At the same time, the poem makes it clear from the start that while the image it paints may be emotionally accurate ("colour of mud", "olive drab and the skeletons of trees"), France in 1917 cannot really be reduced to one painting (or a movie, or even a book).

The first section of the poem does, however, offer some facts—a million dead soldiers, divisions refusing to go to the front. Jenner uses alliteration in the opening sentences (mud, million, dead, defeat, divisions, drab)—to complement the image the first paragraph paints—

and by the time we get to the final sentence of that section we feel we are following the speaker's musings on the topic. But the final sentence of that paragraph distorts this interpretation. Suddenly, we are no longer imagining what France might have looked like as "one painting", the speaker asserts that "everyone knows this painting". This statement turns the images of the poem, its seemingly figurative language, into an actual, literal object, deliberately blurring the line between fiction and reality, as well as closing the temporal gap between its subject matter (France in 1917) and the speaker's present life.

The narrative is further destabilised in the next paragraph when the speaker tells us that she "visited this huge dark painting" every day "this winter". We find ourselves imagining an actual painting, with a "brushstroke near the bottom", a "flick of movement". However, the final two sentences complicate this interpretation when we read the speaker believes there are specks of other colours: "I believe" followed by "perhaps" suggests uncertainty, describing something that may or may not actually be there, again suggesting poetic imagery created by Jenner, rather than an actual, physical image observed. The poem ends with "Mansfield's tangerine dress", and it is only when we get to that final sentence that the purpose of the colours appearing in the second half of the poem (yellow, pink, tangerine) becomes obvious. Hope—or some kind of escape, perhaps—which may be "the size of a pearl" or "could be many things", is what the speaker has most likely been looking for "every day" that winter. It is not surprising that she finds it in Mansfield (portrayed in popular culture as rebellious and as a feminist) amid "mud and suffering" the speaker kept seeing in WWI stories and the narratives of "constriction" and oppression. This poem demonstrates Jenner's ability to blur the line between figurative and literal, and between past and present. It illustrates some of the same methods she uses at the level of the book, to escape narrativity, moving between images,

characters and time periods, while maintaining a sense of coherence and unity.

One literary device Jenner relies on to connect the poems in the collection is repetition—certain phrases and words are repeated throughout the book, making it cohere beyond theme and narrative, behaving the way lyric poetry traditionally does, reflecting and echoing language and sentiment. Jenner uses repetition within and between poems, as both a linking and contrasting device.

"Lust and a complex nose of toffee" is an example of Jenner's use of repetition, while changing the context, to make us consider and reconsider the meaning (and connotation) of some of the words as the narrative progresses. I quote the poem in full.

> Lust and a complex nose of toffee and almonds and sweat
> caused a young reporter from the Tatler to write about Mata
> Hari in his diary
>
> *She must curl and linger*
> *She must contain the motion of a wave. She must lean and shine*
> *and hang without constriction.*
> *Poetry emanates from her body.*
> *She is rhythm.*
>
> For the paper he wrote
> 'The unforgettable rhythms of Mata Hari's sacred dances
> were provided by seven charming lady drummers, their
> faces sweet as an English rose; their dusky complexions the
> embodiment of oriental mystique.'
>
> In his diary
> *A lady in the audience fainted from constriction of the heart.*
> *Lingering resentment was caused when a foreign gentleman*
> *offered to loosen her stays.*
>
> Back at the hotel, after the show, Mata Hari explained the
> rhythm of her dances to the young man from the *Tatler.*
> Destruction and Incarnation.
> Constriction and Release.
> Her hand on his leg.
> The sweat of a strongly built man had always excited her,
> that sort of thing.
>
> According to his diary she also said

A journalist is a kind of doctor to whom the urges of the body may be revealed without shame.

That night, he dreamed her cosmopolitan body was a map over which he would linger like a general, marking the end of each advance with tiny flags.

As counterpoint to these extravagances, his diary recorded the draining quotidian rhythm of his finances, from the steady high tide of his monthly salary, through sweat and remorse, to wishing he could afford port and wondering whether this constant constriction was all there was to life.

At the Front the constrictions of his journalistic life were replaced by a minute by minute life of the body, in which he shook or sweated or slouched or slept, in a lingering line of other bodies, all rhythms gone.

In the diary he kept, although diaries were forbidden, he wrote

No one came to claim her body.
O Mata Hari, I would have come for you.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 57-58)

"Constriction" is repeated in a number of places: Mata Hari must hang "without constriction" and she describes the rhythm of her own dances as "constriction and release"; a lady in the audience faints "from constriction of the heart". The meaning of these phrases is suspended between figurative and literal—the rhythm of "constriction and release" becomes the rhythm of heartbeat, and the context suggests both emotional and sexual repression. Further on the journalist from the Tatler wonders if "this constant constriction", referring to his financial struggles, "was all there was to life", but in the following paragraph he finds himself at the front where "the constrictions of his journalistic life" are replaced "by a minute by minute life of the body", "all rhythms gone". The meaning of constriction, though less literal, becomes less evocative—it turns into a set of constraints, it becomes associated with simple survival. What we see here is another reminder of the difference between the glamour of theatrical,

dramatised language and real life-and-death language of austerity and war.

As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Jenner uses repetition not only within the poems, but between and across pieces in the collection. Another word repeated in a number of poems in the book is “trains”. Jenner’s depictions of trains are generally tender, lyrical, nostalgic. They seem to be, apart from Jenner’s family recollections, what brings together the time periods the book is attempting to capture and connect; they are both metaphorical and literal survivors, still used for transport, over possibly exactly the same tracks in the case of Jenner’s commuter train to Paraparaumu on page 64, as used by Wellington and Manawatu Railway Co. in 1905 (“Code of Whistles”, p 59).

Jenner uses a range of literary devices in her poems about trains. On page 22, there is a simile comparing trains to rugby players, which is followed by personification: “Trains are like this with each other; tactful and patient”. On page 55, Jenner makes the sentiment explicit:

> When I say the word train, I mean
> engines, carriages, and freight cars,
> a snake on the high hill, a zip
> of lights from carriage windows,
> the stripey arm and the ting ting ting
> of crossings; the slow toooot of a goods train
> in places where none goes now.
> When I say the word train I mean
> a triumph of feeling.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 55)

The above poem progresses from concrete description of train components ("engines, carriages, and freight cars") to metaphor ("a snake", "zip of lights", "stripey arm") to onomatopeia ("ting ting ting" and "slow toooot"). The final three lines, however, complicate the exuberant, almost childish tone of the poem. Because of the absence of the kind of trains the speaker is remembering and describing ("in places where none goes now"), the final line is depleted of its denotative power; we realise that the "triumph of feeling", the freedom of travel and distance of past times is missing from the speaker's (present) life, and our own (line 9). The poem, just like the collection as a whole, is trying to remind us and bring to our attention that which is gone—trains, memories, language more concrete and direct, taking us "places where none goes now" (7).

The trains in *Dear Sweet Harry* are solid and grounded, unlike the two main characters of the collection—Houdini and Mata Hari—who are "hanging / safely above their fear" (on page 3) and "must hang / from high places" (43). Jenner's descriptions of Mata Hari throughout the book contain the word "must". Jenner's repetition of that word is especially evident in the following poem on page 43:

> After her divorce she took the name Mata Hari
>
> She must be alone, and shine because of that.
> She must retain memory of the sun at night.
> She must lean only on herself, and never falter.
> She must contain the motion of a wave. She must hang
> from high places, deaf to the softness and weight
> of a sound like a sack landing on the ground.

She must linger in white hotels.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 43)

The same approach is used again on page 57 where the reporter from the Tatler describes Mata Hari in his diary:

She must curl and linger
She must contain the motion of a wave. She must lean and shine
and hang without constriction.
Poetry emanates from her body.
She is rhythm. (57)

The use of "must" in these poems is ambiguous; it sometimes signifies a guess, imaginings of Mata Hari and her space, and sometimes it is a need, requirement, duty almost. It reveals the pressure placed on Mata Hari, and other women of the period, which is one of the themes Jenner returns to in many pieces—those dealing with Mata Hari, Katherine Mansfield and herself. On page 10, for example, while the speaker is talking about her family, she mentions their efforts to keep her "at a safe height above the forest floor". Women in Jenner's book are "constricted", placed under "Doctor Rest, Doctor New Milk and Doctor Chair in the Corner of the Kitchen" (on page 62), or in a "dark little cubby hole" (14). Katherine Mansfield and the speaker not signalled to be anyone other than Lynn Jenner, just like Mata Hari, and other women in the collection, "must" fit certain roles or spaces, and suffer if they don't. But there is rebellion against this "narrowing of circumstances", embodied in Mata Hari who speaks on

behalf of not just the poet but all female characters across time periods (40). This is where Jenner's use of the dramatic lyric highlights the possibilities of direct, subjective speech in contemporary poetry, as an escape from the confinement of prefigured narratives and as a form of liberation—and not only in the literal or exclusively feminist sense.

Looking at the collection as a whole, it becomes clear that Jenner uses repetition as both a linking and contrasting device, giving the collection coherence despite its essential non-narrativity. If we return to the piece on page 31, about grandfather Harry, and the soldiers' fatigue during long marches of WW1 ("We were so tired when we were marching"), we find echoes of the sentiment in Houdini's "confession" on page 53: "Some time or another we all grow tired. I have been tired for a long time" (53). The meaning of the word "tired" in these two pieces is different—Grandfather Harry is talking about physical and mental exhaustion of soldiers, Houdini about having to withstand the pressures of life under spotlight. The soldiers' fatigue we perceive as something immediate, it evokes a range of emotions we associate with war and survival. Houdini's statement sounds equally sincere, because of the way Jenner uses the dramatic lyric form, making the statement itself inclusive ("we all grow tired"). However, though we can perhaps more easily relate to the feeling Houdini describes, the fact that the same word is used to describe two very different situations highlights, indirectly, the contrast between their circumstances, and how the same language, the same words, can be used for either/both.

Dear Sweet Harry demands to be read as a book, rather than a collection of individual poems, to appreciate both Jenner's subversion of narrative and her use of lyric language and repetition to bring out the common themes and make us pay attention to the dramatic moments in the collection. Though narrative threads are difficult to connect, and the book, on the

surface, seems fragmented, including texts and language which would not be considered literary, let alone poetic, Jenner's use of lyric devices, repetition in particular, as well as developing thematic parallels throughout, are strategies making *Dear Sweet Harry* an experimental, oppositional and, at the same time, lyric poetry collection.

I need to know how it felt

In "The Idea of Lyric", W.R. Johnson offers his somewhat bleak view of contemporary lyric poetry, saying "the lyric grew first ashamed and bewildered, then terrified, by the idea of saying I, forgot how to say You, systematically unlearned emotions and their correlatives and their stories. Translated itself into, annihilated itself for, a technological mode for a technological age" (15). In Jenner's work we observe a yearning for the lyrical similar to that found in Bill Manhire's poetry—for the kind of lyric which would have existed before annihilating itself "for a technological mode"—and she, too, turns to the dramatic mode to deal with subjective expression. She lets the "I" of the poem speak on behalf of the poet, but also the reader, allowing emotion back into her dramatic lyrics.

While Manhire mixes diction, found language and inside-out cliches with lyrical moments within the poems, and the tension between experimental and traditional goals can be registered in individual pieces, in Jenner's book the scale is different. She does something similar over the course of the entire collection; a comparable level of tension develops between the pieces in the book, due to the varied, often competing and contradicting perspectives, tone, diction and strategies used in poems which coexist in the collection. When

we look at the exceptionally subjective (dramatic lyric) pieces on their own, it becomes obvious that this level of heightened emotion can only surface occasionally, and it needs to be carefully framed by narrative, irony and detachment Jenner achieves with her third person poems and short prose. In each case we are caught off-guard, these moments are as surprising as they are moving, couched between the factual, ironic and often humourous treatment of the situations that precede them.

To closely examine Jenner's speakers and how they contribute to the overall effect of her book, T.S. Eliot's definition of the "three voices of poetry" seems like a useful starting point:

> The first voice is the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody. The second is the voice of the poet addressing an audience, whether large or small. The third is the voice of the poet when he attempts to create a dramatic character speaking in verse; when he is saying not what he would say in his own person, but only what he can say within the limits of one imaginary character addressing another imaginary character. (89)

In Eliot's opinion the traditional dramatic monologue belongs to the second voice category: poet (albeit behind a mask) speaking to someone or something, and not to the third, dramatic voice of poetry. Eliot explains that "[w]hat we normally hear, in fact, in the dramatic monologue is the voice of the poet, who has put on the costume and make-up, either of some historical character, or one out of fiction" (95). This view is in agreement with later critics' observation of the "split" or double voice present in dramatic monologues. As Elisabeth Howe explains:

> The most characteristic feature of the speech of a dramatic monologue results from this inherent dichotomy between the voice of the poem's speaker and that of the poet, who is inevitably present. . . . The split resulting from the fact that the poem's words are

> simultaneously those of an identified individual and of the poet represents a distinctive characteristic of the dramatic monologue in general and one of its most interesting features. (7-8)

In the dramatic monologue both the poet and the character he or she assumes are present at all times; we cannot ignore the poet and accept the characters as spontaneous speakers—we are aware of the presence of the poet, and that there is a reason for presenting the characters to us the way they appear. This is precisely why dramatic monologue has been successfully employed by poets for the purposes of social critique and political commentary.

However, in Jenner's book we are—in some of the pieces, at least—introduced to Harry Houdini and Mata Hari seemingly directly, "from within", in what appear to be dramatic situations, containing a lot of emotional urgency. One way to explain this appearance of immediacy is by looking at the devices Jenner uses to merge with her characters, rather than manipulate their speech, the way Browning does very obviously in "My Last Duchess", for example, or Carol Ann Duffy does in her poetry collection *The World's Wife*. There are several moments in *Dear Sweet Harry* where we are presented with what could be seen as bare(d) essence of the characters, when they directly admit their weakness to the person they are addressing, treating the listener in the poem as a friend, confidant; these are usually short and direct poems addressing a specific listener. It is precisely that directness of tone which separates "I need to know how it felt" on page 5, and "I do not know how long this thing can last" on page 53, from some of the other Houdini poems containing more elements of a typical dramatic monologue, discussed later in this section. These direct dramatic poems are written in what appears to be the "third voice of poetry", "the voice of a dramatic character speaking in verse", because that is where Jenner seems to "extract the poetry from the

character, rather than impose [the author's] poetry upon it", making the characters more authentic and sincere-sounding than in the rest of the collection (Eliot 95).

W.R. Johnson's examination of lyric pronouns includes the "I-You" category "in which the poet addresses or pretends to address his thoughts and feelings to another person—in William Wordsworth's phrase to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'as if to thee alone'"(3). There is a curious conjuncture of the "I-You" lyric and Eliot's "third voice" of poetry in Jenner's work. Houdini seems to acquire his own voice in some of the pieces, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, and that's when we perceive him as a "dramatic character speaking in verse", to quote Eliot again. At the same time, these are the moments in the collection when Houdini is not addressing a large audience, and is speaking to one specific person—fitting the definition of the "I-You" lyric. These dramatic pieces are not dramatic monologues, there is no poet visibly pulling the strings, no double voice.

The first Houdini piece I would like to look at in detail, in the context of Jennner's use of dramatic lyrics, is the following poem on page 3:

Suspended by my ankles
in a strait-jacket
from some high building,
I extricate myself
in mid air.

While they put the jacket on,
I square my shoulders
and distend my chest
like a cunning horse.

Once I am hanging
safely above their fear
and they are safely
unable to hear the cost,
I dislocate both shoulders.

With my hands still enclosed
in the sleeves of the jacket,

I reach up my back
and fumble the back
buckles loose.

Then I am entirely free.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 3)

The poem could be considered a dramatic monologue rather than dramatic lyric, because we can sense, particularly in the opening stanzas, the poet's presence, choosing the syntactically unusual, theatrical descriptions of the strait-jacket act—suspending and inverting the two middle clauses ("in a strait-jacket" and "from some high building"). We can also register the discomfort of the t, s and k sounds in these stanzas. The language here reminds us of its artifice, both aurally and image-wise. But there is a change in tone midway through the poem. "Their fear" in stanza three excludes the person Houdini is confiding in. One could argue this is intentional, perhaps implying familiarity that does not exist between the listener and Houdini. The final lines of that stanza, however, confirm this is a confession, behind the scenes admission of pain associated with Houdini's apparent heroism and larger-than-life performance.

The repetition of "safely", in both cases used unconventionally, draws attention to the irony and falseness of everything stated until then. "[H]anging / safely above their fear" is filled with ambiguity, it is unclear whether Houdini is hanging safely, and the metonymy of "their fear" is the primary figure; or whether he is hanging, placed "safely above their fear"—implying he is, as a character, suspended high above ordinary human emotions, fear being one of them (lines 10-11). This ambiguity is further enforced by the lines that follow : "and they are safely / unable to hear the cost, / I dislocate both shoulders" (12-14). Again, the use of "safely" draws attention to itself—the audience's inability to hear "the cost" discloses some

contempt for the spectators, as well as condescension, but at the same time there clearly is a cost involved in the performance. The pain Houdini feels but does not directly admit justifies his apparent arrogance; in fact, it is at this point that we start sympathising with him. The final line, the grand and exaggerated statement about freedom, does not sound convincing, because it does not justify "the cost", nor does it logically follow Houdini's description of the act. We see a character resigned to his destiny, which includes fame and various acts of "freedom", for which he pays dearly. We understand that, just as we understand the relativity of freedom he expresses in absolute terms (i.e. "entirely free") in the final line of the poem (20). It is at this point that Houdini's weaknesses start to emerge, and we begin to hear a human voice, not a character in performance.

The next poem in which we encounter Houdini's "lyric" voice is on page 5:

> *I need to know how it felt*
> *to pass through earth and water,*
> *and what you did, as you travelled,*
> *to survive.*
>
> *You must have done something.*
> *Please! Tell me what you did!*
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 5)

For a short and direct poem like this, it is necessary to know the context and understand the situation to be able to locate the speaker and accept the speaker's heightened tone. Jenner solves that by offering us the following narrative on page 4:

> In February 1916, an explosion in a tunnel under the East River blew four workmen up through twenty feet of river silt, up through the river itself, and forty feet into the air on the crest of a geyser.

> One man, Marshall Mabey, survived.
>
> It is said that Houdini visited Mabey in hospital the next day, pushed past the man's wife and sons gathered around his bed, and spoke to Mabey through his bandages.
>
> It is also said that Mabey's sons threw Houdini out of the room.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 4)

Before discussing in detail the dramatic lyric poem on page 5, it is worth first looking at the structure of the above piece. The first paragraph is written in plain, sober language, giving us facts and numbers, and the story of the accident is retold with almost no ornamentation and just one verb. The next sentence (par. 2) is equally simple, stating one man survived. But in the second half of the piece the style changes. "It is said", at the start of both paragraphs, signals that what follows may or may not be true. The repetition of the phrase (anaphora) changes the poem's diction to what may be termed literary or poetic language. The situation described in these paragraphs, though more immediate, portrays Houdini as insensitive and behaving inappropriately (in line with his larger-than-life persona of magic shows), pushing "past the man's wife and sons" (par. 3). The final sentence tells us Mabey's sons threw Houdini out of the room, which delivers humour, and at the same time is an entirely expected and satisfactory resolution. Yet after we read the piece on page 5 which appears to relay Houdini's question to Mabey, we develop some sympathy for Houdini, which creates the kind of tension between the two poems a typical dramatic monologue would generate internally—the reader feels torn between sympathy and judgment.

The poem on page 5 is, interestingly, syntactically not structured as a question. Houdini's "I" is the focus of the poem, demanding: "I need to know". As Johnson points out, talking about Yeats:

> What this performer does in his prime is to insist, again and again, on the reality of his experience (I see, I name, I bid, I hear, I know, I understand) and to emphasize his energy and his action (I walk, I pace, I climb, I choose, I mock, I turn, I stalk, I seek, I summon, I declare, I proclaim, I find). Yeats uses such verbs more frequently than other modern lyric poems because...they ensure a sense of personal presence and of the immediacy of his performance. (Johnson 16)

The strategy Johnson highlights above is one Jenner employs to let Houdini emerge as a character, asserting his presence and personality. The first stanza, though it is comprised of just one sentence, contains seven active verbs, energising the text, giving it urgency, as well as focusing our attention (as per Johnson's observation above) on the "I" of the poem:

> *I need to know how it felt*
> *to pass through earth and water,*
> *and what you did, as you travelled,*
> *to survive.* (5)

The poem also addresses a very specific "you"—"[y]ou must have done something" (line 5). We can infer, having read the piece on page 4, that "you" is Marshall Mabey, and we understand just how irrational Houdini's question is; that what Houdini ascribes to skill is pure chance. Houdini's obsession with his own trade, therefore, handicaps him in ordinary human situations; he is not capable, the poem implies, of accepting life and death as something outside his (and by implication human) control. This kind of set up is typical of a traditional dramatic monologue. According to Byron,

> for some critics, a sense of division or splitting is specifically linked to the emergence of dramatic irony as a result of the disjunction between the limited understanding of the

> speaker and the wider awareness of the poet and the reader. The speaker's meaning can always be distinguished from the poem's meaning, or, as Robert Langbaum puts it, 'the meaning of the dramatic monologue is in disequilibrium with what the speaker reveals and understands...we understand, if not more, at least something different than the speaker understands. (Byron 15)

Yet if we look very closely at the language of the poem on page 5, what we hear is a cry for help—it is almost as if the voice we register here were of someone dead or dying, someone who (urgently) needs to understand how a man could beat death. It is difficult to stay indifferent to Houdini's desperate pleading ("I need to know", "Please! Tell me what you did."), and not to respond with sympathy. That response, however, clashes with our rational judgment formed by understanding the context, having read the previous prose piece. Jenner makes the context dry and ironic, humourous even, creating a sense of double vision. This poem in particular, read without the piece that precedes it, illustrates the strategy Jenner employs to construct what Eliot calls the "third voice" of poetry (a dramatic character whose voice appears to be entirely independent of the poet's). My view is that we can, for the purposes of this study, look at these dramatic lyric poems, like the poem on page 5, independently, as contemporary examples of highly subjective and speaker-specific language in "I-You" poems.

Another example of Houdini's voice I would like to examine in detail because of the lyric properties the poem demonstrates is "I do not know how long this thing can last" on page 53:

> I do not know how long this thing can last, Houdini said.

> I have given myself from one to eight years, and that's a liberal estimate. I am now forty-two years of age. I feel like I am fifty-two years, and some of the time much older—just as I do this afternoon. I have been told it is hardening of the arteries. Perhaps it is. Whatever it is I am getting older and yet I have no particular regrets. Some time or another we all grow tired. I have been tired for a long time.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 53)

Apart from Jenner briefly signalling to us who the speaker is ("Houdini said"), the rest of the piece is written in what appears to be a voice separate from the poet's. There is no sense of "splitting" or tension characteristic of dramatic monologues. The voice sounds similar to the one we encountered on page 5—it is equally direct, and seemingly addressing a specific, familiar "you". Before we even start considering the meaning of the words, the poem's lyric nature is established though its sounds; it uses repetition: "years", "it is", "older", "tired"; "i" and "e" sounds are repeated throughout, and towards the end "t", "s" and "r" sounds start accumulating, and the poem ends with what feels like a protracted sentence of long vowels ("I have been tired for a long time"). The way the character's speech progresses—its structure—has the characteristics of a lyric poem. It is unclear what Houdini means by "this thing" in the first sentence. Reading on we guess he is talking about his ability to perform. Yet half way through the meaning changes—or at least allows for the possibility of "this thing" being life, rather than performance. When we get to Houdini's statement about "no particular regrets" and growing "tired", we sense his own sense of mortality.

The very ambiguity, or doubleness of reference that transpires as the poem progresses, as well as its musical properties, allow it to transcend its seemingly plain language and form and move us as lyric poems do: we sympathise with the speaker, we identify with him. If we consider the relationship between the speaker and the listener (and by implication, the reader),

or the way the poem "treats you", we notice it is the specificity of "you" that allows for the character's address to be more personal, letting the reader get a glimpse of the character's emotional world (Manhire *Doubtful Sounds* 146). In these dramatic lyric poems we are not only invited to sympathise with the speaking character, but also to identify with the listener, with the "you" of the poem. Often the "you" of the poem, as in the example above, is implied by the use of "we", adding another layer of familiarity, suggesting belonging or likeness. These pieces are, in essence, gestures of trust; unlike dramatic monologues where the speaker often tries to manipulate or win over the auditor, these poems reveal more openly characters' weaknesses. They border on confessional, but they are usually provoked by dramatic (life-or-death) moments where so much is at stake—or so it appears to the speaking character—that all artifice seemingly dissolves.

In the pieces discussed so far we hear what seems to be Houdini's voice. While perhaps not as entertaining or formally and linguistically challenging as in some other poems in the collection, that voice is more sincere sounding, less mediated. In the context of Jenner's poems, I would like to, therefore, propose a new, slightly modified, definition of the dramatic lyric. It is based on what has been said about the difference between the dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric, in terms of dramatic lyric presenting us with the character from within, rather than as an actor on metaphorical stage. What I believe describes better these (we could call them pure) dramatic lyrics is the merging of the poet and character—allowing the poet to reveal the most intimate of human thoughts and feelings, but to do so in the voice of the character. What we observe are poems which could be described using Anne Williams' classification as "performed lyrics" (20). Williams explains why such poems, though they appear dramatic, performed, still belong to the lyric genre:

> The work remains fundamentally a lyric, however, as long as the poem's 'center of gravity' remains in the lyric purpose, the representation of virtual experience from within. (20)

What we see in Jenner's dramatic lyrics is the need for (Romantic, perhaps) subjective expression, for heightened subjectivity, as some kind of release, catharsis for both the poet and the reader, which is nevertheless rarely exhibited in contemporary poetry, because very few poets risk that level of sentimentality in the first person.

I would now like to look at a poem where the speaking voice is not as clear as in the dramatic lyrics discussed so far, though its "center of gravity" remains "in the lyric purpose" (Williams 20). The following poem is on page 52:

> I know if I wait, I will hear a voice,
> whispered like summer wind
> in willow trees. Now, it says. Now.
> That is reassurance.
> Then I know, my limbs can keep the tempo,
> there will be no pain
> and my nerve will hold for a time.
>
> Afterwards? Oh, afterwards.
> Of afterwards I do not speak.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 52)

What is remarkable about this poem is that the voice could belong to Houdini, Mata Hari or a lyric version of the poet. Perhaps a more accurate interpretation would be that it belongs to all of them. There is clearly a distinct voice, speaking not only to but with someone ("Afterwards? Oh, afterwards"). The setting is quite literally dramatic, someone describing a performance of some kind—or some kind of action, usually painful ("there will be no pain") and terrifying ("my nerve will hold for a time"). There appears to be much at stake, and even

though we cannot fully comprehend what kind of action the speaker is engaging in, we can sense the importance and urgency of the statement. The ending is heavy with repetition, which amplifies the meaning of that final sentence: “Of afterwards I do not speak” (line 9). We are, again, faced with mortality, with transience of each (painful) moment, the reward for which seems silently elusive, reminiscent of Houdini’s “cost” of freedom and fame in the poem on page 3. The voice, because it is difficult to locate or attribute in this poem, is similar to Manhire’s linguistic speakers, though here there are no sharp shifts in tone and diction. Jenner can afford that level of directness of tone and even sentimentality in entire poems, because of the scale of her experiments working across the collection as a whole, linguistically and thematically complicating the structure of the book, rather than each individual piece.

Jenner chooses Harry Houdini and Mata Hari as her main dramatic characters, both larger than life and archetypal. Houdini—a magician, superhero, and Mata Hari—femme fatale. In both cases she presents these characters from a more personal angle, showing us their weaknesses, their vulnerability. It is almost as if a famous character, by virtue of myth built around it, earns the right to be vulnerable in poetry. Or as Jenner explains, “that which was permitted to [Mata Hari] is certainly not permitted to Madame Zelle MacLeod” (54). Or equally, that which is permitted to Mata Hari and Houdini may not always be, in the context of contemporary poetry, permitted to Jenner or any contemporary “I”.

In the poem on page 7, in which the speaker finds Houdini’s “sort of place”, Jenner draws attention to the process of creating a character, merging with a character. I quote the poem in full:

> One day, while writing about Houdini, it came to me to put on a

> black plastic carnival mask from the two-dollar shop, and look at myself in the mirror. Green glitter rose in spikes around my eyes, and in the middle of my forehead, a red jewel glowed.
>
> It's not that by wearing a black mask I saw Houdini, or even that I detected his presence, as some people say they smell a snake before they see it. I just knew that I had found his sort of place. I made up my mind to cruise the back streets of this place, and wait. To stand in any crowd, in alleys and doorways, at the back of theatres, and wait for the moment when he would come charging round a corner, talking loudly to anyone who would listen. Late at night in my house on the hill, I would also listen for heartbeats, sighs and curling things he might say softly to himself for comfort. I might add a murmur of my own.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 7)

Jenner finds Houdini's sort of place behind a black mask, which could be seen as a metaphor for the kind of dramatic lyric Jenner employs in the book. The kind of mask she needs to give us Houdini's voice is opaque, one that allows Houdini to emerge as a human being, "from within". An important characteristic of the dramatic lyrics discussed in this section is the universality of both the feeling and the topics the characters are touching on. Jenner tellingly ends the above poem with "I would also listen for heartbeats, sighs and curling things he might say softly to himself for comfort. I might add a murmur of my own" (par. 4). This reiterates Jenner's interest in human, vulnerable moments, the kind of moments everyone can relate to—"heartbeats" and "sighs". Her admission that she might add a murmur of her own confirms that not only does she want to show us particular and complex characters who will assert their speaking "I", she is also implying this "I" can stand in for any "I" murmuring late at night.

Another place in the collection where Jenner appears to be talking about the writing process—about her "obsession" with the topics and characters central to the book—is on page 18:

> About this time I remember wondering whether this obsession had chosen me or I had chosen it, how large it would become and whether there would be any natural limits on its growth.
>
> At some point I became indifferent to its magnitude and relished instead its minor notes.
>
> (Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 18)

We cannot be certain who the speaker is, but if we read the poem as if delivered by the poet (or a version of the poet), and dealing with the writing process, then this piece shows us once more the identification and merging with the character the author is seeking or perhaps finding (almost by accident) through parallels between her own life and circumstances and those of Houdini or Mata Hari. The "obsession" mentioned in the first sentence mirrors Houdini's obsession with his trade, but there is also rational questioning of the "natural limits on its growth". This poem can be seen as a bridge to the more direct and lyrical Houdini and Mata Hari pieces discussed earlier in this section, those which expose the "cost" associated with their performances, where we get to see the characters (just as we see Jenner in this piece) resigned to their unorthodox lives and relishing "minor notes" (18).

While the focus of this chapter so far has been on the poems in which Jenner merges with the speaking character, where the distance between the speaker and the poet is not as great as in a traditional dramatic monologue, it is worth acknowledging that is not the only way Jenner uses the dramatic mode. While the dramatic lyrics discussed in this section create the kind of lyrical voice most suited to subjective expression, there are poems in the collection in which dramatic irony is used to distance the poet from the speaking character. Examples of poems which behave as traditional dramatic monologues in terms of voice (exhibiting

"splitting" or "double voice" characteristic of the genre) and tension between sympathy and judgment provoked by the speaker's unintended revelation of character are "Houdini talks about the performer's life" (on page 51) and "Mata Hari speaks about her birth" (40).

The poem on page 51, "Houdini talks about the performer's life", is where Jenner lets Houdini tell us his magic is "hocus pocus", and all his challenges are "bunkum". The title of the poem identifies the speaker as Houdini, and here "the speaker is a convenient vehicle for the poet's opinion," which is how Sinfield defines "the concept of the feint" typical of the dramatic monologue (25). Sinfield explains this further stating that "we experience the 'I' of the poem as a character in his own right but at the same time sense the author's voice through him" (25). I quote the poem in full to discuss its dynamics:

Houdini talks about the performer's life

Walking on deck one morning, Roosevelt
put his arm around my shoulder.
Tell me the truth he said. Man to man.
Was that genuine Spiritualism last night,
or legerdemain?

Sir, I said, it was hocus pocus.
All the challenges I face are bunkum.
I think of them myself. I even supply the cuffs.
The task set me is very hard.

You know the crowd, Sir.
You have spoken on a stage.
Blinded by the lights, you feel it
when they come towards you,
when they drift away.
But, have you ever seen the crowd
when they think they can't be seen?

They call out for the scape goat,
their voices high and sharp, like wolves.
Steam rises from their coats,
the tang of lust is in the air.
I know them. Animal to animal.

Sometimes I even love them.
I am strong, you see strong in my flesh.
Stronger than their dark will.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 51)

The poet's presence is sensed through elaborate lyric devices, as well as Houdini's humourous and ironic admission of trickery: "I even supply the cuffs. / The task set me is very hard" (lines 8-9). There are syntactic echoes, parallels which imply class differences between Roosevelt and Houdini on one hand ("Man to man" in stanza one) and the crowd on the other ("Animal to animal", in stanza three). Their shared knowledge of "the crowd" becomes the focus of the poem. Even though the tone is light at the start, by the time we get to the final stanza "they"—the crowd—are compared to wolves, steam rising "from their coats", their voices "high and sharp" (18-19). These images, combined with the half-rhyme of "scape goat"/ "coats", and the repetition of "them" in lines 21 and 22 are the devices used to change the tone of the poem and modify the speaker's voice. The final lines of the stanza reveal Houdini's weakness—the need to repeat that he "is strong", "strong in his flesh", gives the impression of him trying to convince not only his auditor but himself of that (23). His fear of the crowd can be sensed through the way "they" are portrayed by ascribing some "dark will" to them in the final line of the poem: "Stronger than their dark will" (24). The question ending stanza 3 (still addressing Roosevelt) complicates the setting—because stanza 4 is so different in tone, it is unclear whether Houdini is still talking to Roosevelt or addressing the (implied) auditor from the opening lines. Jenner does not use formatting to guide the reader; in stanzas two and three Houdini's use of "Sir" to address the listener identifies Roosevelt, but that is missing in the final stanza.

The poem illustrates the double voice or "splitting" Langbaum attributes to the fact "the speaker is in some way reprehensible... sympathy is in conflict with judgment" (105). The difference Houdini emphasises between "us" and "them" in the opening stanzas (including himself and Roosevelt in the same class of people, those who "know the crowd" and "have spoken on a stage"), as well as his blatant exploitation of "Spiritualism", initially portray an unscrupulous entertainer; however, our perception of the speaking character does change as the poem progresses, when we sense his weakness and are reminded of the "cost" of his performance. Jenner's subtle suggestion that Houdini may indeed be speaking on behalf of Roosevelt about "the crowd", comparing them to animals, is another layer, another overtone, Jenner adds to the meaning of the poem to include her own political and social stance on the implied class differences.

Mata Hari's deliberately self-conscious story about her birth and origin on page 40 is another poem relying on the form of dramatic monologue to deal with social and political themes. Biographical uncertainties in fictions surrounding Mata Hari are conveyed using intentional (and evasive) duality and contradictions describing the events in her life. The "split" voice characteristic of dramatic monologue (or the presence of the poet behind the character's words) is evident in the games the speaker appears to be playing with the reader—similar to some of the other pieces in the book, there are choices on offer and the reader is invited to choose which story to believe. Mata Hari is presented as intentionally ambiguous, at once playful and confrontational. She lets the reader (and/or auditor) decide which narrative to believe; however, it is her detachment and implied indifference ("Take your pick") to the choice that makes the poem appear emotionally and politically charged. Even though the facts and official stories are deliberately questioned throughout the poem, in the final three lines

Jenner uncovers some emotional truths behind Mata Hari's fictitious biographies:

> You could also imagine
> an interior apartment in Amsterdam,
> a wicked stepmother
> and a girl with nothing;
> the sort of narrowing of circumstances
> which either takes your blood away
> or something very different happens. (40)

There indeed must have been that "sort of narrowing of circumstances"—who she was and what she did was determined not by choice but her circumstances, by the lack of choice a restrictive society creates, "which either takes your blood away/ or something very different happens" (lines 21-22). Jenner lets Mata Hari confront the reader; we understand, having read the final stanza, that while the tone of the poem may seem playful, the purpose of the "games" Mata Hari is playing with the reader is not to manipulate or seduce, but to expose her helplessness and lack of control over her own destiny.

To summarise, the dramatic monologues and dramatic lyrics in *Dear Sweet Harry* demonstrate the possibilities and range the dramatic mode offers for explorations of (lyric) voice(s) in a contemporary experimental poetry collection. They allow Jenner to switch between emotionally charged, highly lyrical tone, and humorous and ironic diction, contributing to the collection's fragmented, challenging structure. While there are both traditional and experimental lyrics represented in the book and the entire collection does the job of questioning narrativity, the highly subjective dramatic lyrics discussed in this chapter not only earn their place but significantly contribute to a book of this kind, demonstrating that behind all the artifice there is a human voice, speaking, directly, poignantly. The dramatic lyric poems, in which the speaker is (emotionally) closer to the poet's "I", are another way for

Jenner to preserve “poetry’s most beautiful illusion—the speaking voice”, by making the context, the collection as a whole, linguistically complex and structurally challenging (Tucker 243). These dramatic lyrics show that it is possible to use the dramatic mode for occasional unmediated emotion, for the kind of heightened subjectivity once reserved for the older style traditional lyric, which now tends to be judged as outdated and embarrassing.

Conclusion and Discussion of *Some Other Europe*

According to Alan Sinfield, "[f]iction and self-expression are equally fundamental to art. By working on the border between them and conceding the entire territory to neither, dramatic monologue invites continuous reconsideration of their claims and capacities" (76). As discussed in the Introduction, a typical dramatic monologue allows poets to distance themselves from the words delivered by the speaker by constructing a set of circumstances and establishing the speaking character in time and place distant from the poet's. Dramatic lyrics, acknowledged by many critics as separate from dramatic monologues, are poems in which the emotional distance between the poet and the speaker is not as significant, where the speaker could conceivably be the poet, but the title or circumstantial details reveal that someone other than the poet is supposed to be the speaking "I" of the poem. Historically, this kind of set-up, particularly the distance the dramatic monologue allows, has been useful for poets wanting to indirectly convey their social and political views, and a realist, traditional dramatic monologue can still be used for that purpose. There are, however, additional uses to which the dramatic monologue can be, and has been put by contemporary poets, in response to postmodern pressures on language, sincerity and subjectivity.

As argued in the two critical chapters, using Manhire's and Jenner's work as examples of dramatic monologues which combine postmodern and lyric goals, the dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric are genres which can successfully bridge the gap between experimental and traditional poetry. In the creative part of the thesis, which is a poetry collection, discussed

in more detail further on, I attempt to solve some of the same creative problems as Manhire and Jenner, making use of the options the dramatic monologue offers, by exploring the range of dramatic, lyric and postmodern (or linguistic) voice(s) available as an alternative to the lyric "I".

Some Other Europe: Nikola Tesla as a (Post)postmodern Voice

The creative portion of this thesis is a poetry collection titled *Some Other Europe,* and thematically it revolves around Nikola Tesla's life and inventions. Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) was a Serbian-American scientist and inventor, known for his contributions to the design of the alternating current electricity supply system. He was born in Smiljan—a small village in what was then a military border province of Austrian Empire, and is now part of Croatia. There are several reasons for choosing Tesla to be the main (and only, apart from the lyric "I") speaking character in my poetry collection: he was one of very few famous scientists and well known immigrants in America from the former Yugoslavia (where I am also from); many modern inventions in the field of communications and radio technology—necessary for today's commerce and global economy—are attributed to him; and he has become (in popular culture) a symbol of an eccentric, misunderstood genius unable to profit from his own inventions.

Growing up in Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 1990s made me aware, from an early age, of the historical, religious and ethnic divisions existing in that part of the world. As a teenager

I witnessed the break-up of the country into independent states, civil war and its consequences, both financial and humanitarian. War and suffering in Europe, particularly the Balkans, are therefore subjects I could relate to, and which seemed relevant to Tesla's life, especially during WW1, and even more so WW2, when he was living in relative comfort in the US, knowing his family, along with most of Europe at the time, was in less fortunate circumstances. Some of the sequences in my poetry collection ("Across the Atlantic" and "All these feathers") are entirely about that period of Tesla's life.

Nikola Tesla's successes and failures in America and his disappointments with the commercial aspects of industrial finance meant that—according to most biographies and historical sources—following his contribution to the Niagara Falls power plant design, and his experiments with wireless transmission of energy and radio resulting in half-finished Wardenclyffe tower, he lived in anonymity and isolation, continuing to work on his own.

In *Some Other Europe*, the character of Nikola Tesla is developed using very few biographical facts: his origin, his most significant inventions and commercial failures resulting in relative poverty, his life alone, and his love (or at least company) of pigeons later in life. These few biographical facts I found useful in imagining Tesla as a lonely immigrant, an idealist disappointed in profit-driven American dream and society, and someone aware of historical misfortunes of small, insignificant nations at empires' crossroads. This Tesla, isolated and lonely, unable to let go of his memories of Europe and his intrinsic belief in human kind and his own work, seems like the kind of character whose views and feelings would be equally interesting in the 21st century. The fact that some of his inventions helped shape the world as it is now, technologically advanced yet full of inequality and discontent, adds to his relevance today. Just as Marie Curie and Einstein were the symbols of scientific

progress in the 20th century, due to their contribution to what were seen to be the most important inventions of that time, Nikola Tesla's inventions used in generation and transport of electricity, as well as radio and communication technologies, account for his popularity in recent years. There are numerous websites, many run or assisted by scientific institutions or mainstream media, dedicated to maintaining Tesla's legacy, for example PBS[7] Tesla Laboratory, Tesla Memorial Society of New York[8], IEEE prize[9] etc. He features as a character or is mentioned in a number of movies (e.g. "The Prestige" starring David Bowie, as well as numerous TV series and documentaries) and books of fiction, and many biographies have been written about him over the years[10]. Though there are plenty of other sources stating the same facts as Wikipedia, I chose to include and quote internet sources in the few footnotes in my collection. The reason behind that decision was to contrast Tesla's internet popularity, citing sources often written in sensationalist language and full of superlatives, with his more human, lyric "voice", which is the dominant dramatic voice of the collection.

In my poetry collection I use many of the strategies and techniques discussed in the critical part: repetition, logopoeia, historical and thematic parallels, to make the voice (or speaking "I") of the poems intentionally ambiguous and difficult to attribute to either Tesla or a lyric version of myself. In some pieces the two voices blend, letting a contemporary Tesla emerge as a character, "speaking presence", addressing either a specific or unspecified other or speaking to "himself or no one" in the poems closer to the lyric genre (Tucker 243). These

[7] http://www.pbs.org/tesla/ins/index.html?PHPSESSID=a1c8b67c466de299d4bb8481481d8481 and PBS-produced video http://www.shoppbs.org/product/index.jsp?productId=2886392
[8] http://www.teslasociety.com/biography.htm
[9] http://www.ieee.org/about/awards/tfas/tesla.html
[10] The titles of some Tesla biographies and autobiographies and complete reference information are listed in the Bibliography on p.97.

explorations of voice I see as a bridge between 20th century events—namely World War 2, as well as European empires, history and culture—and more contemporary issues and themes, like the civil war in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, global economic crisis, political tension in Europe and other parts of the world. Because the collection progresses chronologically from poems describing late 19th century events to sections containing poems about World War 2 and 21st century themes, Tesla's notional voice becomes the link between time periods, allowing for repetition and variations on central themes of the collection: love, war, economic crises and inequality. The collection, on a different level, is also attempting to comment on the irony of Tesla's purported commitment to scientific work resulting in loneliness and isolation (loneliness for science), in the context of today's isolation and alienation many feel in the technological age (loneliness because of science). In that sense, Tesla becomes a metaphor for 20th century idealism: belief in progress brought about by education, scientific enquiry and innovation.

The Unit of the Book: Contextualising the Dramatic Lyrics

Some Other Europe aims to preserve the lyric elements of poetry, and just like Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry* and Manhire's dramatic speakers discussed in the critical part of the thesis, it does that by adapting the dramatic monologue, combining it with post-postmodern, contemporary literary concerns. However, unlike Lynn Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry*, discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, *Some Other Europe* is divided into discrete sections, each section demonstrating a different set of techniques, progressing largely chronologically from poems

based on Tesla quotes and found text towards lyric poems and contemporary themes and language. The intention behind grouping and ordering poems by theme and voice was to get the reader to gradually accept and start trusting—even identifying with—the speaker who becomes a displaced voice, equally "then" and "now", and therefore able to comment on a range of current, contemporary issues, as well as historical events.

With the exception of "Aerodrom Nikola Tesla" which serves as a preface to the overall book, the opening poems of *Some Other Europe* are composed largely out of Tesla quotes and found text. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bill Manhire does something similar in his dramatic monologues—he relies on shared cultural and literary contexts of certain phrases and clichés, letting their original meaning (and emotional responses they invoke) remain and clash with the meaning of the lines and poems they are re-used in. In *Some Other Europe,* in the opening poems in particular, reusing the language of Tesla's autobiography and speeches, and combining it with lyric devices and variations in form create a similar sort of tension. Some examples of this strategy are: "Correspondence", with its repetition required of a pantoum; apparent formal orderliness of "Colorado Springs"; and line breaks creating the look of a concrete poem in "Here is a simple glass tube" and "I give you neon promises".

In the sequence titled "My Early Life" found text complements lyric passages side by side, which is similar to the technique Jenner employs in *Dear Sweet Harry*. The section, however, as well as my overall collection, is largely chronological. Lynn Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry*, discussed in Chapter 2, illustrates the principles of nonnarrative by its inclusion of disparate characters and beginnings of narratives with no closure. In *Some Other Europe*, however, the speaker is notionally stable, constant, connecting the sections of the book. Differences in the tone and nature of the speaker's voice result from the movement and

progression between points in time marked by the historical events mentioned. The most straightforward and old-fashioned lyrics are grouped and contained in the sections central to the book: "Across the Atlantic" and "All these feathers". Though these sections include some formally experimental pieces (i.e. "Central Park"), echoing and complicating the voice of the opening sections, most of the poems are essentially "I-You" lyrics, and only through diction and theme they maintain the illusion of the speaker being Nikola Tesla, and not the poet. In these sections in particular, the level of sentimentality I allow myself is higher than in my other first person (lyric "I") poems, and in that way these poems are similar to Jenner's dramatic lyric speakers discussed in Chapter 2. These lyrical parts of the collection I use to introduce an emotional, vulnerable Tesla, who then continues to speak in the 21st century in the sections that follow: "US Steel Serbia" and "Some Other Europe".

"US Steel Serbia" and "Some Other Europe" ask of the reader to suspend disbelief, introducing Tesla as a contemporary voice, making the speaking "I" of the poems even less attributable and therefore more linguistic, reminiscent of Manhire's dramatic monologue speakers. Just as Manhire's first-person poems discussed in Chapter 1 are deictically easy for readers to "enter", but the structure, surface and logic of the poems are disjointed, "wobbly", the speaker in most of the poems included in "US Steel Serbia" and "Some Other Europe" is equally "unreal"—a contemporary voice echoing some of the themes and sentiments of the earlier sections. Manhire uses regular rhythm and temporal indicators to let the reader into the poems, making them deictically accessible, combining that with the incongruousness of the literal language used, and communicating to the reader that what follows cannot be taken literally or seriously; he invites the reader to accept the speaker's voice as a purely linguistic construct. In my own collection similar effects are created by the speaker overtly situating

himself in the 21st century, claiming to be over one hundred and forty years old at the start of "US Steel Serbia", while continuing on the themes and echoing the lyric tone of the previous sections of the collection.

"Some Other Europe" contains another shift in tone and voice (apart from the speaker being contemporary in terms of diction and themes): that section of the collection also includes many second-person poems of the kind Michele Leggott talks about in her essay quoted in Chapter 1—the "you" in some of these poems is a more universal, non-specific "you", often seen as a replacement for (and a way to avoid using) the lyric "I" (Leggott *Certainties and Aches* 168). On reflection, this shows that as soon as the speaker of the collection is thematically and historically more contemporary, therefore edging closer to the lyric "I" (i.e. my own lyric voice), the poems start being less direct, using strategies characteristic of postmodern distancing of the author from the text. The themes, however, are similar, and continue and echo the earlier sections in language and sentiment; the main link between the sections of *Some Other Europe* and the time periods the collection covers is Nikola Tesla and his (and my own) memories of Europe and the Balkans, geographically and historically distant from the remembering speaker.

"Europa, Jupiter" is a short concluding section of the collection, which, as well as returning to some of the language and themes of the opening poem ("Aerodrom Nikola Tesla"), introduces more overtly the poet—a contemporary linguistic presence obviously separate from the implied speaker of the rest of the collection, Nikola Tesla. This section allows me to return to some of the same concerns and topics, including literary and cultural references from the earlier parts, though from a more personal angle. The poems in "Europa, Jupiter" are best described as contemporary lyrics, situated in the (technologically advanced)

21st century, where art is seen as an "emotive" profession unsuited to machines, and where loneliness and isolation are almost the norm.

Contemporary Dramatic Monologue and Lyric: Bridging the Gap Between First-Person Lyric and Experimental Poem

In the creative part of the thesis, *Some Other Europe*, by dividing the collection into sections and ordering the poems largely chronologically, I structure it in a way that helps readers accept the variations and changes in diction and theme, making it clear that the voice, particularly in later sections of the collection is linguistic, unattributable, though the poems themselves exhibit lyric properties. The dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric genres in this case provide the framework for the transition and movement between found text and lyric language, as well as past and current events. The dramatic mode and the figure of Nikola Tesla offer enough scope for experimenting with language and form, without foregoing the traditional lyric elements present in most of the poems of the collection. This way of structuring the collection allows me to include what would be considered traditional, even old-fashioned lyrics in the sections of the book containing Tesla's imagined emotional responses to the horrors of WW2 and hypocrisy of societal norms, as well as some personal poems about his loneliness, lack of companionship and love directed towards people from his past and towards a dove.

The dramatic monologue in *Some Other Europe,* like in Jenner's *Dear Sweet Harry* and Manhire's poetry, provides a path back to the lyric; dramatic speakers in these first-person poems allow for a broader range of emotions and topics than a contemporary lyric "I". My

own collection aims to portray Tesla as a compassionate human being rather than a famous scientist, therefore contrasting more sensationalist, dramatised portrayals of him and his recent internet-enabled popularity which the collection indirectly references. In *Some Other Europe* I make use of the dramatic monologue as one of the ingredients, alongside traditional lyric poems and found text, in an attempt to create an innovative poetry collection, relevant today in its topics and emotional content.

To conclude, dramatic monologue as a genre does offer enough scope for innovation in contemporary poetry, whether in individual poems or within of a collection, because it provides a (linguistic, tonal) justification for variations in discourse and diction, as well as direct address which would seem outdated and more problematic in first person lyrics. Regardless of the structural complexities and difficulties of a poem or a collection, the dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric—as this thesis demonstrates—are capable of preserving many lyric traits and emotional content, while distancing the poet from the sentiment expressed.

As this study demonstrates, in support of Perloff's statement regarding "rhythm, sound and visual image" being the elements of poetry worth preserving beyond postmodernism, in Manhire's and Jenner's work these elements are what connects and unifies fragmented and seemingly disparate discourse and situations (21). Manhire and Jenner rely on aural and rhythmic devices to convey emotion, yet they both successfully problematise the "I" by signalling that the speaker is someone other than the poet. As noted by many contemporary critics, such as Tucker or Byron, and as demonstrated by this thesis, dramatic monologue as a genre does not preclude postmodern experimentation; it can expose and incorporate postmodern questioning of subjectivity and self, while maintaining coherence and syntactic

stability of text.

The range available between the dramatic monologue and dramatic lyric offers plenty of scope for further innovation. Dramatic monologues, such as “My Childhood in Ireland” by Manhire, “Houdini talking about the performer’s life” by Jenner, or my own poems “Tesla Roadster” or “US Steal Serbia”, through ironic tone and distancing of the speaker from the poet, can be used for social critique; dramatic lyrics, such as Jenner’s “I know if I wait”, or my own “5th Avenue” or “1941”, allow for lyric language and sentiment that would seem outdated in a more traditional, realist first person lyric.

Depending on the context (i.e. a sequence or a collection) and whether the “speaking presence”, the speaking “I” of the poem, is historical, imagined or simply textual, the dramatic monologue offers many options for generating variety in contemporary poetry (Tucker 243). There is room for humour and satire, social and political themes, as well as lyric poems more traditional in tone and diction than many contemporary first-person poems.

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Appendix A: *Some Other Europe* Poems Published

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[11] Included in *Some Other Europe* as "I am a small boy inventing things"
[12] Included in *Some Other Europe* as "1942"
[13] Included in *Some Other Europe* as "Shakespeare's Globe"

Appendix B: Bill Manhire’s Poems

My Childhood in Russia

One day when our father had gone
to cut wood, to cut wood,
we fled from our rented rooms
to a place far out in the suburbs.
There on the seventeenth floor
we watched snow approaching the city.

My sisters quarrelled, my brother got drunk.
Our mother shed tears, surprised to be lonely;
we sang in the stairwell after she died.
I imagined my father still in the forest,
the furs he would need to be wearing,
his great axe. How could he ever return?

This was my one source of strength:
seeing the forest, recalling his axe.
I knew I would not leave our city
where the smallest things were so prized--
a piece of chalk, a particular ribbon--
while so much of my father was missing.

At school they said that Moscow was shaped
like a wheel. Your turn, Viktor, to read.
Yours Alexei. From childhood to chit-chat.
But our town was shaped like an axe.
It chopped at its people: that man on the bike,
the fellow shaking his fist in the street...take that!

Yes, each of these men could bleed!
And always one thing succeeded another.
A girl took my cock and raised it towards her.
Where were the steppes? Where the Urals?
And the city still grew, while the forest just crept away
further,
inspecting for somewhere to hide.

Where was some paper on which I could write!

(Manhire *Lifted* 44)

My Childhood in Ireland

I never climbed the hill
or strolled to the end of the pier
to see what the walkers in rain
might be finding out there.

Nor did the book fall open
where Maeve had secretly signed it.
In fact, it never fell open.
Not that I minded: the world

streamed away
wherever the great ships
were going. Far away
there were ways beyond knowing.

I walked back to the house.
My sister's new child was chained
to her breast. She drifted
inside a dark forest.

My father opined while the dog whined.
The television did its best.
While my father opined
the dog licked itself.

Well, you manage to find
what might make you happy.
I went on the Net. I wandered.
Asian bukkake.

(Manhire *The Victims of Lightning* 101)

False William

Sadness entered my life so early.
The sky was only the sky sometimes.
I was never going to die.

My friends opened their heads
to show the vile, invisible anger.
They stood and glittered in the yard.

Everywhere birds were in flight and vanishing:
my father's wings were sick in bed,
he was the history of sound.

And all the time someone was watching my clumsy feet!
Oh remove them and hollow them.
Remove them now.

They shall be shoes
for the king who must not touch the ground.

(Manhire *Lifted* 56)

Love Poem[14]

There is no question
of choice, but it takes
a long time.

Love's vacancies, the eye
& cavity, track
back to embraces

where the spine bends
& quietens
like smoke in the earth.

Your tongue, touching on song,
darkens all songs. Your touch
is almost a signature.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 17)

Poem

When we touch,
forests enter our bodies.

The dark wind shakes the branch.
The dark branch shakes the wind.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 19)

[14] "Love Poem", "Poem" , "The Elaboration" and "Your Absence" were originally published in *The Elaboration* in 1972.

The Elaboration

There was a way out of here:
It went off in the night
licking its lips.

The door flaps like a great wing:
I make fists at the air
and long to weaken.

Ah, to visit you
is the plain thing,
and I shall not come to it.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 20)

Your Absence

Your absence is a hurt
I would bring to no one:
It is a place
For entertaining friends and waiting.
I shall always ask you in.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 21)

The Contract[15]

Sometimes you are distinctly
childlike. I half expect you
to bring me gifts, some
ordinary purchase out of
nature—a flower,
or a dead sparrow.

And sometimes
you resemble a room
filled with pianos, lacking
all taste.

When you tire of lying out
under the moon, the sea is all
grape & I am in bed
with my portable woman,
tearing along the dotted line.
Then you are most like
the lady in the comic-book, lifted
miles into the air
with your eyes showing it.

I have a method specially
reserved for dealing with you.
It involves a giant wasp
with orange stripes, opening
its wings just before dawn.
Come in, if you get really
sick of it. Let us bury this comfort.

(Manhire *Collected Poems* 53)

[15] Originally published in *How to take off your clothes at the picnic* in 1977.

Appendix C: Lynn Jenner's Poems

I register tomorrow for enlisting.
Hurrah, now I am one of the boys.

Harry Handcuff Houdini
Scholar of the Occult
Weak left hand
Blue
Black
Jew
Has person lost arm, leg, hand, eye?
Mother

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 2)

My mother and father were scientists.

'She is a *dachshund*,' my father said, pointing to our puppy. '*Dachshund* is a German word, which means badger dog. Some people call them *sausage dogs*, but that is silly. It makes them sound like toys, and they are not toys. The scientific name for dog is *Canis lupus familiaris*. A domesticated carnivore; descended from the *grey wolf*. You can hold her if you like. But just remember, she wants to eat badgers.'

My father had a belief in biology as truth and a preoccupation with shadows in the night. No doubt both were behind his efforts to keep me at a safe height above the forest floor until I turned twenty-one.

'Think about matagouri,' my mother said. My mother was responsible for *environmental* influences.

'In dry conditions the leafy shoots lose their chlorophyll and turn into hard spikes. But if you plant matagouri somewhere with plenty of water, the plant will produce soft leaves.'

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 10)

Kathleen Mansfield Beauchamp was born in a plain wooden house in Wellington, to a mother whose pleasures were flowers, dresses, travel and letter writing. Mansfield later referred to this house as a dark little cubby hole.

I thought I could detect a faintly pink feeling in one of the upstairs bedrooms and I am sure there was some unusual air movement in the hall, near the collection of her books for sale. The rest of the house seemed to be in darkness, exactly as she said.

Leaving the house after less than half an hour, I looked up at the big dark hill behind Tinakori Road. Across the top of the hill pine trees seem to have been stopped in their advance. There is evidence of a fire. Native trees are growing back, small and rounded like lumps of dough.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 14)

About this time I remember wondering whether this obsession had chosen me or I had chosen it, how large it would become and whether there would be any natural limits on its growth.
At some point I became indifferent to its magnitude and relished instead its minor notes.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 18)

Pink light catches my eye. A building the size of a cathedral. Huge doorways. Three trains inside. From the top of ladders little men in white overalls lean over them, touch them. It looks as though the men are rubbing the trains down, the way old men used to rub rugby players with liniment before a game, but maybe the men are patting them. They could even be scraping something off the skin, as with barnacles on the hull of a ship.

Four or five others are sitting a little way back from the entrance, at an angle, waiting. Trains are like this with each other; tactful, and patient. For them, space is never assumed. It is occupied, or relinquished according to a Mandarin sense of entitlement.

Maybe pink light shining through the huge doorways at both ends of the building is their equivalent of the yellow glow we hope to see in the windows when we come home in the dark? That feeling someone knows how hard the day has been, and has prepared a fire for us to sit by?

I want to be that man in white overalls on the top step of a ladder. I would rub their skin with soft cloths and grease. I would know them all by number. I would never criticise them for a little crustiness, or a crotchety outburst.

I want to absorb pink light, and then absorb more, until every cell in my body radiates light. Pink light my body. My body pink light.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 22)

There is a room with a wooden floor.
There is an Army Doctor
and a table.

My great-uncle Bertie walks towards
this table. He does not feel *Duty*,
as the other men say they do.
He feels [a Yiddish word]
which translates literally as
Gratitude-for-having-been-
allowed-a-place-to-live.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 27)

The Day Before the Battle of the Somme

The General's compliments and would Lieutenant Malins require any assistance with his moving picture camera? If the lieutenant would care to inspect this map of the Parade Ground...

The General would be on horseback. He would enter the square here, and address the men for twenty minutes, keeping his horse between this mark and this mark. There were tall trees at the South end, here.

The sun would be directly overhead.

In the afternoon

Malins sets up his camera in a corner where three communication trenches meet. Lines of men in single file pass by. A corporal touches each man on the shoulder.

A forensic lip reader, who reviewed the film, said that each time the corporal touched a man he would say

And you.

When the last man passes, the corporal says

That's it. That's them all.

One man says

I hope we're not in the wrong fuckin place again, cos next time I'm fucking going.

Cigarette smoke rises across the shot.

In the long summer evening

Malins takes the camera and the tripod past the Danger Tree,

along a white road, up a small hill and on to a ridge.

After walking up and down the ridge several times to find the site with the best view, he sets up the tripod, braces the legs with stones, puts a thousand feet of film into the camera, and lifts the camera on the tripod.

As the sun comes up

Malins cranks the handle at a steady two revolutions per second, while lines of men run across the hill, falling to the ground as they pass a certain tree.

This is either the first infantry advance on the first morning of the Battle of the Somme, or the first time men are filmed in the act of fighting and dying.

Later that summer a film plays simultaneously in London and in France.

Men laughing in a wood. Men running across a hill. The King and a deep hole. Missing only the sound of the guns, according to the men resting, back from the line.

Fancy sending them over to France to die for us one woman says, and she and her friend leave the theatre arm in arm.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 28-29)

The year is 1978. The All Blacks are playing at Murrayfield.

A pipe band marches on to the pitch. They play a song you think you know. The song is a thin wail, fading in and out with the wind.

My grandfather Harry's voice says

> *We were so tired*
> *when we were marching.*
> *Sometimes a pipe band would come along*
> *and march with us for a while.*
> *To lift our spirits.*

Wagga, his foxie, thumps the stump of her tail on the carpet. The clock on the mantelpiece has stopped. In his house a fire burns, although it is December. The silence is so deep it could have an astronomical name.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 31)

Mata Hari speaks about her birth

I was born in Java, or India, take your pick.
My mother was the kind of woman who
leaves a child motherless.
My father was a Calvinist businessman
from Amsterdam, a romantic
who broke his wife's heart,
or a Jewish hatter, take your pick.

As I said, my mother died giving birth to me,
or she might as well have done,
which led to my being taken in
by an aunt in Amsterdam or nuns

at a sacred Indian temple.
And trained as a dancer.
Imagine red tapestries
and plump golden gods.

You could also imagine
an interior apartment in Amsterdam,
a wicked stepmother
and a girl with nothing;
the sort of narrowing of circumstances
which either takes your blood away
or something very different happens.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 40)

After her divorce she took the name Mata Hari

She must be alone, and shine because of that.
She must retain memory of the sun at night.
She must lean only on herself, and never falter.
She must contain the motion of a wave. She must hang
from high places, deaf to the softness and weight
of a sound like a sack landing on the ground.
She must linger in white hotels.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 43)

These are the facts:

Mata Hari was arrested on the 13th of February 1917, tried by
a military court on the 24th of July on charges of espionage, put
before a firing squad at Vincennes, near Paris, early in the morning
of the 15th of October 1917, and she did wear a black velvet coat.

Her body was unclaimed. A head with her name on it was de-
posited at a museum for the criminally insane. The head has been
lost. No one disputes any of this.

What happened on the field that morning is less certain.

It is said that just before the shots were fired, she opened her coat and revealed her naked body to the soldiers. It is also said that the soldiers fired blanks, and that in the smoke and confusion they led her away, first to a mutineer's camp, and then on to a ship leaving for Argentina. Some claim that she ran a luxurious brothel there for many years, catering especially to Jewish gangsters.

A rather blurry photograph of some hills, a few trees, a group of soldiers, and a woman tied to a post, appears often in articles and books about Mata Hari. The composition of the photograph, the way the soldiers are standing, and the distance from the single other figure are all identical to other photographs of executions from this period.

This blurry photograph may, as most people believe, be a photograph of the execution of Mata Hari. It may also be a reconstruction filmed years later, as part of a movie about Mata Hari.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 44)

When I say the word train, I mean
engines, carriages, and freight cars,
a snake on the high hill, a zip
of lights from carriage windows,
the stripey arm and the ting ting ting
of crossings; the slow toooot of a goods train
in places where none goes now.
When I say the word train I mean
a triumph of feeling.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 55)

Dear Sweet Harry

Thank you for being so tantalising
that when you died, a man made a list
of everything in your house; all your tools,
every needle and every kernel of corn.

Secrets and vices notwithstanding,
you will always have a spot on my

mental mantelpiece. Not wedged in
amongst this year's crowd. And not
near the end, where you might fall off.

I will imagine you in a short sleeved shirt
looking for the history of magic
in second hand bookshops.
The show coming soon enough.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 56)

Mr Gurdjieff hardly speaks a word to me.

He has placed me under Doctor Rest, Doctor New Milk and
Doctor Chair in the Corner of the Kitchen.
I am to take large doses of attic bedroom and white wall,
small sips of vodka and dark red carnations, and I may have
as many slow drum beats as I want. I am to abstain from
thinking or writing and before retiring I am to gorge myself
on Persian carpets. The one in my room has a spreading
apple tree, blue hummingbirds, and a hippopotamus
in the branches.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 62)

This faded Fuji photograph—green at the bottom, as always,
green for the soft life of towns. In middle ground, a river,
tiny wee us and our tartan picnic rug. Then the mountains,
tall girls at the back. My mother pours tea from a thermos.
Beside her a book of native plants is open at the Mount Cook
Lily. I have a book too. My father looks towards Mount
Cook (that was its name then). He is smiling because
the mountain has decided to show itself. A hawk flies low to
the land, in circles. My sister sees a rabbit running across a
ridge.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 63)

Engines are the heart of trains. Engines just keep on and on, because we need them. They may have been bought and sold, but in their own minds they are still public servants, or perhaps citizens of the former Eastern Bloc; distinguished by ugly colours and low expectations.

They soldier on as people do. But then, like people, sometimes they just stop. On the last working day before Christmas I was on a peak-time service to Paraparaumu when it stopped in the middle of a paddock. Someone got it going again, and I never heard what happened after that.

(Jenner *Dear Sweet Harry* 64)

SOME OTHER EUROPE

Aleksandra Lane

Table of Contents

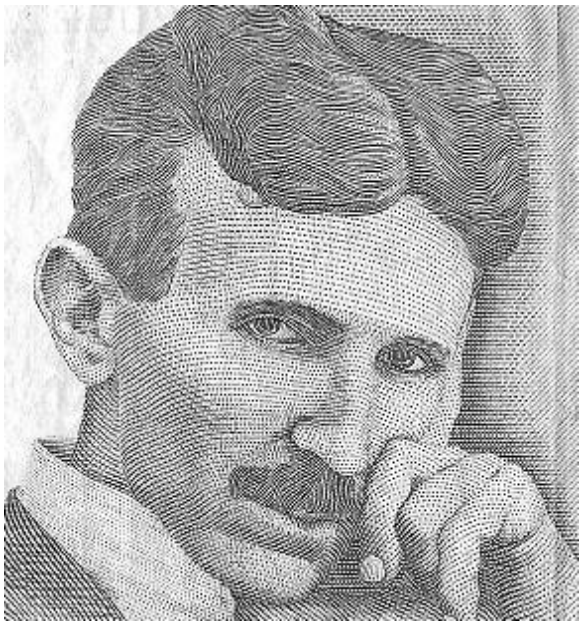
Aerodrom Nikola Tesla

You land in silence. Reading Nabokov's *Transparent Things*
you may as well laugh, the author is witty;
but what you find between the sheets
is tissue porn, an attractive life sentence. Reading Nabokov
you land in silence, your plane forever arriving and
forever late. *Pretty much everybody even remotely*
associated with real-time strategy games has heard:
Explore the life and accomplishments, Enter
an interactive laboratory with sounds
animations and explanations of Tesla's key.

There is a large photo, part of the expiring Empire
of Austro-Hungary and there you fall in
and out of love with an extended metaphor, what they used
to call an allegory. Oil spills in every sea of language, poisonous particles
suffocating your child's honesty. *Enter the interactive laboratory*
*with sounds animations and explanation*s. And attraction by numbers, the end
according to Martians will not at all be as expected: we laugh
at them, they laugh at us. Meanwhile, every truth is raped and all
beauty pillaged by irony and heavy handed adjectives.

Enter. Your neighbours in the city are projected
pop-icons, while movie stars get increasingly obscure
and obese, increasingly generic. It becomes difficult to distinguish
between your wife and the lead actress. Eloquence permeates
corporate boardrooms, building on university seminars: they invent
not sentences, but words, so we forget the first in
first out rule, waking up one dimensional in language, focused on
read-only memory and retrieval techniques, our discs turning
but no longer able to register the sounds of damage, sounds of
communication protocols designed specifically for the purpose
of intercept. Pay attention to beauty and the unmistakable music
of persuasion.

NIKOLA TESLA



Nikola Tesla (1856-1943) was a Serbian-born American inventor and engineer, known for his contributions to the design of the alternating current electricity supply system. He spent most of his adult life in America, alone.

Do not strike.

Do not strike at what you are looking
but what you intend to hit.

For God's sake do not strike
at what you are looking
but what you intend to hit, is what my father,
famous for his sense of humour, used to say
to our cross-eyed neighbour.

Then all of us children laughed.

Nikola Tesla known as the 'wild man of electronics'

was without doubt one of the greatest minds in the history of the human race. Admittedly, he also had more loose screws than a Meccano set. [1]

Were we to seize and eliminate from our industrial world the result of Mr. Tesla's work, the wheels of industry would cease to turn, our electric cars and trains would stop, our towns would be dark and our mills would be idle and dead. His name marks an epoch in the advance of electrical science. [2]

[1] Kerry Redshaw, http://www.kerryr.net/pioneers/tesla.htm

[2] Vice President Behrend of the Institute of Electrical Engineers

I give you neon promises, ladies and gentlemen

of wireless persuasion, of air filled with absences,
voice over white noise of design
all the foreign accents of Babylon.

I dream of bodies of water as great as Niagara, and I dream
of home, harsh wool of winter and leather sky of late spring,
once in a lifetime town visit, tar, shoeshine as a souvenir,
though the shoes everyone wears there
wear mud: rough peasant slippers of pelt and poverty.

I give you neon promises and my suit reflects
our good fortune.

Allow me to explain:

Here is a simple glass tube from which the air
has been partially exhausted. *I take hold of it.*

Here is an exhausted bulb
suspended from a single wire. *I grasp it.*

Wherever I may move it
in space, as far as I can reach,

its soft, pleasing light persists
with undiminished brightness.

Colorado Springs

“KEEP OUT—GREAT DANGER”[3]

At first the citizens were compliant, literate, and they observed the sign.
I am grateful for that. Singlehandedly I could light up
their small town sky. I was testing not only the instrument, but their belief
in the principles of physics and inevitably I failed. I did

cause one small fire, though they blamed me for much more,
including the drought. When I left, with my equipment thankfully intact,
they no longer knew where to turn for I showed them god
of a different kind, a god born and burned in the power plant.

They found no words within, when they took down the sign:
without the mechanics, the town’s heart stopped, only maples
changing colour, and again sounding out, learning to whisper
autumn. And spring, slow, impossible to thaw, spring.

3 Sign outside Tesla’s Colorado Springs laboratory.

Correspondence

They think about me even in their dreams
waiting for me is like waiting for the messiah's
wreath of hope, prodigal twig
returning next summer, maybe, maybe spring.

Waiting for me is like waiting for the messiah.
They love me, they think about me
returning next summer, maybe, maybe spring,
my sisters and their shiny husbands.

They love me, they think about me
between the Old and the New Testament
my sisters and their shiny husbands.
Here I receive birthday letters from dignitaries, kings.

Between the Old and the New Testament
I, of course, no longer distinguish.
I receive birthday letters from dignitaries, kings
and queens of Wall St, signed in blue blood.

I of course no longer distinguish
a wreath of hope, prodigal twig.
And queens of Wall St, signed in blue blood
they think about me, even in their dreams.

My Early Life

Our first endeavors are purely instinctive, promptings of an imagination vivid and undisciplined. As we grow older reason asserts itself and we become more and more systematic and designing. But those

early impulses, tho not immediately productive, are of the greatest moment and may shape our very destinies. Indeed, I feel now that had I understood…

New York, 1884
Worldly goods totalling four cents
A pocket full of poems
Carefully worked calculations for a flying machine
Head full of strange dreams

America

Is this America, I asked myself in painful surprise.
Six blocks down, then to the left, he said, with murder

in his eyes. A burly policeman twirling his stick
five years having elapsed. And nothing has happened since

to change my opinion.

The present is theirs. The future, for which I really worked, is mine.

It is difficult to appreciate what those strange phenomena
meant at that time. We crave for new sensations
but soon become indifferent to them. When my tubes were first
publicly exhibited they were viewed with amazement impossible
to describe. From all parts of the world I received urgent invitations
and numerous honors and other flattering inducements
were offered to me, which I declined.

They send me such beautiful bribes—what am I to do
but refute? They mock me; they burn my lab to the ground. Then
the insurance man comes dressed as a debt-collector. Our roaring
times: much progress with very little education. Trial and error
in Edison's dying lamp, such poor permanence in mine.

Progress is no competition

The two men were merely opposites, they said. Forecasting
is perilous. I know you would have been pleased
with the result of the experiment: the apparatus was singing to me
and I was simply whispering back. Repetition was unnecessary:

They say Wardenclyffe is no more. Forecasting is perilous.
Niagara Falls as an all American concern, its one solid wall. I harnessed
its gypsy horses, its bucking mane, and the other man died rich riding them
—not a rival, merely opposite of the same. We were two sides of the coin,
needless to say, neither good nor bad.

FOR SALE[4]

LOCATION: Long Island – 5 Randall Road, Shoreham, N.Y., between Tesla Court and Randall Road

SIZE: 15.69 acres

ZONING: Two-acre residential

PROS: Complex of 14 industrial buildings, including historic Tesla laboratory. Property can be delivered fully cleared and level.

CONS: Property was a New York State Superfund cleanup site, with the main concerns being silver and cadmium. Remediation was completed last year, but the site still requires semiannual groundwater monitoring as well as periodic inspections of two soil areas of concern, to ensure that they undergo no disturbance.

I will never recover.
Wardenclyffe[5] towering over
every conversation. Unprofitable, an awful lot
of scrap metal and paper, so worthy of revelation,
yet they ask me to write about the Martians and the current
state of humanity. My titan child is gone: there will never be
another one like that.

4 **May 2009**, see related NY Times article: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/05/05/science/05tesla.html

5 **Wardenclyffe Tower** (1901–1917) also known as the **Tesla Tower**, was an early wireless telecommunications tower designed by Nikola Tesla and intended for commercial trans-Atlantic wireless telephony, broadcasting, and to demonstrate the transmission of power without interconnecting wires. The core facility was not completed due to financial problems, caused by the financier withdrawing funds due to the fact that there was no near-term profit to be made from constructing this tower, and was never fully operational. (Wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wardenclyffe_Tower)

Tower

My dearest colleagues,
enemies, friends: this project is a distant
memory of a life well spent, affordable
not only for Mr Morgan, but for many empty pockets
of the new century. Half-finished, it remains
upright, no longer expecting
to be put to use: there are tonnes of wasted material
and effort, and the citizens are hungrier than ever.
Admire the view, I must look the other way.
So much for this summer: plenty of determination
and no more determinants.

...had I understood
and cultivated instead of suppressing them, I
would have added substantial value
to my bequest to the world. But not
until I had attained manhood
did I realize that I was
an inventor.

I am a small boy inventing things

Now I am compliant,
complicit, scholarly.

Willow trees excepted, it was still. Little by little,
you teach your autumn to catch flies, then the flies
flit away.

I am a small boy
and I am resonant: made
a fishhook out of wire and spite
while the day went on with laughter and elsewhere
adventures. A fishhook that gleamed

like water and lull. I am slim,
my mother is an engineer, my father is a priest.
We could not grow rice, frogs or willow leaves.

I am a small boy inventing things.

Across the Atlantic

Seven kinds of soldiers pillaged the quiet
fields of my father's village. Some wore uniforms
some arrived barefoot because they had even less
in plain clothes, and only hunger
in common with the pillaged. Confusion saved
the youngest, their mitigating innocence, their love
of hide and seek. Corn could never grow there again,
instead: endless raspberry fields.

1941

The trees are silently emerging
out of frost, out of the long beguiling winter
of that latitude. They are again smiling
their foolish spring smiles, grinning like today
is always, and they have known no other season.

It is still cold, fresh milk shrouded in steam
brought carefully to the table in the kitchen
where bread, poignant with yeast and clay
warmth of the oven keeps swelling
until its smell wakes the children
in the room next door.

1942

Lindens outside my childhood
home are now much taller, hiding the view
of the barren valley below.
Barbed wire surrounds the section
where we played hide and seek, innocence
drained months ago
from the soil under the prisoners' feet, cursing
under their soles. At night
I hear lindens crying for luna, for the summer
just gone, summer of omens,
while the thin twigs of arms and legs keep
breaking off
and landing in heaps, becoming compost
for the only thing that will ever
grow there—nettle and loss.

Women are embracing killers, embracing
the dead. Women
are giving birth to cold blooded
murders, raising the offspring
on little more than a handful of bitter
forest berries and cornflour
wrapped in headscarves, smuggled past
the hungry guards
under the coat, under the blouse.
Food is kept close to the heart, like love
or a newborn, or words
which can no longer express, just ache,
night after night, like lindens crying for luna, invisible
behind the autumn cloud.

An aging letter to Ana

What could an old man like myself save, preserve
for some distant future generation? Something light
and uninhibited, something from the previous century,
stolen from an old manor or a shack. An object
or a sentence, maybe an innocent village
child. Walking by the river, hand in hand,
and tracing difficult equations in dust or sand, or love
on someone's freely given palm. The smell of May slowly releasing
first rays of seasonal luck and regret, to be gambled away.
How we understood affection looking at war close-up, and that war
had the face of a perennial child, always hungry, forever growing up.
I was in love once: she was a young girl and should never have
understood boundaries and divisions, weapons and burned down
mosques, deserted churches, rebuilt and rebuilt. What would I say
to her today, this side of the ocean, knowing she was forced to witness
new century's soldiers no more humane than the Turks
occupying the neighbouring fortress, adjacent land. What could I
say, old and unaccomplished, short of both wealth and desire,
to a young girl like that? That I knew or thought I did
that clergy was not for me, yet complied, complied.
That no blessing is forever, and everyone's god sometimes lies,
precisely when truth is needed to stop the hurt, unspill the blood.
That she should keep weaving, hold on to the tapestry of ancient skies,
pour water behind each and every child old enough
to leave the village, strong enough to carry a gun. And give
what sugar is left to his younger siblings, envious of the adventure, unaware
of fear spreading around their brother's sleeping mat for months,
counting down, whispering, scratching his back with hawthorn branches and
freshly sharpened knives. Or would I simply say remember
we were loved, in the absence of a loving god, we loved each other.

By the river

It is true that young women here are every bit as beautiful
and some have the same eyes, and
from time to time, her exact profile,
but I am now too old for them, like I was too young
for her then, green
and like any boy that age too eager to fall in love incurably.

That day by the river
she was all her own, proprietary, unpronounceable, like the epidemic,
she was too much lightning,
thunder. I met a force stronger than any
I would subsequently conquer,
more powerful than a rational sentence, language, anything
I would ever see or read.

Someone else's moon

Unlike most other fruit, melon
cannot be preserved, its flavour
synonymous with drought, its moist flesh
the colour of a gingerbread heart

sold at village fairs. Green bellies
of pregnant earth, enduring lust, ours
for the taking then, in the impulsive
present tense, always now.

The issue of marriage

Zits and powder cases, that's what the young ladies
of this town carry about with pride. Even if I chose to

how could I possibly find myself a bride? White frill
of family values and narrow expectations, trust in God
and stately powers, what use would all that be to me?
I'd rather let the years go by, contribute, while

I can, to some future understanding of liberty. I'd rather fall in love
with a statue, a dove, keep the old world's trust in brother's or
a neighbour's helping hand, and not see disputes, fires, floods.
War wipes old tears. Poppies will grow out of each crushed heart, seeding

for miles when we're all soil, all dust. No powder will hide
today's betrayals, our ingrown fears, no powder
will stop the cynical clouds replacing our entire sky, no powder
will hide us from ourselves.

All these feathers

Of all the pigeons of Central Park this one I recognise from the old country. Of all the pigeons, and women, this one I choose to be most blameless, beak unbloodied, at once all-seeing and free of sight. I held her, as one would hold a child

or a message for the few surviving comrades behind enemy lines. I once said I loved her as much as a man loves a woman, but that is not the truth: I loved her more and less than that. She had to fly or there would be nothing left in motion that month, that winter when the weather here was as harsh as the war on the other side of the Atlantic, she was the only family I could protect.

They say an inventor's heart is sand and stone, unmovable and forever shifting, but when all the hope is gone we find ourselves in love with hope, the idea of flight or free will.

Carrying an olive branch

#1

All these feathers
gathered around the square
are also looking for
the old country: a piece
of bread, white, hard-earned

in a trench. Nothing else
is the same, just this silent surface
of street doves
reflecting the city's sky
day after pay day.

#2

I remember: Paris in flesh, love
for some other Europe. Here
the railway stretches out each day
in search of land, golden
tooth aching down south. South-west.

We are at home now like man and wife
man and his only dove.

#3

I believe this war will be the end
of all wars. When energy
abundant and transmittable
satisfies our hunger. When the world
is illuminated at last. When the steel
of my resolve becomes the steel that moves
the earth

    I must let you fly home
carrying an olive branch

#4

Under your wing I hide
all the unsung
lullabies – my great great uncle
combing his white moustache,
saying Niko - fight,
but don't forget to sing.

The sky is still a net of copper wire,
you know it too. The sun is out,
but it's burning cold moon
under your silent wing.

What's the use of nursing you back to life
if neither of us can sing?

#5

What can you see
beyond the Empire
State Building, beyond
the river? I open the window, open
my hands to greet you but there is not a grain
of courage left. Some mornings
come, some mornings go
elsewhere. Peasants embracing
hay back home. In autumn
their plums purple like the women's eyes
and stinging sweet on the inside.

You prefer barley
and all I have to offer: thin wheat stalks of sun
spilling between my fingers
onto the window ledge and out
of my hands for once.

5th Avenue

No one knows me here. This suit
matches the latest fashion, I go unnoticed
and can walk wherever I please.
5th Avenue is a seductress, for example, and I smile
when I smell my own longing
for human company while stray dogs follow
this scent of an old man, yearning for flesh,
a benevolent pair of eyes, but thankfully
no one knows me here and 5th Avenue is behind me
and it's late enough to avoid temptation, all temptation
behind me, left long ago in the old country, old
century, when desirous love was as fashionable
as a bowler hat today.

Deathbed dove

This room, where even my bed is ill
and the dresser covered in dents and scratches, waiting
to be replaced when I'm gone, the room

is eager for a younger resident, someone
with a fresher coat of paint and shine, eyes
brighter in the mirror, less knowing but more

hopeful than these. She visits me here. Brings letters
from the other world, the next world, before the next.
She tells me, bleakly, what lies beyond the winter's cloud
and cures me of the simpler diseases,

allowing me to continue what work is left, undisturbed. The heart
is weak, and even she knows it will stay that way for a while longer,
and no prayer, no pious company can change that.

Someone else's moon

Unnaming each constituent part of sentence, body—
yours made entirely of flight—the kind of syntax
solitude invents, we understand each other.
It's these winter days, low forgiving light, a poet's
leftover fog in the heart, reminding you how different
a feather is from quill. The comforts of a colony:
here you are a symbol, carried across the ocean
in many languages, Latin, after Greek.

Words have a surface, skin, they respond and scar
or maybe you would compare them to light,
both particle and wave, matter of fact, debate. One man's
signified, et cetera. Someone's moon, sober
and irreversible, lights up behind the gauze.
Someone else's moon—wounded winter sky.
In solitude, we understand each other.

Central Park

I

Grey sky
on parole
released

with tear gas in our eyes
and bonbons for the homeless.

Migrant thoughts
circling above 200
years of fortune.

II

Three uniformed stars marching above. Three uniformed stars above Central Park. You and I: the sky's eyelets and the tree's forgotten branch. Stars simply urging us to walk the plank after dark.

III

You are a beautiful machine. But you need to eat, sleep. I cannot make you—just mend your seams, your brittle outspoken heart.

I love similes, this—

gambler’s luck.

I am a drowning boy

I am a drowning boy and remember
the springs in each of our hotel beds
the maids and their humourous disinfectant.
Cut to measure, tailored, for 40 years unchanged.

The springs in each of our hotel beds
now quiet.
Cut to measure, tailored, for 40 years unchanged,
it suits us fine, this loneliness of an old man.

Quiet.
White threads appear. Exhaustion. Light.
It suits us fine, this loneliness.
You are a drowning boy, age 12.

White threads appear. Exhaustion. Light.
I am a drowning boy and remember
the maids and their humourous disinfectant.
You are a drowning boy, age 12.

How survival makes things plane.

US Steel Serbia

I never dreamed
of the way back machine[6]:
my nightmare was entirely different.

Today I am one hundred and forty something, exactly
as I had predicted, and in Bosnia
there is no talk of balkanization with a zed

or a zee. Every continent dishes out slightly different
flavours of dirt, sand, smoke
and the list of sins and prohibitions goes on and on and
extends while I'm contracting

non-existent diseases, sheer panic
and the flaking uncertainties
of an ordinary human being. In god
we no longer believe, our trouble is today

science is no alternative.
It is true I never dreamed of the way back
machine. Had I imagined it, I would have been
better prepared.

6 waybackmachine.com

US Steel Serbia

On my way back
to the way back machine I see a sign:
US Steel Serbia. Naturally
I think of you. They are

renovating my home. They are building
museums, selling postcards, my face is worth
one hundred dinars. In someone's pocket
I travel around the world
on less than one dollar.

Meanwhile paper
is collected, the streets are clean, young
boys and girls dressed in bright colours
smelling of medicine. After the bombing
was everyone's favourite phrase.

After the bombing, people rebuild, regroup,
count the parts, make
if not love, babies. On the way back
they think of you.

Tesla Roadster

The Tesla Roadster – the only electric car for sale in Europe or North America -- uses an AC induction motor descended from the scientist's original vision. Tesla Motors unveiled the Roadster in 2006, which UNESCO declared the Year of Nikola Tesla in celebration of the 150th anniversary of his birth. "Nikola held more than 700 patents and remains an inspiration to me personally and to many entrepreneurs and inventors – both in Silicon Valley and around the world," said Tesla CEO Elon Musk. "Without his vision and brilliance, our car wouldn't be possible. If he were alive today, I'm sure Nikola Tesla would be a very happy Roadster customer and a passionate advocate of electric vehicles."[7]

The model is an extraordinary combination of parts. My automatons stop at remotely controlled children's toys, but Mr Musk has plenty of spare parts, and much variety to choose from. The size of the vehicle and its power are excessive for the rural roads of modern day Croatia. It demonstrates not only the feasibility of the enterprise, but its decades long investment on both sides of the ocean, both shores. US Steel Serbia is a relatively small business, compared to the blue skies of North America, and now it looks as though the internet never existed and we are all back in the old Yugoslavia, looking over our shoulders, for secrets are not safe within, they are confiscated point blank. Still, I like walking out and finding the smells of childhood. Imagining I road-tested your Roadster, Mr Musk, but decided not to purchase. Thanking you for the experience. Acceleration was pure magic, so much so that I almost flew off the road as I slept and smiled, enjoying the view both inside and out.

7 http://www.teslamotors.com/it_CH/about/press/releases/tesla-roadster-world-tour-heads-hallowed-grounds-nikola-tesla

The Americas

I never travelled south of the border.
I was too busy working on the next generation
of my rotary motor. But one of my first assistants
whose name I can no longer recall, for his
practical skill was somewhat short of desired,
presented me with a flawless globe, the
wildforests so green on that model I often
imagined exotic birds and peculiar creatures
living there, wasting precious hours
of my solitary time in boyish fantasy.

Think-tanks of the following century understood better
the nature of dictatorship, building and
subsequently destroying empires, while the good people
of the country worked the mines. Gold-digging in fear
of retribution, landslides, floods. I, personally, never travelled
south. I would have been too heartbroken to continue
my scientific work. The globe, however, still sits on my desk,
as brightly coloured as ever, hasn't faded one shade, still worth
every dime.

Allow me to explain

The world is waltzing to its own tune, spinning
news reels and breaking the heels of the lonesome
middle class. I invent, get invented in turn, what books

I have surround me, fulfilling desires, nooks and crannies
of imaginary tracts, books and doves, companionless,
light. Oh may you live in interesting times—and we are indeed

cursed, scattered on electronic maps, discarded, misused.
I invent. In truth there were no assistants
and I kept my day job, but the magic show of electricity

is more attractive, powering this century of regret,
wrong turns and a reverse engineered understanding of poverty.
Think what you will of my eccentricities, the world
keeps waltzing, I am waltzing with it too.

The coming of age of aluminium

Tin foil flowers
will not suffice, I see you refuse
to comprehend soul mongering setting up shop
two hundred bodies down the road. Waltz or join the army:
one two three one two three
either way. Party and medicate, then blame
the economy. This century will regret, we do our worst
out of fear—I thank you for the tin foil hat, but my birthday
is not today.

In making the above statements
I wish to disconnect
myself with the extraordinary
opinions expressed in some journals which I
have never authorised and which
though they may have been made with good
intent, cannot fail to be hurtful
by giving rise to visionary expectations.
I frequently exposed my body
to continued mechanical vibrations.
The members of the medical fraternity
are naturally more interested in the task of
relieving the suffering from their pain, and
as might be expected, a great many communications
have been addressed to me
by physicians.

Do not believe when they say
yesterday never existed—I was there
and so were you. If you close your eyes and listen
for the even rhythm of the pendulum, everyday time,
you will see old people's smiles
remembering paper bags of flour and hand made
walnut oil, lard and
rough as revision palms, listen
and you will hear people reciting poetry and feeling
the weight of each word, each gram,
each pound.
Someone somewhere is reading Dostoyevsky, some
spoiled young man, no doubt, who does not understand
the privilege of being shown
a body in its entirety, still attached
to a singing soul, a dove in the middle of winter, warm
under the feathers, watching our gloved hands, scarved faces
our upturned world from above.

Belgrade, 1999

Ask me if I cared as 99

occupied the hearts and
minds hearts and spades spades and mines

Meanwhile, CBS settled on the capitol:

back in Belgrade they remember me fondly
as an extinct word, while missiles fly past
the great civilizing potency
of the new metal. You are an extraordinary immigrant,

the National Museum
says the president, broadcasting white noise.
terminating with flash-bang canisters.

Either side of I

Another Belgrade built
of memories, and memories
of ambient waves: childhood fireworks, then
later, air raids.

The people of the city read
but cannot understand war: you,
a pronoun of exile and peril, no longer abstract
but flesh and mud of border guards.
We switch on television to escape but all too soon
there is nothing to escape from: static, either side of I,
us, they.

Now this Belgrade, civic, civil, a marble monument
to honour a fallen Balkan
soldier, overlooking the unknown Danube
ferries, fluorescent
disco lights.

The coming of age of aluminium

Oakland, 25 October 2011

Everyone is on Google today, the aliens
are coming. Ask me if I care
as we occupy downtown Auckland.

Meanwhile, CBS settles on the capitol:
the great civilizing potency
of the new metal.

You are an extraordinary immigrant,
says the president, broadcasting white noise
terminating with flash-bang canisters.

Some Other Europe

Summer of omens

Europe is nibbling on its limbs, while Germany presents
the largest speed dating book fair for writers
and publishers, and every small town west of Danube
is hosting its own carnival, internationally acclaimed.
Money keeps moving, circling around the globe, unlike most of us
who have nowhere left to go. The moon, some say,
is just a lightbulb, turned on and off, spotlight
on our stellar democracy.

Europe is getting colder and hungrier and increasingly irate,
while Russia keeps arresting, holding its cards drunkenly
over the green casino table top. China and Japan, being older
than most at playing empires, are willing to call each other's
bluffs. Iran and Syria have become figures of speech, yet they
are spilling real blood. Jerusalem anxiously pours
petrol in their cocktails, and the US
re-elects.

Food is amazingly abundant, considering all the local
disasters, droughts, fires and floods. Weapons are manufactured
but no one mentions that and technology haunts us, undead.
Europe is younger than ever, and thinner than it's ever been,
silicone bursting through its seams while the moon awaits
the richest of the rich. The US re-elects itself.

Dear Faust

Once you're familiar with the devil, it all becomes
easier to handle: the dragons, the dens. The speakers
and the mutes, street theatre and lack of protest.
When a man is hanged, he drinks alone. With or without the devil
spurring him on. It makes no difference: he cannot be
any deader. You order expensive prostitutes to escort you
to the execution, but they are colder than the corpse. No matter,
once you're familiar with the devil, he may reincarnate as your
first cousin, sister, brother in law, long-lost relative, your fourth
husband or wife. The scenario is flexible, yet finite and programmatically
predictable. The executioner brings a glass of whiskey and a warm coat.
Once you know the devil, you accept him as your own. You arrive
with a tall Russian blonde, walk out hand in hand with the devil's
advocate. The executioner is very professional and polite, all things considered.
You could have had a less adequate blade, blunt and
disrespectful of blood. The scenario is flexible, your co-stars professional
and collateral damage virtually non-existent, except in your heart.
It is so much easier to handle the personalised terror once you're formally
introduced.

Late July, Greece

The sea hears nothing, wave
after wave of gossip and idle expectation, sand banking on sand, umbrellas
keeping close together, each a sad camouflage fortress

barely holding up. Some fall in love here
because there is nothing better to do at the time, though
it is obvious that the real world would not accommodate,
that perfection never lasts, and is never deserved. Which is why

the first kiss after dark is just like any first kiss, unrepeatable, memorable.
When the lights are turned back on, we hear our own thoughts, and we hear them
backwards, generations reversed. The perks of being older here
include the taste of someone's final breath of innocence. Their simple

action, inaction, in the pauses between a heartbeat and a heartbeat, pulse
uneven, soft dislocated murmur reminding us of Greek tragedy, Mediterranean
seafarers and sacrifice. The perks of being, real world suspended between the sea

and the sky, sand banking on sand, autumn promising nothing better,
nothing at all.

Athens, National Symphony Orchestra

This could be you, making sense of the vernacular,
tidal demography
powering your lexicon. So much of Europe

played in that final symphony, followed by End of Transmission,
national broadcast frequency to be auctioned off
to no one interested.

It could be you, us, and melody
is always last to leave, no matter what season it is, it's autumn,
which never fails to remind you
of what you remember best—lifetimes of difference
between making love and sex, auctioned off
to no one interested

in the melody that is you, could be yours, a symphony
you know but couldn't name, which moves you
like someone's hand resting on the table, each finger eager to remember
a long forgotten craft: joinery or some other part
of home making that could not be bought

one hundred years ago; fingers so still you could call them lustful,
were they not in the middle of undoing your good Sunday
arguments, attached to a body of alternate hormonal beats
to which you couldn't dance but could make love, were it not for you
making sense of a long forgotten craft.

Before Rome

The affection of clouds, zeroes and ones
you compare the morning to, is not as straightforward
as a child stroking the fur of the only mother he has, before
Rome, before our retelling of myth, you understand that
a warm body next to yours is life-
giving, no signifiers there in the middle of European forest
and snow weighing down pines' singleminded greenery,
its whiteness stays with you, as does the ground, degrees warmer
than the air surrounding the child, the elongated shape
of the wolf, attractive in its wilderness and sharpened
sense of timing, blood.

By the river

There are echoes of lives and lives lived
you realise we neither choose nor are chosen
being ourselves in others while being ourselves—
narratives too complex for teenage sweethearts
though that is how it always starts, ends.

You remember someone you spent one night with
and think you should have spent the summer, year,
knowing so much now neither of you could have known then
which is why you remember someone younger
than that decade of military brass and submarines.
Wishing you'd made love then and there, instead of
being hesitant, instead of being yourself.

You haven't had that many lovers since yet know the body
itself wouldn't have mattered, certain that the other body
would have found a way of knowing yours, that night,
overripe, you felt but couldn't understand you were
as strong as that decade, strong enough to stay
against sadness, hospital beds, anything that year may have done
to the body your body wanted that night, young, overripe,
echoing all your future lives.

Then

We understood tribunals
before we understood the tribes. Then love—
it excuses itself, explains itself
to the bewildered audiences around the globe. We
understood and wanted our dog back. Our backyard
and our grammar. Surrendering before music, love
we understood, resonant. Struck
by enlightenment.

Now

This is hope tuning in, weak signal
and opaque reception, it always sounds
like accidental madness and bilingual tendencies,
tenure of tenderness.

The clouds are dancing back, echoing
one-up democracy, that real time seagull rather angry
about the business of involuntary pangs
of radio, UV. This is hope

tuning in. Good morning, good
silence, nothing left to check off, check in.

Vienna

One tacit cloud, tactile sun, homing
pigeons landing in vain, in Vienna a nice day
starts with have a nice day in Vienna, first officer speaking
and porcelain flight attendants. Between Theresien-platz
and Judisches Museum, next
to the souvenir shops you are introduced
to a tamed empire, nothing left to prove, entirely decorative,
ornamental, a nice
day in Vienna, though spoken in German
understands English very well.

One white dove, one grey
respond to the call, but the people are unknown
to their ghosts, unrehearsed. In Vienna you learn
there are cities in waiting rooms, forgotten
on the clean side of tracks. You could call it pretty, but really
it's the way the city stands its ground, chronologically bound
to beginnings and ends, passing of time. The same cloud,
one white dove, one grey, reason enough
to have a nice day, and have a nice day in Vienna.

When stories become songs

There are grandmothers, socks of winter days,
snow on the glass pane a curtain
of early dusk, winter grandmothers rhyming
simply with caress and whispered chants,
lullabies. One century

and thousands of miles apart, now there are lightbulbs
all around to contain what sun hides
above the cloud, summer in captivity. Winter days

when yarn is what connects each night and day
and day and night, when stories become songs
and songs are the quietest. There are grandmothers
with hands of kindling and smoke, holding our cheeks,
warming our frost-bitten palms, grandmothers
nearly forgotten

remembering us.

Some other Europe

Autumn copper, crop after crop to remind you
of another landscape, year irrelevant, grass
tired under foot. In 1989 Europe was tying the knot

and in 2011 the offspring reaches maturity, interests
breeding interests at unprecedented rates.
I still remember her in sepia

wedding dress, snow tricked by low winter sun
into blushing. Europe of many languages, one
bloodied heart. Yes, we defended the Empire, one war at a time
for generations. Being this far from the border,
from the uncertain fields of monarchy, I learn to fit in,
to appreciate brick and mortar, ink.

It's autumn again and I remember the word
of Balkan geography, origin, meaning
under the sky, a particular sky, mapped

in that language of borders by landmarks, rivers
and mountain chains, unlike the sky here, singular
like the language, one language
state after state.

Europa, Jupiter

Just as mechanisation freed, or forced, workers into jobs requiring more cognitive dexterity, leaps in machine intelligence could create space for people to specialise in more emotive occupations, as yet unsuited to machines: a world of artists and therapists, love counsellors and yoga instructors.[8]

[8] *The Economist*, January 2014.

Signalling to Mars—A Problem of Electrical Engineering

Little airplane progress
bridging the gap to Mars. My apparatus
says Tesla, what science may achieve
this year. He writes about his experiments

in electrical healing. In every poem
there is a meanwhile, and words contain us
containing knowledge
of moments beyond reach, elsewhere
or in the past.

Shakespeare's Globe

I
To change right here, in the middle of summer spells
heresy: dark blue sky hiccupping stars, it’s happy hour this side
of my condiment acquaintance, he’s young
and we’re all in Paris. The stars go
on and on. Not even an outline of desire.
Clear skies.

II
Act 2 is never final and never great. Chekhov’s gun
is leaning on the chair, surrounded by flowers, footnotes,
commiserations and thanks. It’s a happy funeral, this. When I die,
borrow a musician and reform him: make him
play polka tunes and dance. Hijinks and honorary guns for my wide-eyed
beliefs, ounce of lead for the heart.

III
We could be related, but we’re not, we are solemnly
playing chess. Remarkably, it’s Valentine’s Day
and the city knows it. There are girls with bunny ears
and headless drama students drumming up business
of mockery. And in the corner of my
solitary confinement someone’s delicate gold chain
misplaced. Pawn, king and queen. Always two
moves ahead, the colony. It’s Valentine’s Day
and he smiles like a child, wins
every subsequent game.

IV
Many moons of aphrodisiac, and white heat
of competitive galaxies corner the lead actor
who, nether, and neither here nor there, accepts
a very personal pronoun's kiss. Simplicity disarms
and dismantles anti-semantics, compliant
crowds and rows of empty chairs: seduction
of impossibility, tip-of-the-tongue about to be invented
word. No enemy satellite can see inside. No enemy,
pravda.

V
Time to reflect, retract, retreat. Days of unlearning
and slow autumn crookery. It is obvious, next time
anger arrives as planned, we are stubborn and gay and needy,
public and very private. Still, no enemy.
Just freshly painted flesh and stage directions for Shakespeare
cries out behind the scenes. I disappears
to return suspended in disbelief.

Jupiter

I think of you as dreamstock, plush vocabulary
of dawn, Earth picking up the knitting
of light and air, the place a winter's day begins
with an Alpine pattern, or reindeer of North America,
if that's where you are at the time, the other side
of up or down. Dreams distributed around
insignificant flesh ashamed of what it feels
and understands, this language.
I think of you, elemental as gold and oil stock, currency
exchange. Earth picking up its knitting older than satellites,
older than this year or decade. Substance
containing the form is perhaps all we ever had
in common, arriving at language
entirely on our own.

Now and then

a matter of sunset
clause, of skin partial to handshakes, hand-
underlined life sentences, a small matter
of pronunciation, clemency, carbon copies
and innuendo, files and cabinets, credit cards.

I am still wearing the moon, and it's a dress
like any other. Under neon we only see each other spent
for want of a better word, and I am hundreds of miles south
of syllabus. We grow so many hearts, one for each hurt,
where do they come from, these muscles, and rhythm
so easily disturbed, does it depend on the soundtrack, season,
luck?

And then you laugh and now I understand: second best only
to the physicality of sex, laughter—a release, rare moment of you
being yourself.

Circling around the globe

Here is some language to impress your date,
nouns and verbs, no prepositions. Solid language, language
of firm and decisive leadership delivering shareholder value.
The price of gold is sensitive to demand and the tech companies

are reporting losses this holiday season. Here is an early Matisse.
Some language free of charge, complimentary ticket
to Mars, Venus being next, according to your life coach
and TV personality from the States. Tony Robbins

was all the rage, I was blonde. Bottom line:
some language might make your day, early Matisse.
Some language, motion-picture style, dubbed over
in Germany, I guess we were simply deaf back then,

watching Madonna. The body would be fine. No words
to describe the losses to your 19-year old self, in the OK magazine.
Some language, 1980s style, certainly pre-Y2K,
in Vogue, before Financial Times, square

root moves on the dance floor. And in the next sentence
you are expected at the prom, graduation, the wedding.
According to the latest business model, you discover
like everyone, you are supposed to be somewhere else.

Notes and Acknowledgments

“Do not strike” sequence is based on the following text found on page 8 of Nikola Tesla's *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla*: “For God's sake, Mane, do not strike at what you are looking but at what you intend to hit.”

The quote on page 8 found on the Tesla Society website (www.teslasociety/genius.htm): “In his speech presenting Tesla with the Edison medal, Vice President Behrend of the Institute of Electrical Engineers eloquently expressed the following thoughts: 'Were we to seize and eliminate from our industrial world...’”

“Here is a simple glass tube…” comprises entirely of text found (some of it rearranged) on p200-201 of Thomas Commerford Martin's *The Inventions, Researches and Writings of Nikola Tesla.*

“Our first endeavors…” (on page 14 and page 20) quoted from *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla,* page 6.

The text of “America” based on the following quote, found on page 49 of *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla:*

> What I had left was beautiful, artistic and fascinating in every way; what I saw here was machined, rough and unattractive. A burly policeman was twirling his stick which looked to me as big as a log. I approached him politely with the request to direct me. 'Six blocks down, then to the left,” he said, with murder in his eyes. 'Is this America?' I asked myself in painful surprise. 'It is a century behind Europe in civilization.' When I went abroad in 1889—five years having elapsed since my arrival here—I became convinced that it was more than one hundred years AHEAD of Europe and nothing has happened to this day to change my opinion. (49)

The quote on page 16 (“It is difficult to appreciate...”) found on page 55 of *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla.*

“I am a small boy inventing things” based on the following text found on page 25 of *My Inventions: The Autobiography of Nikola Tesla*:

> One of my playmates had come into the possession of a hook and fishing-tackle which created quite an excitement in the village, and the next morning all started out to catch frogs. I was left alone and deserted owing to a quarrel with this boy. I had never seen a real hook and pictured it as something wonderful, endowed with peculiar qualities, and was despairing not to be one of the party. Urged by necessity, I somehow got hold of a piece of soft iron wire, hammered the end to a sharp point between two stones, bent it into shape, and fastened it to a strong string. I then cut a rod, gathered some bait, and went down to the brook where there were frogs in abundance. But I could not catch any and was almost discouraged when it occurred to me to dangle the empty hook in front of a frog sitting on a stump. (25)

Waybackmachine.com is an internet archive website, providing links to previous versions of websites searchable by date and URL.

The quote on page 63: “Just as mechanization freed…” is from “The Onrushing Wave” (p23-26), *The Economist,* January 18-24 2014, p26.