Poetic Voice 9

Poetic voice is often assumed, in the lyric, to mean the voice of the poet. A generalized speaker, called a "lyric I," allows the poet to speak in some pure language, perhaps as the spirit of poetry itself. This notion, however, applies to only one kind of poetic voice. Even in cases where the poem does seem to present the poet as speaking in general, there always remains the individual person as well. Conversely, when the poet seems to speak in his or her own voice, she or he still is speaking as a poet, in poetic language, and not merely privately or casually. To the extent that the poet's audience is implicated in poetic utterance (as we saw it to be in the very structure of verse forms), there is always a further point of reference in the poem as well. Besides the speaking person, there is also the person spoken to, whose responses or expectations may be felt as a point of view, or an implicit voice, which is more or less acknowledged within a given text. There are lyrics that make this doubling of voice quite explicit and central to their discourse. Such texts build into the poem the fact of an audience, or of someone being addressed (addressee), making the poem not a pure lyric voice, but more like a dialogue—perhaps a philosophical debate or argument; perhaps a seduction; or perhaps some other kind of persuasion or explanation. Even a "lyric I" that does seem to be speaking as a single poetic voice may in fact represent or inscribe a multiplicity of voices, a number of different points of view or ways of seeing and speaking.

Poetic voice, that is, rather than being a pure, single, or personal voice, can be complex and orchestrated, with a range of different representations, different stances and points of view, for a variety of purposes. It certainly also involves diction, which can help define a poem's speaker, whether in the role of author or of characters who may be quoted or introduced as other speakers in the text, almost in the mode of reported or represented speech. The com-

plexity of poetic voice is most obvious in poems that are quite explicitly structured through a speaker who is not the poet. In such a poem, the speaker is specifically defined or presented as an invented character and is often presented as if speaking to an invented addressee. This form is called a *dramatic monologue*, a poem which seems to be a speech taken from some dramatic encounter between an imagined character and someone he or she addresses. It was perfected by Robert Browning (1812–1889), whose "My Last Duchess" can serve as an example:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
But to myself they turned (since none puts by
The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
How such a glance came there; so, not the first
Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
Her husband's presence only, called that spot
Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
Frà Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps
Over the lady's wrist too much,' or 'Paint
Must never hope to reproduce the faint
Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff
Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
For calling up that spot of joy. She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad,
Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace—all and each
Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men,—good! but thanked
Somehow—I know not how—as if she ranked
My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
In speech—(which I have not)—to make your will
Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this
Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
Or there exceed the mark'—and if she let
Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
—E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Although this poem is spoken by one person, and is hence a monologue, it is very specifically addressed to someone else. This means that, from the outset, there are at least two points of view inscribed into the poem: the speaker's and the addressee's. These are discovered in the course of reading the poem, with specifically orchestrated moments of recognition, confrontation, and disclosure. Here, the Duke of Ferrara (the setting is Renaissance Italy) is speaking. As we learn later, he is speaking to the envoy of a count from a neighboring court, giving him a tour of the castle and its art treasures. And, as we learn at last, the envoy has come to negotiate a dowry for the count's daughter, who is slated to become the duke's next duchess. Just why the duke is in need of a new duchess, we learn in the course of the monologue.

Thus, in this text, all we hear are the duke's own words. Nevertheless, we hear them directed to an addressee who has come on particular business. We hear in them this addressee's response, sometimes as specifically marked by the duke, who seems to be answering a question, or a look or gesture, of this envoy. These two points of view or attitudes of speaker and addressee make up the first structural tier of the poem. Although the poem is made entirely of the duke's speech, we hear through it the answering voice of the addressee to whom it is addressed.

We also hear much more than that. Indeed, we as readers are no less central to this poem's structure than is the count's envoy. We too are its audience. And the poem is addressed to us in ways no less calculated and intricate than it is addressed to the envoy. That is, our position or attitude, our answering voice or response, is also taken into account and registered through the poem. We as readers then function as another point of view or attitude. That makes three. But if we say the poem is addressed to us in calculated ways, we must go on to ask by whom. Not by the duke certainly, but rather by the poet. The poet is finally directing the poem's utterance, using it in ways that make the duke say more than he knows, and not only to the envoy, but to the reader, each of whom hears him somewhat differently. A dramatic monologue in Browning's sense thus involves not one but four positions, four participants in its discourse: the speaker, the addressee, the poet, and the reader.

What a dramatic monologue of this kind does is exploit these differences of position in a complex interplay of multiple understandings and responses, ironies and implications. The first and most pointed irony is of course against the duke, who certainly intends to present himself, but has little idea of how much he has, in this speech, given himself away. What exactly has he disclosed? Let us begin with his point of view. He is conducting his guest on a tour of his palace, with special emphasis on his cherished art collection. He is partly himself enjoying his own treasures, about which he cares a great deal, and partly impressing on this envoy the wealth and taste he believes his art collection to display. This he feels will strengthen his position in negotiating a dowry. The envoy will report to the count the great wealth and prestige of the duke, showing him to be a most desirable suitor.

It is to the duke incidental that among these art treasures is a portrait of his last duchess, his previous wife whom he is now in the

business of replacing. To him, that is, what he is showing is one among other artworks, acquired by him in one among other ways, with a history that adds to its appreciation much as other artworks are appreciated through their histories. This seems, at least, to be what he consciously admits to himself. For him, the subject of his discourse is the work of art. But for the envoy, and even more for us, the subject of his discourse is himself. Notice how often he refers to himself: "my" last duchess; "I call" that piece a wonder; "I said 'Frà Pandolf by design.'" Here we catch him carrying on both ends of the conversation. It is not clear whether he has allowed the envoy to speak; whether the envoy has signaled some question by a look; or whether the duke assumes a question he happens to want to answer (as with others visitors who, he says, "seemed as they would ask me, if they durst"). What we learn about him in any case is how much he likes to speak for others, how much he likes to control what he and they say ("by design") and see ("none puts by the curtain I have drawn for you but I").

And yet we also see how partial this control is, how deeply undermined it is by the duke's incredible self-ignorance. His description of his last duchess, from which we learn why she is his "last" duchess, that he had her killed (after the portrait was painted), shows him to be arrogant and cruel, self-centered, and, above all, possessive. Some of this he may himself feel. As he explains, he could perhaps have told her how much he disliked her generosity and sweetness of temper, when he and only he should have been her object of attention: "She had a heart . . . too soon made glad." Yet telling her directly would involve "some stooping; and I choose / Never to stoop." The duke seems to feel this arrogance is his due, entitled to him with his "nine-hundred-years-old name." Still, however much he knows about himself, we who listen to him know more, and the dramatic irony—the discrepancy between the character's and the audience's knowledge—runs against him and in our favor. It is we who see how wrongful is his arrogance and cruelty. He does not see this himself.

How much of this irony is caught by the count's envoy is less clear. We assume he has been at least somewhat unnerved by the ruthless egotism of his master's future son-in-law. Perhaps we see some sign of shock during the display of the portrait, which the duke however takes as a question about the artist. Perhaps there is some flinch or recoil or gesture of escape hinted in the duke's: "Nay, we'll

go together down, sir." But we have no indication that the envoy intends to advise his master against the match. We feel he may sufficiently share the duke's world to be impressed by the duke's power. Nor does he object in any way to negotiating marriage as a matter of dowry and object transfer. The envoy is in any case only partially revealed to us, since we can only guess at his reactions by the way the duke reacts to him.

But surely we have better access to ourselves, to our own reactions and attitudes. How do we hear the duke? Our most comfortable role is to judge the duke, who of course earns our dislike. But our own position is not exhausted by harsh judgment of the speaker. Nor is our superiority to him entirely assured. We have, it is true, caught the terrifying drive to possession which motivates the duke, causing us to shudder when he assures the envoy that, despite his insistence on the dowry that is due to him, the "fair daughter's self" is the duke's true, as he puts it, "object." What he wants is to own the other's self, as he wanted to own the self of the last duchess in a way that she somehow denied to him. But while we may be remote from the kind of ownership that involves dowries and titles, we are not entirely removed from what this poem suggests to be another kind of ownership, that of art. In the portrait, the duke has finally achieved the control and possession over the last duchess he desired. There is in the poem a peculiar series of substitutions in which the last duchess's living person becomes a matter of pigment and color, line and design. Her "depth and passion" and "earnest glance" have been transferred from her to the portrait, as part of its aesthetic achievement. Her living blush has become "that spot" of color on canvas. "Paint," the duke goes on to say, "Must never hope to reproduce the faint / Half-flush that dies along her throat." This chilling remark rivets us in the knowledge that the flush on her throat is now nothing but paint, and that it did in fact die after she sat for this portrait. The duke is very pleased with this final possession of his duchess in art, where she remains, as he states twice, "as if alive." For the duke, art is another mode of possession, control, and ownership. But even without his malice, the poem—which is to say the poet—poses us with the question of our own possessive desires, even in so apparently innocent, indeed interesting a form as art. Perhaps art too can become a mere object of possession and status. When we hear the final clang at the poem's end, where the

artist casts his subject "in bronze for me," we cannot but wonder at our own habits of appropriation as well.

In terms of poetic voice, what is outstanding about this, as in Robert Browning's other dramatic monologues, is the multiplication of points of view that the poem incorporates, distributes, and directs. Although this poem is structured as the duke's speech, it is also very much the poet's utterance, in a quite different way than any controlled by the duke. These two voices in the poem here work more or less against each other. What the duke asserts, the poet subverts. The two voices are also engaged in a number of different conversations at once. The duke's is directed both at the poem's addressee-envoy and at the reader, who responds to each of the poem's other three participants—speaker, author, and addressee. The four-part construction, which includes poet, speaker, auditor, and reader, each plays off, undercuts, supports, and crosses with the other. The result, for the reader, is a mixed experience of critical detachment and judgment, on the one hand, against the speaker; and yet also of being implicated in the speaker's presentation, if only because any use of a first-person voice initiates (even if in the end it is not fully sustained) an identification of the reader with the "I" who speaks. The first-person "I" is always, in some sense, a seduction. The reader's experience, then, can be described as representing one point of view on the text, but also as shifting between the others in varying degrees of identification and detachment.

The dramatic monologue is one case where the question of poetic voice becomes central and is specifically dramatized. The fact that the "speaker" is a dramatic character clearly distinguishes him or her from the poet, whose voice, however, is no less represented in some manner through the speech-act of the invented character. To speak of the reader or an implicit addressee as "voices" involves extending the term "voice" into more metaphorical, or theoretical, usages. But "voice" is a useful term for indicating the way in which in lyric (as in fiction) different points of view, and also different stances, positions, roles, and even references become drawn into a text.

The dramatic monologue may seem a special case, dramatic in ways that ordinary lyric is not. But this difference is far from complete. Consider, for example, the seduction poems we have analyzed: Edmund Waller's "Song" ("Go lovely rose . . ."); Spenser's

"My Love Is Like to Ice"; John Donne's "The Flea"; Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." In each text, the poet is in some sense speaking. But he does so as a seducer. His speaking role in the poem is that of a lover attempting to persuade his lady to requite his desire. There may be, in each case, a historical lady who had been so beguiled by the poet as a historical person. But even if this were so (and it need not be), the poet's self-representation in the poem is more than autobiographical. It incorporates all sorts of conventional imagery, modes of address, and poetic forms that make the speaker quite stylized. It is as (conventional) lover that the poet speaks in such texts. And he also retains an independent role as poet, to the extent that each text incorporates elements that distance it from mere seduction. In the case of John Donne, the self-representation as lover co-exists alongside a self-representation as courtier: witty, charming, and audacious, but in a constrained and controlled manner. In the case of Marvell, a reminder of death as a warning against seduction appears alongside the plea to make haste. Thus, in each case, the distinction between speaker and poet contributes to the texture and complex effect of the poem. The speaker has his desire, and the poet has his.

There is, in the seduction poem, a similar differentiation between the addressee and the reader. The poem, in each case, is addressed to a lady, whose response is not recounted but whose vulnerability to persuasion directs the poem's rhetoric. We as readers are distinguished from the lady. Only for her is the seduction immediately sexual, and we witness and assess her position from beyond it. Yet, the reader to some extent shares the lady's position, in that our time is also short, and mortality is a pressure under which we live and to which we must respond. We may not be seduced sexually, but we are vulnerable to the poem's argument and urgency. Thus, as in a dramatic monologue, four viewpoints, or voices, are projected. The speaker may be less explicitly dramatized than a dramatic monologue's fully invented character, but he is not merely identical with the poet. He is cast in a role, that of seducer, which the poet may regard quite critically. And the implicit audience of the poem, the lady, is distinguished in important ways from the reader who is affected by seduction, but not toward the same end.

In each of these texts, different figures in the poetic discourse create a complex statement of multiple voices, in complex relation to each other. In other poems as well, the speaker's voice crosses with, but is not fully absorbed into the poet's voice. In "A Poison

Tree," as we saw, the childlike voice of the speaker turned out not to be Blake's, who in the end quite dramatically broke away from identification with the speaker. In "Prayer Is a Little Implement," Dickinson similarly introduced a devotional voice which proved not to be entirely hers.

But what of poems apparently written in a single voice, one not overtly dramatized, but instead spoken by the "lyric I" of the poet? I think that we can say that even in seemingly straightforward cases, there will be some multiplication of poetic voice. The poet will almost inevitably have some audience in mind, if only the reader, whom she or he will be addressing, and whose response she or he will be taking into consideration as a participant in a dialogue felt to a greater or lesser degree. And the poet will almost inevitably be presenting himself or herself in some role, even if it be only the role of the poet. If the speaking voice in a text assumes a role it is called a *persona*. The term persona, derived from drama, means mask. It denotes a speaking voice that is stylized, or fashioned, or slanted in ways that distinguish it from the actor, or, in poetry, from the poet. The term's application is clear when there is an obviously invented dramatic character speaking in a text, such as in "My Last Duchess." But one can also speak of a persona when the speaker is not an explicitly dramatized character. The poet can take on the voice, or persona, of a child, as Blake does in "A Poison Tree." The poet can take on the voice, or persona, of someone in prayer, as Emily Dickinson does (and also resists) in "Prayer Is the Little Implement." The poet can speak as a seductor, as he does through many poems in the English tradition. The sonnet tradition as a whole is founded in, or deploys, a number of poetic personae: lover, courtier, and even poet brooding over fame and immortality.

Each of these stances informs not only the speaking voice of the text, but also its topics, imagery, strategies, and purposes. In Sir Philip Sidney's (1554–1586) sonnet sequence *Astrophel and Stella*, for example, Sidney's biographical role as courtier repeatedly informs the verse. Sonnet 41 is about a tournament in which Sidney participated that was staged by Elizabeth as court-pageantry:

Having this day my horse, my hand, my lance
Guided so well that I obtained the prize,
Both by the judgement of the English eyes,
And of some sent from that sweet enemy France.

In describing the courtly action of the tournament, Sidney as speaker attests his prowess with the lance in the pageant. But this serves also as an image for his prowess as a poet. And both in turn serve (and are served by) his role as lover, since the ultimate judge of the contest is his beloved, Stella, whom he courts in this display and who is the ultimate "prize":

> Stella looked on, and from her heavenly face
> Sent forth the beams, which made so fair my race.

Thus, Sidney's persona here combines several roles—courtier, lover, poet—which all are mutually defining. Sidney, moreover, is fully aware of this complex and artful construction. As he writes in sonnet 45, where he represents himself as a servant pleading for his mistress's grace: "I am not I, pity the tale of me."

The notion of poetic voice can be used in still broader ways. In the course of a text, a poet may refer to some body of material; some set of conventions; some topical interest or political situation or concern; a theological or philosophical, commitment or dispute; or some aesthetic conception. This particular issue then connects the work with what might be called a conversation going on around it; and its introduction into the text may be described as an additional voice, which the poet engages, either to support or to dispute it. George Herbert writes out of a body of faith that his work supports and realizes; just as Dickinson's writing contests orthodox positions. Shakespeare's sonnets tend self-consciously to address conventions of sonnet-writing, which he ironizes or uses in original ways, thus also complicating and redefining his own voice as speaker. Sonnet 130 is a famous example:

> My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
> Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
> If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
> If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
> I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,
> But no such roses see I in her cheeks;
> And in some perfumes is there more delight
> Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
> I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
> That music hath a far more pleasing sound:

I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

This "anti-Petrarchan" sonnet invokes conventions in praise of the idealized lady in order to complicate them. The *hyperbole*, or exaggeration, of the lady's eyes, lips, breasts, hair, and cheeks in a blason-like list, here subverts itself, by exposing such praise to be hyperbolic and finally untrue: a "false compare." Diction plays its part. The elevated language of sonnet-love, like the image of the mistress herself, is brought down to earthly "ground" by such low-diction words as "wires" and "reeks." The poem's power, however, is felt only when this address to the Petrarchan conventions is recognized. It is a voice answering back another, conventional sonnet voice that the poem implicitly engages.

There is, as well, a different kind of lady in this sonnet, a "dark lady" of uncertain character and reputation instead of the adored, high personage of the sonnet tradition. It is one of Shakespeare's remarkable departures from the traditional sonnet that in place of the elevated lady, his are addressed first to a young man and then to a dark lady, neither of whom has ever been identified with certainty. This shift in address means not only that the sonnet's addressee has changed but with and through it many of the energies that make up the sonnet as a verse form, including the sonnet's speaker. The dark lady's implicit presence introduces her as a kind of new voice in the poem, as the sonnet itself suggests: "I love to hear her speak." But the poet's own persona, and voice, is also altered. It engages, contentiously, the traditional sonnet speaker's acts of praise. And it takes on the role of a different lover, addressing his lady not in hyperbolic supplication, but in terms that are more human, although, as the concluding couplet implies, not less powerful.

To speak of the conventions of the sonnet as a kind of "voice" which this sonnet addresses and answers back, is to use the notion of poetic voice in a rather broad, figurative sense. Like notions of multiple voices in fiction, a poem's relationship to literary tradition, or to political, philosophical, and religious issues can be thought of as the conversation between different voices. But even within a narrower use of the term, poetic voice can take on different roles in the poem and can exhibit a range of balances and mixtures. On

the one hand, even the most apparently personal "I" of a poem, in which the poet seems to be speaking through no voice except his or her own, has in it some act of self-representation, some enactment of a role; and to this extent the poem never offers a simply unself-conscious voice. On the other hand, even when a persona is constructed as a dramatized figure through whom the poem is speaking, the 'mask' always retains some reference to the poet. The boundaries between a lyric I and other represented voices are therefore very varied and flexible.

The importance of poetic voice in a text can also vary: that is, poetic voice may be a central, or a more secondary aspect of the text. In the case of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), poetic voice becomes particularly central, thrusting the poet into prominence so that the whole text becomes a kind of figure for him, and claiming special powers for the poet that endow him with almost preternatural sources of authority. Shelley's mastery of poetic voice can be glimpsed in his sonnet "Ozymandias of Egypt," where he succeeds in inscribing in small compass three, even four voices:

> I met a traveller from an antique land
> Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
> Stand in the desert . . . Near them, on the sand,
> Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
> And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
> Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
> Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
> The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed:
> And on the pedestal these words appear:
> 'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
> Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!'
> Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The sonnet opens in the voice of the poet as "I," who recounts what "a traveller" tells him (the second voice), including the inscription on the monument representing Ozymandias's voice (also hinted at in his "sneer of cold command"). The statue itself expresses the vision, or viewpoint, or voice of the "sculptor" who "well those passions read." A kind of reflection on the sonnet as pledged con-

ventionally to a monumental fame that defies death, this poem instead records the decay of monuments, gradually but inexorably worn away by the desert sands. From among the poem's echo-chamber of voices, the poet's emerges in oracular warning against the arrogance of human power, especially when imposed through tyrannical assault. The very embedding of this Ozymandias voice in a series of reports and representations by others chastises its claim to speak above and dictate to others, asserting against the disdain of this "king of kings" the potency of counter-voices.

Oracular, prophetic, and urgent: in Shelley poetic voice acquires mythological dimensions and powers, while however retaining strong political and historical commitments. The political passion of Shelley's voice sounds clear and sharp in these stanzas from his poem "The Masque of Anarchy":

> II
> I met Murder on the way—
> He had a mask like Castlereagh—
> Very smooth he looked, yet grim;
> Seven blood-hounds followed him:
>
> III
> All were fat; and well they might
> Be in admirable plight,
> For one by one, and two by two,
> He tossed them human hearts to chew
> Which from his wide cloak he drew.

This is as ferocious a poetic voice as ever was. Here, Shelley gives archetypal shape to his political assault, through the mask, and the seven bloodhounds.

Poetic voice as mythological impulse and historical force becomes both topic and structure in Shelley's powerful "Ode to the West Wind." Throughout this poem, a strong pattern of apostrophe and personification blurs the line between the human voice and the forces of nature, both of which turn out to be deeply implicated in the forces of history. The poem's opening (vocative) lines, "O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being," unleash the power of apostrophe to give human shape to what it addresses, a personified power reinforced by the images of "breath" and "being." But these

images then reverberate back onto the poet figure who is speaking, and who the "West Wind" itself mirrors through a rich invocation of biblical tradition (by way, not least, of Milton) where the wind is the divine voice of prophecy (*ruach elohim*). This circular gesture in which the poet invokes the wind which represents the poet, comes to realization in the poem's final section:

> Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
> What if my leaves are falling like its own!
> The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
>
> Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
> Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,
> My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!
>
> Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
> Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!
> And, by the incantation of this verse,
>
> Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
> Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
> Be through my lips to unawakened earth
>
> The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
> If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

The poet, having granted the wind agency, pleads to become the wind's agent, its "lyre." Poetry and world become images of each other, together a "tumult" of "mighty harmonies" that burst forth in "the incantation of this verse." As a "trumpet of prophecy" the poetic wind marks a path of destruction through old nature, which is no less a figure here for old history, toward a new creation which for Shelley is fundamentally political. This revolutionary vision, however, takes shape above all as an impetuous poetic voice, a "Spirit fierce" at once invoked and driven, conjured and commanding. The wind emerges as the poet's word; the poet's word drives the wind. Poetry here becomes almost pure voice, the central figure of the text as it calls nature and history to a new birth.