
CHAPTER

ACTUAL AND INVENTED DIALOGUE

FOURTEEN

In this chapter we're combining two of the kinds of discourse—actual dialogue and invented dialogue. By *dialogue* we mean all kinds of conversation and discussion. If the interlocutors are spontaneously interacting as their own selves, this is an actual dialogue. When this talk is written down, it is a transcript. If, on the other hand, the speakers are role-playing, they are improvising or performing an invented dialogue. When this imagined conversation is written, it is a script (or direct quotation in fiction and comic strips).

Since the language of scripts and transcripts resembles that of informal talk, a less-developed language student may feel more at home with such texts than with most other types of discourse. At the same time, if the scripting is artful and the characters articulate, or if the transcript records inspired discussion, either can provide an example of expressive and eloquent discourse to contrast with the looseness, imprecision, and dullness of much common conversation.

More than any other types of discourse, actual and invented dialogues emphasize the interrogative mode and interaction. They provide models for alert and involved give-and-take, epitomized in the question-and-answer dialogue so familiar in comedy duo routines and characteristic of interviews. Dialogues involve all the language arts since they can be spoken spontaneously, improvised, witnessed, written, read, and performed.

ACTUAL DIALOGUE

Actual dialogue is such a common, natural, and pleasurable experience that we often discount its value, especially as a classroom activity. But conversing, in fact, provides the most pervasive and significant of all processes in the development of language. Actual dialogue includes all oral exchange, such as ordinary socializing, task talk, brainstorming, topic or panel discussion, monologues, interviews, trials, hearings, and debates. Actual dialogue is a broad, fundamental kind of discourse that embraces the whole oral base of language and, when transcribed, entails spelling, punctuating, and paragraphing as well. Since *TALKING AND LISTENING* treats the oral processes of actual dialogue, here we shall consider only actual dialogue that has been written down—transcripts.

■ TRANSCRIBING SPEECH

Creating and reading transcripts are very important activities. They provide one of the easiest transitions from the familiar world of oral interchange to writing. One way to produce a transcript is to tape a conversation and write it down while replaying the tape. Another way is to take notes as you listen and then write up these notes as close to verbatim as possible or desirable. Either way, students develop transcribing and editing skills (see "Transcribing," on page 237).

Classroom talk, telephone chats, overheard dialogues in public places, interviews, TV talk shows, or public events such as court trials or the deliberations of legislative bodies can be taped and transcribed. This transcript can in turn be used as a script for a performance, to recreate the fullness of the original event, or as evidence to quote in documenting research or making a statement.

■ READING AND PERFORMING TRANSCRIPTS

There are as many types of transcripts to read and interpret as there are kinds of dialogue, ranging from snatches of random conversation to tightly planned lectures. Collections of transcripts that include such task-oriented dialogue as the exchanges between the astronauts and ground control, or such public events as trials, hearings, interviews, debates of public officials, and deliberations of legislative bodies are invaluable in acquainting students with the range of this type of text—not to mention the workings of their society!

Transcripts are among the most important sources of documents in this century for the creation of more abstracted materials such as reportage, biography, and history. Tape-recording made feasible the whole new genre of "oral history" (see page 373). Reading and performing transcripts of public processes may teach far more than anything else in school might about how our government and civic bodies function. Information and social issues are presented in a way that students may at first find more familiar and compelling than essays. See page 186 for the process of making Readers Theater scripts, for which transcripts may furnish excellent material, as in Peter Weiss' *The Investigation*. See other parts of *PERFORMING TEXTS* for enacting scripts.

■ CORRESPONDENCE

When parties in conversation are separated or find themselves in a situation where they're not expected to talk, they may take their dialogue to paper. Notes passed in class have a long tradition as a ploy to transcend limits set on conversation. Separated in space, people can talk by radio or telephone, even as a group by means of conference calls, and machines can record these conversations. Though not the same as vocal dialogue, the dialogue-at-a-distance we call correspondence represents the next step beyond it and may as logically be taken up here as anywhere in our tour of discourse. Dialoguing by computers with modems, and faxing, may indeed make this step shorter and give correspondence a new life, if not a new meaning.

Like conversation, correspondence between familiar parties tends to be spontaneous and informal. Personal letters are much like talk also in ranging across other kinds of discourse from true stories to directions and generalizations. Like

public task or topic talk, business or intellectual correspondence may be more formal and focused than personal letters. Memoranda are like business letters within an organization. Often the same people who write these or postal letters to each other also talk together at times in person or by phone, showing clearly how space-time circumstances determine whether interlocutors talk or write and how closely conversation and correspondence may alternate regarding even the same subjects. Most working adults, especially white-collar, mix oral and written dialogue this way constantly on the job. Interestingly, this mixture probably characterizes most adults' personal communication as well: they are alternately talking and writing to relatives and friends, depending on who is where when.

Rapidly developing telecommunications will no doubt influence considerably the relations between conversation and correspondence in both professional and personal lives, as more people, for example, work and study at home and as communication generally replaces transportation.

So considering oral and written dialogue together may have great learning importance. How much, for example, do the language and structure of conversation and correspondence differ when people alternate them in pursuing the same subjects with the same interlocutors? Will chatting and keyboarding become more alike in the future? Or raise consciousness of differences? Delays in response certainly lengthen the monologues within exchanges. The more that one has to go it alone before getting feedback, the harder it is to find out if one is getting across. Body language has to be replaced by purely verbal equivalents. Expression has to be more precise and organization more logical, which means *foreseeing* the receiver's needs.

Increasingly, today's communicants will have to adapt rapidly back and forth between face-to-face or vocal dialogue and dialogue-at-a-distance via various media. *Rapidly*, because they may one moment converse over television telephones ("face-to-face"), another moment over cellular radiophone (vocal only), then dialogue in the same time over modems (permitting immediate response), then correspond over fax (less rapid turnaround) or transportive services (slow exchange). Whereas, in other words, interlocutors used to either converse or correspond, now spoken and written dialogue have spread into a spectrum blurring old distinctions.

What does this mean for teachers? Interlocutors have to be able to shift awarely from one means of communication to another according to the degree of remoteness in time and space, that is, according to the speed and fullness of the feedback. The more dim and delayed, the more one has to speak like a writer. Practice under these rapidly shifting conditions will best teach how to constantly adjust language, organization, and rhetoric from one circumstance to another. The learning environment must contain these various means of modulating between conversation and correspondence—everything from phones and mailboxes to faxes and computer networks. The idea of pen pals is still alive and well at *My Weekly Reader*,¹ which arranges for classes to exchange names and addresses, and thrives also via electronic mail among schools, which enables students to exchange not only news and thoughts but samples of writing as well.

¹ Field Publications, 245 Long Hill Rd., Middleton, CT, 06457.

A child's first letters are typically gifts to the recipient, artifacts often lovingly crafted and delivered with pride. They're a way of sharing feelings and stories with someone cherished or at least familiar, often someone to whom the child could perfectly well speak. Maturing students find reasons to address increasingly remote people in reaching out for new personal relationships and in engaging with the business world. As they shift correspondents, they learn to adapt their discourse to accommodate people who don't otherwise share their lives.

PARALLEL READING

Because electronic media are being used for dialogue, much of it vanishes like conversation itself, but it can be printed out, if desired. Texts can result and be shared with others not party to the dialogue.

Written letters have always been regarded as potentially important reading matter because of the thoughts and feelings of the correspondents, their part in events, or their relationship. Precisely as an extension of conversation, letters can be a comfortable access to books for reluctant readers. Many students will enjoy browsing through books of correspondence for personages, periods, or topics that interest them. Newspaper and magazine columns often take the form of letters querying an expert for advice or information about personal relations, health, sports, etc., and these too attract youngsters. See page 408 about writing advice letters and page 354 about letters as part of true stories (see "Fictional Letters" on page 351).

INVENTED DIALOGUE

Under this heading we shall consider primarily the reading and writing of dialogue in the form of scripts. Dialogue within narrative will be covered in the next chapter. See *INFORMAL CLASSROOM DRAMA* for orally invented dialogue. Dialogue of ideas comes up in the last chapter as being more akin to essay than drama.

■ MEDIA ALTERNATIVES

Any invented dialogue can be presented in a number of ways, each of which has a different potential and set of limitations. If the fictive conversation is a script that depends largely on voice and verbal interaction rather than visual image and scene, it lends itself well to Readers Theater or a radio show. If part of the drama of the script is in an unusual appearance of a character or setting, a TV or puppet show or play or videotape might be more appropriate (see "Puppets" on page 96 and "Filming" on page 335). For a lighthearted or humorous script or one with fantastic characters, an animated film might be best. If the script calls for several very different settings or fast-paced action, a film might serve well. Help students be aware of their options and select a medium that best suits their intentions. For this purpose, have on hand for students to look at and imitate some collections of scripts for various media.

■ POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Aside from general story prompters treated in the next chapter, here are some oral and visual stimuli for writing dialogue.

IMPROVISING

Taping and transcribing improvisations produces a script that can be edited and filled in with stage directions. Improvisers need not set out to create a script, but if they're taping anyway for self-critiquing as they work up a best version, they can transcribe this version as well as, or in lieu of, placing the tape in the library. Collections of professional scripts in the classroom serve as models for the format and punctuating of scripts, thereby eliminating the need to "teach" script-writing. Capturing subtleties of vocal expression on paper is a fine art well practiced as players transcribe their own dialogue together. How much voicing can you get across through punctuation and how much must be conveyed in stage directions? Consider, for example "*Good evening*," "*Good evening ...*," and (sadly) "*Good evening*" (see "Transcribing" on pages 237 and 236).

Or a group might set out to write a script by improvising it first, with or without taping it. This allows them to rough out action and dialogue and leave the perfecting to the writing, which one member might do alone or all might do separately or collectively. A single writer's script can be discussed and revised in a writing workshop, often by trying out the script as discussed later. Separate versions can be merged in a collective session or two. Finished scripts of improvisations can be rehearsed and performed or exchanged with other groups to be performed by them.

Just as improvisations can take off from minimal situations (see page 106), so can written scripts. Inasmuch as writing a script is making up dialogue as you go, an author is improvising from a basic idea of some human interaction. Help students move easily from floor to text by thinking of script-writing as just shifting the form of the improvising. The big difference of course is that, in writing, a single actor is playing all the roles and doing so on paper instead of with voice. Experienced oral improvisers will make this transition easily, aided by transcribing some improvisations, and will write much better scripts for this experience. Indeed, the best way to start writing scripts is to improvise. This heads off many problems raised later in this chapter.

COMIC STRIPS

One of the best ways to ease youngsters into writing invented dialogue is to have them use the comic-strip medium. They might begin by remaking comic strips—whiting out or cutting out the original dialogue and filling in their own. Or you may find on the market some consumable booklets of comics with blank balloons for doing just this. Looking for cues for dialogue, the writers read the faces, gestures, and circumstances that they see in the drawings. Filling in comics makes students aware of dialogue by isolating it.

If copies are made of strips with empty dialogue balloons, writers can compare their different dialogues for the same strips. This raises interesting issues of interpretation and aptness. Some may decide to contrast spoken words with gestures or facial expressions by, say, having a character who looks scared try to sound courageous. But maybe others think the character looks surprised instead and therefore invent very different dialogue.

Next, students might create their own stories and characters as well as dialogue. Since this involves inventing, drawing, and writing, partners may be especially welcome. They can be directed on an activity card to go on to make their

own comic books by drawing panels as well as writing the dialogue, thinking up new situations for borrowed characters, or making up their own characters. They may find it easy to start by converting into comic-strip format a story they already know. Comics and cartoons are good for rendering riddles or jokes that take a question-and-answer form. Students can display their comics or read them to younger children or other people, allowing the listeners to see the pictures as they read aloud.

Seeing how narrative can be carried by dialogue is good preparation for writing regular scripts. Like films, comics put prose narrative into pictures. The dialogue balloons act as the sound track in films, the quotation marks in prose, and the script format in plays.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Pictures of people or animals can stimulate dialogue-writing. A group spreads out some photographs or other pictures of two or three people who might be talking and then write collectively or separately a script of what they are saying to each other. First, they should take time to examine the picture, noting the age, clothing, posture, gesture, facial expression, setting, and activity of the people. Individuals may do this alone, of course, but may benefit from doing it first in a group. If members all write on the same picture, they can compare and discuss the differences among their dialogues, which will probably be considerable. Then they can display the scripts around the photo that inspired them. If they write from different pictures, they can learn a lot from seeing what each created from his choice.

Applying this same process, students may:

- give voice to animals or things if pictures of these suggest that they might be conversing.
- invent dialogues from photos showing *more* than two speakers.
- imagine a monologue uttered by one of the parties in the photo to another, as may be suggested by the relative stances of the figures. What circumstances explain his holding forth while the other or others let him?
- choose a picture of someone who looks like he might be talking to himself about something going on around him, imagine his interior monologue, and write it down as a script for a soliloquy (voiced for the audience but not heard by others in the scene).

If results of any of these are posted, a game can be to try to guess which dialogues or monologues go with which pictures. Scripts can be performed by the authors or others or made into booklets for either silent reading or performance.

Another alternative is to write dialogue for a “silent film,” a video showing action but lacking sound.

TAKING OFF FROM LITERATURE

Fables, folk tales, myths, legends, Bible stories, and other synoptic narratives can be fleshed out into scripts as described for oral dramatization in “Situations from Reading” on page 107.

In one ninth grade, drama and script-writing were used in a study of myths. The students took the characterizations and plot summaries from Edith Hamil-

ton's *Mythology* and expanded them into group-written scripts, which they then rehearsed and performed. They used the texts only as sources, which meant that individuals read them in whatever way they thought best (including scanning) to glean what they needed to know for their drama. What actually happened was that in order to make up the dialogue and compose the scenes, the groups had to straighten out the action and interpret the characters by discussing them and by referring to the text for evidence. This class got very involved in the dramatizations. Another class in the same school read and studied the myths as texts. After reading a number of the myths, this class began to groan and lose interest. At the end of the year, the two classes took the same factual test on the myths. The class that had enacted them remembered them as well as the other that had studied them with the teacher. Students, moreover, who had been known to read with poor comprehension seemed definitely to understand and remember the material they had dramatized much better than they usually remembered texts they studied.²

Students can draw a minimal situation from a scene in a story, play, or novel they've read. This would be an off-stage scene referred to by the characters or the narrator but not directly presented. For example, we're told that one character informed another of something important. How did he say it, and how did the other react when he heard the news? Or what do you suppose Cinderella's sisters said to themselves as they went home from the ball?

■ A SCRIPT-WRITING SEQUENCE

Inexperienced writers would do well to keep to one continuous scene unrolling in one place. Since drama by definition is creating events at life rate, the playing time of the script would be approximately the same as the time the action would take in real life, allowing for some artistic stretching or compressing. Putting the matter this way helps keep the scene truly dramatic, in the moment, and emphasizes the fact that a script is a blueprint for enactment, not merely a text to be read like any other.

As a blueprint for moment-to-moment action, most scripts represent a far greater detailing of story than any narrative, which is always some narrator's summary of such things as dialogue and movement. In other words, as a direct simulation of action, plays represent the least abstracted, most detailed rendering of a story possible. Students who have had experience scripting tend, when writing regular narrative, to have a better sense of how much detail is required and when to include or exclude it. If students practice telling stories as both dramas and narratives, they will learn to do both better from understanding the relationship between them.

Because they're so used to narrative, inexperienced script writers tend to write a play as though it were still told by a storyteller free to jump a great deal in time and space. The result is a flurry of many very brief snatches of scenes

² Then head of the English department at Weeks Junior High School in Newton, Massachusetts, Joseph Hanson initiated this research for his own purposes long before the teacher-researcher movement got under way, but it exemplifies the practical sort of research that the movement today encourages teacher to conduct in their classrooms, as mentioned under "Teacher Research" on page 260.

threaded along “stage directions” that are really a sort of narration, even to telltale lapses into the past tense. Stage directions should contain only what can be seen and heard, except for an occasional indication about how to stage and act the scene. Explanation of background circumstances, recounting of offstage action, and descriptions of thoughts and feelings indicate that the author is still thinking of narrative, not drama, which is a no-host show. The test for all this is how well a crew could stage the script, or film it, as the case may be.

Much depends on how experienced a student is in both improvising and performing, because such experience heads off many scripting difficulties. For one thing, veteran improvisers are not nearly so likely to confuse dramatic writing with narrative. Instead of trying to warn students about pitfalls, just suggest a rough sequence that will build experience in script writing so as to avoid some of its problems. One way is to improvise dialogues orally, because these are staged from the outset. The other is to go from simple to complex as we’ll now describe.

Begin with short duologues, scripts having only two characters and one scene. Edward Albee began his career with a duologue of exactly this sort, “The Zoo Story.” Orchestrating voices beyond a pair complicates interaction by more than just simple addition because of all the possible combinations of interlocutors. After beginners have written some complete duologue scenes, they may move either downward in number to dramatic and interior monologues, or upward to plays with larger casts. We will outline a sequence suggesting possibilities in both directions.

If students do improvisations of each of the following kinds of plays before writing scripts for each, the scripts will be far more playable and require less revision. Make initial playwriting a direct extension of improvisation, and state the directions in performance terms. For a duologue, for example: “Write a single, uninterrupted scene playable in around five minutes, with minimal stage directions that read like a sensory recording, and containing no more than two characters.” This last stipulation keeps the dynamics manageable and makes dramatic focusing easier.

SHORT DUOLOGUE

To write a duologue is to invent a two-person conversation by writing down what each person says in turn. One thinks of two definite people located somewhere and doing something. Who are they? Why are they there together? Why are they talking to each other? What is each trying to do through the dialogue? How different do they sound? How much can an onlooker tell about the people from the way they talk? Members of a workshop deal with these questions as they try out the script, some reading it, some watching.

TOP THAT
Randall Peterson

A: Hi . . . I'm John.

B: I'm Frank. Glad to meet you.

A: Man, I hate these flights!

B: Headed for Phoenix?

A: Yep. Going to visit an old army buddy.

B: Really? I was in the army once . . . worst experience of my life. I don't know where they got those cooks, but was that food ever bad. I was always going hungry. I remember this time when a guy put a plastic vomit on his tray at the cafeteria. They charged him a quarter for it, too!

A: That sounds pretty bad. Our food was really quite good. You could have as much as ya wanted. Did they ever know how to whip up a feast!

B: Boy, did I ever get stuck at the wrong base. It was a desert down there. One day it was well over a hundred and they made us go on a hike with full gear. We had guys dropping like flies. But I suppose you had it lucky.

A: I sure did. It was practically tropical compared to my farm. The winters were so mild that we would sneak out at night and go swimming in the creek. You could get a great tan in the summer, too. The hikes we went on were only about as far as to my mailbox and back at home.

B: Our barracks were terrible. I was less cramped in my bathroom at home. We had eight guys in one room once. What a pain! There were smelly socks and T-shirts strewn everywhere. It sure makes work in the stock market seem easy.

A: My base was great. Our commanders were a riot. One day we were camping way up in the hills. In the middle of the night our commanders woke all of us up except one guy. We packed everything up and left him there. He could have died when he woke up. We had a great time with those commanders.

B: My commander was terrible. You couldn't get away with anything. He made us do calisthenics until we dropped. My base had no recreation at all. My college fraternity had parties all the time. When I got into the army, I couldn't believe it. There was nothing to do.

A: One thing I can say for my base is that they sure know how to entertain ya. They had a pool, bowling, movies every Friday, and a dance once a month. Yep ... times in Yuma were really great.

B: Yuma? You're kidding . . . That's where I was.³

Student duologues will vary from (a) tight interaction of personalities to (b) dual reminiscence to (c) exchange of ideas and attitudes. In other words, they may go in the direction of (a) drama, (b) narrative, or (c) essay. Take a moment to think of where the sample above stands in this respect. Actually, this flexibility is all right, because in responding to such differences, workshops can help authors understand better what they've created and what they might do with a script next. Maybe the reminiscence *should* become a narrative, the intellectual exchange an essay or Socratic dialogue. Can a script fulfill itself better by becoming a prose piece or by remaining a script, perhaps of another kind? Writing duologue off nonstop for fifteen to thirty minutes often elicits a lot of valuable material that might not come to the author any other way, because of the interplaying viewpoints. In revising, he might well cast the dialogue into another form.

After hearing others read and discuss his script, an author might also continue it into a new stage or even add a third character. Or he might discover that because one speaker dominates the other extremely, he has in effect written an exterior monologue ("dramatic monologue"). What does this mean? Or perhaps one speaker goes inward so far as to be talking to himself. Is he really soliloquizing? What does *this* mean? Don't worry that duologue writing often goes into something else. It's a way to externalize problem-solving. We often think in just this dialectic of "on the one hand" and "on the other hand." See the discussion of alter egos farther on. Some of the more interesting matters that workshops can

³ Taken from pp. 204-5 of *Active Voices II*, ed. James Moffett and Phyllis Tashlik (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1987), an anthology of writing by students in grades 7-9, which includes examples of other scripts treated in this chapter.

take up are just these transformations of one sort of voicing into another. This is in the nature of the dynamics between people and within a person. The main thing is to help students explore and exploit these shifts. Consider that it's all good if understood and utilized. Furthermore, following out the implications of these shifts away from pure duologue will create natural pathways into monologues or scripts with larger casts, which are basically just such shifts in dynamics.

Mixing duologues with monologues and dialogues when doing readings, revision, and performances will help students understand the relations among these and to see how they might be combined in a single script, as happens all the time with longer plays. They are the building blocks of drama, and much of the art of writing plays consists of juxtaposing them for various effects.

Experienced with duologues, the young playwright can try his hand with scripts for three characters, then increase the number of both characters and scenes. Or he can try monologues. Either direction requires more skill. Since plays with multiple characters are more familiar, we'll take them up next.

A PLAY OF MORE THAN ONE SCENE

Experienced students might try one-act plays containing two to four short scenes that distinctly develop a dramatic idea. The activity directions need not stipulate multiple scenes; they merely need call for a complete play performable in, say, twenty or thirty minutes. The number of scenes and characters is left to the author. The advantage of having done duologues and monologues before is that these are key elements in larger, more varied plays, so that our playwright stands a better chance of successfully employing all dramatic resources—dueling, “speeches,” soliloquies, as well as group interplay.

Here's a sample play by a ninth-grade girl that illustrates how some high school students might begin to advance from duologue to more characters while parceling out the action over several scenes.⁴ Her introduction and her abstract designation of the characters show the representative value she intended the characters and action to have. Like professionals, amateurs usually make statements through their dramas.

BUT MOM . . .

Author's introduction

Names have been omitted except where necessary (as in the dialogue) because I feel the scenes are too typical to pin down to one family.

Scene I

(It is a typical study. The walls are dark wood. There is an overhead lamp lighting up the room. A middle-aged lady, dressed in a black sweater and pants, is sitting at the desk. She has a cigarette in her hand. She is tapping absentmindedly on the ashtray. A young girl of about fifteen can be heard reading a paper she is holding. As she finishes, she looks up.)

⁴ This student was in the class of Joseph Hanson, head of the English department at Weeks Junior High School, Newton, Massachusetts.

DAUGHTER: *Well? Any comments?*

MOTHER: *Very good for a first draft.*

DAUGHTER: *Mother, I read you the first draft two days ago.*

MOTHER: *Oh, (absently) did you?*

DAUGHTER: *Yes, and you told me to rewrite the part about the type of love between parents and children. Do you have any final corrections?* (There is a pause. The mother doesn't seem to be concentrating on what is being said to her. The daughter is waiting for a reply.)

DAUGHTER: *Well—?* (She puts the paper on the table.)

MOTHER: *I'm thinking.* (Then she seems to be talking aloud to herself.) *I better call and change my hair appointment to nine o'clock.*

DAUGHTER: *Mother!*

MOTHER: *Hmmm?*

DAUGHTER: *You're not listening.*

MOTHER: *What?* (Pause) *I'm sorry, dear, I wasn't listening.*

Scene II

(The table in the kitchen is small and has been crowded into a small nook. The area has been painted another color. The purpose behind this was to make it look like a separate breakfast room.

The daughter is sitting at the table reading. The mother summons her while entering the room.)

MOTHER: *Why can't you once have the table set before your father gets home?*

DAUGHTER: *But Mom, we're going out for dinner.*

MOTHER: *Never mind the excuses. Why don't you go upstairs and start getting ready, dear. The Shermans will be by for us at seven and we don't want to keep them waiting.*

DAUGHTER: *But Mom, it's three-thirty.*

MOTHER: *I know, but sometimes it takes you a long time to get ready. Besides, I want you to look nice for them. You want to make a good impression on them, don't you?*

DAUGHTER: *Mother. I am not concerned with looking nice for them—I am not out to impress people. I want to look nice for myself.*

MOTHER: *O.K. How about for your father and me? We like to see you look nice.*

DAUGHTER: *Hmmm.*

MOTHER: *If not for us, do it for your brother. He's dating their daughter. You don't want them to think he comes from a family of slob.*

DAUGHTER: *How come he doesn't have to go tonight?*

MOTHER: *You're making it sound like a chore to go out with us. You know, if you want to stay home tonight you can. We aren't twisting your arm. It costs a lot of money to take you out and there are plenty of other things we could be doing with it instead.*

DAUGHTER: *You still didn't say why Alan got out of it.*

MOTHER: *Alan "got out of it" because he had already made a date for tonight and it wouldn't be polite to break it.*

DAUGHTER: *But Mom, he's going out with René Sherman!*

MOTHER: (What her daughter has said finally dawns on her) *You know, you have a point there.*

FATHER: (As he enters he pats his daughter on the head) *Yes, I always said she was a sharp kid.*

DAUGHTER: *Oh, Dad.*

FATHER: *How about playing a little tennis?*

MOTHER: *Mel, I thought she should be getting ready to go out.*

FATHER: *But Ruth, it's three-thirty!*

Scene III

(Father and daughter enter the house with their tennis rackets. The clock on the wall shows that it is close to six-thirty.)

- MOTHER: *Did you have a good game?*
 DAUGHTER: *Yes, and boy am I exhausted.*
 MOTHER: *Mel, you shouldn't have let her work herself up like that. She just got over being sick.*
 FATHER: *But Ruth, she was better two weeks ago.*
 MOTHER: *I heard her blow her nose yesterday.*
 FATHER: *I'm sure tired. We had to stop at the gas station on the way home because the tire was flat and I didn't have a spare.*
 DAUGHTER: *Come on—let's get ready. The Shermans will be here in less than a half-hour* (Daughter and father start up the stairs together, but Mother suddenly calls out to them.)
 MOTHER: *Wait a minute dear. Could you stay down here a minute and help me roll a ball of yarn?*
 DAUGHTER: *Now?*
- MOTHER: *Well, I want it for tonight.*
 DAUGHTER: *But Mom, we're going out to dance. You can't knit at the table.*
 FATHER: *Maybe she wants to tell some interesting yarns.*
 MOTHER: *All right* (she continues in a rejected tone) *go upstairs and get ready. It's OK. I'll do it myself and if I don't finish then I won't finish. So I won't knit tonight.* (She is obviously waiting for a response, but she gets none; she goes on to add:)
 MOTHER: *If it was a sweater for you, I'm sure you'd be able to find the time.*
 FATHER: *Why don't we get dressed first, and if we have any time, then roll the yarn.*
 MOTHER: *You know there won't be time after we get dressed. You've got to do it now.*
 FATHER: *But Ruth, it really isn't shorter if you roll yarn first and then get dressed, or . . . Oh, never mind. It's no use.*

Scene IV

(The door bell rings. The mother, dressed in a simple black cocktail dress, can be seen in the hall running towards the stairs. She sees her reflection with the pink wall paper in the mirror and stops.)

- MOTHER: *Somebody else get it please—I'm a mess. It must be the Shermans.* (She starts back to her room.)
 DAUGHTER: *Joyous raptures.*
 MOTHER: (from her room) *Make sure you know who it is before you open the door!* (The daughter takes one last glance in the mirror, straightens her hair and gallops down the stairs. She pulls the curtain to the side to see who is outside. Forcing a big smile, she sighs and opens the door. Suddenly without warning she is bombarded by six-year-old twin boys dressed in suits. One has a cowlick and both have devilish grins. Then in walks a little girl, obviously a little older than them and feeling more dignified.)
- DAUGHTER: *Won't you come in? Mom and Dad will be right down.* (The Shermans enter. You can tell by their faces all the fun they had getting the children ready and over there.)
 GUEST: *I hope we're not too early.*
 MOTHER: (Coming down the stairs putting her last few hairs into place mumbles to herself.) *Three and a half minutes.*
 GUEST: *What's that?*
 MOTHER: (Blushing slightly.) *I said Mel will be down in a half a minute. Let me take your coats and we'll go inside for a drink.* (The telephone rings. The daughter runs into the study and answers it.)
 DAUGHTER: *Hello?* (pause) *John?* (Pause—sarcastically.) *No, you don't*

have the wrong number, you just have the wrong person. (She hangs up.) (The guest's voice can be heard as they approach the study.)

GUEST: *Oh, Tommy brought his crayons with him. (They are now in the room.) Is it all right if he draws on that paper until we're ready to leave? (He is pointing to the paper that the daughter had read to her mother that afternoon.)*

MOTHER: *Of course, it's only a first draft of Amy's and she doesn't mind. Do you, dear?*

DAUGHTER: *But Mom . . .*

LEARNING ABOUT TECHNIQUE. For one thing, this play raises the important technical issue of scene-breaking: how many scenes, and which ones, are required to dramatize successfully a given piece of material? Does "But Mom ..." need four scenes, and what is the effect of each?

Somewhere in the learning cycle through which such a play passes, this issue of technique should be raised. The sooner in the cycle the better, perhaps, but not necessarily always. The whole cycle can include a drama workshop reading and discussion of the first draft, or silent reading of the first draft in a writing workshop followed by written commentary and discussion; a rehearsed reading or performance before the class; and preparation for publication by a group of editors who consult with the author and incorporate the reactions of audience and actors.

Over-fragmenting a play into small scenes may represent a lingering confusion of narrative with drama, an immoderate eagerness to score an ideological point through plot manipulation, or simply an unskillful, uneconomical constructing of the material. Scene shifts mean time pauses and perhaps new locales. Are these justified? They also introduce problems about how to indicate in the dialogue facts that cannot be seen—the new time and place, their significance, and what has occurred in the interim. Putting such information in the mouths of the characters can come off as well-motivated and integral action or as obvious "exposition" for the audience's benefit. Pacing is also involved in scene shifts. Is each scene as long or as short as it ought to be for what it tries to do? The speed of both the individual scene and the succession of scenes has to be considered here—the rate at which an audience assimilates certain actions and the cumulative effect of short and long scenes.

These dramaturgical matters, which are exactly those that the professional faces, can be raised by students in their own ways at various points in the cycle, but if necessary you may raise them. Do this while sitting in on a writing group or acting group, sometimes at the end of a class reading, if a certain problem seems to be widespread but unrecognized. Often one thoughtful question is enough: "What would happen if we dropped this scene?" (To let the students test whether it is justified or not.) "What if Charles dramatized a meeting in the shop instead of having the girl just refer to it?" (To open up other compositional possibilities.) Pace can be focused on by your personal reaction: "I felt that scene might be slowed down [or speeded up]. Did anyone else feel that?" Most of all, try to spot the technical implications buried in student commentary and to make them emerge so that students will then spot them for each other.

LEARNING TO DESCRIBE. If one glances back through "But Mom . . .," looking only at the stage directions, one will become aware of how much description the play contains. A virtue of playwriting is the opportunity it affords to practice the accurate and significant rendering of appearances—the look of a room, the look on

someone's face. Far from being an exercise, play description is purposeful and functional—an indication of what the set and prop people should do and how the performers should look and behave. The writer has to think about real spatial relations, on the one hand, and about significant selection of details, on the other. Production of a play will often put description to the test of clarity. Moreover, since stage directions also include an account of the action, the playwright must, like other storytellers, coordinate description with narration but in ways peculiar to scripts.

DRAMATIC OR EXTERIOR MONOLOGUE

In literature a "dramatic monologue" refers to a character holding forth solo to one or more other characters in particular circumstances. It is a synonym for "exterior monologue," which may be a clearer term for students, especially in contrast to "interior monologue." Most monologues, at least in real life, occur in the midst of dialogue; only in literature are they sometimes excerpted as self-sufficient speeches. So students can begin monologuing as part of improvising a duologue in which one character dominates and the other is reduced to incidental reacting: a parent gives a lecture during an argument with a child; one character tries to "bring around" another who's sulking; or a salesman gives his pitch. Next, players think of situations in which, for the entire scene, one of the two people does all of the talking and the other reacts silently or merely mumbles an occasional reply or is cut off whenever he opens his mouth. This often occurs when an individual is addressing a group, as a coach giving a pep talk at halftime, a treasurer explaining to the board why an organization is short of money, a young person giving an excuse to an adult, or a boss giving directions to his workers. Several other students silently play the listeners, and students take turns being the monologist.

The first time or two that students write dramatic monologues, activity directions should probably set up the monologue in script form and stipulate a playing time of two to five minutes. Later students can try stripping the writing down to voice only, foregoing stage directions; the accompanying action, the time and place, and the identity of the listeners all have to be reflected or implied in what the speaker says. The monologue is written as a straight piece of prose, without opening and closing quotation marks. It may recount an incident and thus constitute a kind of short story told by a participant.

LULLABY
Anne Getis

Come on, Allen, your parents have left, it's time for you and me to have some great fun! (Sitter goes over to child, takes the child's hand, which the child suddenly jerks away.) What's bothering you? Didn't you kiss your Mommy goodnight? (Stoops down to child.) Well, it's all right, you'll see her tomorrow when you wake up. Now, Allen, what would you like to do? (Allen begins to cry again.) What's wrong, Allen? Why are you crying again? Oh, please, Allen, stop crying. Don't you want to have fun tonight? (Sitter goes over to bookshelf.) Look Allen, here's a Big Bird and look, oh wow, here's your favorite. Cooky Monster! (Sitter goes back over to Allen.) Allen, couldn't you stop that silly crying? If you don't I'll go and watch T.V. and leave you here. (Sitter pretends to leave but then changes mood.) Allen, if you stop crying you can have your dinner and watch T.V. You'd like that, wouldn't you? Why don't you tell me what the matter is? (To audience and kind of nervous.) What will your parents say if you don't eat your supper? Why does this always happen to me? What will your parents think of me when they discover you've cried all night?

They probably won't pay that much. ... (Looks back at Allen.) Won't you at least say something, Allen? Oh, please, please stop crying! Most good kids don't cry all night and give their babysitter a rotten time. Don't you want to be a good kid? Well, I guess you don't care, huh? (Goes over to Allen, who is now huddled on the bed.) Now, please, dear sweet Allen, don't worry about Mommy and Daddy. They went out just for tonight. Don't worry. They'll be back very soon. In fact, as soon as you open those blue eyes of yours and those tears disappear, they will be back. (Sitter stands up and looks at Allen's body on the bed.) Did you hear me? Well, (to audience) believe it or not the kid is asleep! Now, only 6 more hours until your parents arrive. (Covers Allen up.) Sleep well, Allen.⁵

Self-exposure of the speaker is one of the things best accomplished by this form, sometimes resulting in unconscious self-satirization. Much of the art of plays and fiction consists of making the characters reveal themselves without author commentary. Students who have tried this art recognize it when they see it and read literature with better comprehension. Consider, for another example of literary technique, the matter of understatement. At the same time that dramatic monologue overplays the speaker, it underplays the listener. As much as anything, what accounts for the success of the famous opening scene in *Pride and Prejudice* is that Jane Austen quotes Mrs. Bennett directly and throws the brief replies of Mr. Bennett into indirect discourse, thereby putting the grossness of the one on display and investing the other with a sly and winning irony. It frequently happens that the reader of a dramatic monologue identifies with the listener, not with the speaker.

Understatement and the speaker's self-betrayal are artful creations by the writer. Instead of setting out to teach these literary techniques as concepts—and spoiling good literature by presenting it as examples of the concepts—the teacher does better to let the students *practice* the techniques. Then they will see what an author is doing *while* they're reading instead of needing to have it pointed out to them afterward.

While still emphasizing personality and behavior, as in dramatic dialogue, monologue begins moving writers toward ideas and essays. An isolated and sustained individual voice takes the fundamental posture of the writer, who is a monologist.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE AS A POEM. Mature students may be encouraged to write the dramatic monologue as a poem. To do so involves them in the important matter, so often encountered in both lyric and dramatic poetry, of harmonizing the natural diction and rhythm of speech with the artifices of poetic language—the greater richness of diction, inversions of word order, metrical and rhythmic patterns, and breaking of lines. Why would a writer depart from daily speech? What does he gain? Why do so many dramatists not concern themselves about realistic language? If they write dramatic speech in poetry, students will know. Furthermore, associating dramatic monologue with poetry will accustom students to listening for a character voice when they read any poetry, for even if he's not creating a character as such, the writer of a poem selects a tone, stance, and style that is not always the same for every poem; he creates a speaking personality out of some part of himself.

⁵ Taken from p. 205 of *Active Voices III*, ed. James Moffett, Patricia Wixon, Vincent Wixon, Sheridan Blau, and John Phreaner (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1987), an anthology of writing by students in grades 10–12, which includes examples of other scripts treated in this chapter.

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

An interior monologue is what a character situated in a given time and circumstance is perceiving and thinking, verbalized as the character might do so were he to utter these thoughts and feeling. Although it's merely a simulation of trains of thought or streams of consciousness that go on in us all the time, as a school writing project interior monologue can look very different from anything the students are familiar with. The most effective point of departure for interior monologue is a minimal situation for improvising in which one character speaks his thoughts aloud as he engages in some action. There may or may not be other people in the scene; if there are, they pantomime. Students who have created dialogues and dramatic monologues will find shifting the monologue inward to be a fairly simple and very understandable variation.

An activity card might feature a photograph and ask students to imagine what a person pictured there is thinking. Or students may be told: "Make up a character whose way of thinking and speaking you feel confident you can imitate; imagine him somewhere doing something; then write down in his own words what he is thinking and feeling during this situation." With concurrent drama work, and with a previous program such as we have been recommending, students should have little difficulty with this.

At first, interior monologue can be written as a script with stage directions, and then, on subsequent occasions, as a direct presentation of voice alone. The former corresponds to soliloquy in the theater, and the latter to a kind of fiction or poetry. The script form may be an easier way to make the transition from improvisation to paper. To the extent, however, that the character's thoughts are reflecting what is going on around him, stage directions may be unnecessarily repetitious. On the other hand, a contrast may be intended between the thoughts and the surrounding action. The direct presentation of the inner voice alone takes more art, since no other source of information supplements the voice, and the resulting indirection is often more enjoyable for the reader, who must infer circumstances more on his own. The difference between writing an acting script and writing a version to be read is itself valuable to learn about. Theatrical soliloquy and the fictional technique of interior monologue can also be related in this way, which would be a considerable help in reading literature.

One virtue of this kind of writing, as the example below demonstrates, is that the movement of language is fitted to the movement of mind, a virtue that goes far beyond dramatic writing. It's what makes even an abstract essay seem to live and breathe, to put us in the writer's mind. There's a special kind of self-expressive value too: under the pretense of putting words in the mouth of an invented character, a student can write many real personal thoughts that he might be embarrassed to offer frankly as his own. Consider also the detailing of thought and feeling in the paper below compared to the less effective, generalized statement of feeling a student would produce in a paper the same length written in response to "My Most ——— Moment." Because drama is a moment-to-moment thing, activities based on it will inevitably produce detail.

As a chronicling of thoughts, an interior monologue is a kind of story, but the content of the thoughts may range over many things that do not belong to the moment. The monologue may utter not only present sensations but also memories of the past, speculations about the future, and general reflections of all sorts. Thus it may contain bits of narrative and personal essay. The chronology of the present

provides an easy and meaningful way to talk about and relate many things that teachers often try to get at by more topically organized writing. Often interior monologues reflect two or more different inner selves in dialogue with each other. (see "Alter Egos" on page 326). The title by the able ninth-grade girl writing below expresses some of what we've been trying to say.

MINUTES OF MEDITATION

The class is always ready to go at the end of the period, no questions are raised. I just sit here, like a fool, always wanting to inquire about something, but never daring to do so. Well, today I must force myself, or I'll flunk tomorrow's test. Only five minutes of the class left. Let's see, how should I phrase the question? This is really silly, I have been in school seven years, and every year it is the same thing. I don't dare ask the teacher a thing. Luckily in the past someone else has asked my question, but there were times when someone didn't, and I forfeited. Let's face it, one shouldn't be afraid of a teacher anymore, he has superiority but not so much that he would punish you for asking a simple question.

Four minutes, ohh my stomach is jumping with butterflies, it's as if I was going to perform on stage, which I wouldn't do in a million years. I guess I'm just one of those people who can't face another person. I must stand up for my opinions and what I want. It may take me a few minutes (like now) of meditation, before I will do something. I'm sure all people have gone through what I'm going through, they just cover up for it. I certainly admire these people. I remember a time last year when someone told me "Gee, I'm scared!" and I answered "Why should you be scared? just try to relax, and forget the people in the audience" (she was in a play). There I was giving her advice, and I sit here a year later trying to convince myself to relax.

Three minutes, the time passes so quickly, I wish the minutes would be hours. These kids around me, always jutting their hands into the air. So brave, no that's ridiculous, they are just not timid like me. I'm sure I'll learn how to speak up. I better or else I don't know what I will do. In high school I probably will have to contribute (as I should now) in order to get the full benefit of what's being learned, and I better start right now, marks close soon. I remember on my last report card, the teacher's comment was "Should contribute more," the same comments for years. My marks are good, but they would improve if I contribute more. I have all these ideas in my head which are just right, or answers I could have kicked myself for not saying.

Two minutes, ohh my hand is getting shaky, my stomach suddenly hurts, maybe I'm hungry, which is highly possible being fourth period, but it is really nervousness. I better look interested in the class (I'm trying) I don't want my teacher to think I'm idle. (Boy, would he be surprised to hear what goes on in my head, he'd probably think a whole dictionary is pouring out its words, like salt.) Now I'm beginning to bite my nails, a stupid habit. I should start eating carrots, maybe that will stop the biting, I have read it does. I'll ask my mother to buy a package today, and I'll eat them at home whenever my hands become idle—for instance, when I watch television. When my hands are idle, or when I'm nervous, they seem to creep up to my mouth.

One minute, I should begin to rehearse what I'm going to say. "Ah, Mr.—, I would like to ask you a question." No! That's much too formal. There must be a better approach, "Ah, excuse me, about the—, is it blah, blah, blah, etc.?" That's better, but I bet I won't use any planned approach, I'll just say what comes natural. That's actually the simplest way. The kids are beginning to pack up, a signal for teachers to give out the homework assignment, sure enough. Oh what a bother, all the books away, and one must drag out a notebook, usually at the bottom

of the pile. Let's see, now I'm getting tense, this isn't as if I was going to be executed, it's a normal everyday thing (to me it isn't though!) Oh what should I say, my stomach is doing somersaults.

There's the dismissal bell, everyone jumps up. Luckily lunch is next, so maybe no one will be around when my turn comes, and yet I'd feel better if there was at least one of my friends with me. No, I have to go through it by myself. I'll just take a deep breath and ask the "deadly" (but important) question. Well... here goes!⁶

As the paragraphing indicates, this monologue is basically ordered by time, and yet a personal organization of ideas is laid over against mere chronology. There is a coherent subject—the girl's timorous indecision—and it is developed. This subject, incidentally, is essentially that of T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," also a kind of interior monologue. When this girl reads Eliot's poem later she will enter into it with much greater ease than she would have without this experience.

INVENTING SOLILOQUIES FOR LITERARY CHARACTERS

Students don't always present themselves in thin disguise. Often they try to become another person, to extend themselves by imagination into an invented state of mind. Making up the thoughts of a character in literature is one way of entering into and fully comprehending both the character and the work in which he appears. One ninth-grade teacher asked her class to imagine an interior monologue for Achilles as he is sulking in his tent listening to the sounds of battle.⁷ One boy wrote this straight off during fifteen minutes in class:

My friends and enemies alike die out there on the battle field in honor while I, swift-footed Achilles, sit here and sulk by the quick-sailing ships. My strong principles or the battle field. I can find no honor now.

If I go into battle my principle will be broken. I will do a great injustice to myself. Yet if the gods keep me here, the Greeks, fellow warriors, will call me a traitor or a coward. There is no honor in that.

I must go out to the battle field. How can a man be so cruel as to leave his companions to fight until death! My friends Odysseus and Ajax out there fighting Trojans while I sit here and have pity on my self.

Pity. Why should I have pity? Has not Agamemnon wronged me? Did he not take Briseis, my fair prize? Did he not shame me in front of my men, and was it not because of his greed that I am sitting here? Yes! Let the Greeks say where is the coward Achilles. And they will open their eyes and see their own greedy King Agamemnon drove Achilles away, taking his prize, insulting him, and relieving him of all honor.

I Achilles am doing right to sit here. And I will do it until I am given back my honor and my prizes.

In order to be Achilles for fifteen minutes one must draw on what one has read and put it together meaningfully. The dramatic approach causes the student

⁶ Weeks Junior High School, Newton, Massachusetts.

⁷ The teacher was Lucy Woodward at Weeks Junior High School, Newton, Massachusetts.

to actively work over and complete in his mind what an author has presented to him. Such papers can both show and increase reading comprehension.

ALTER EGOS. Another kind of improvisation brings together both dramatic and interior monologue by means of a double cast, two for each character. Immediately after one character speaks, his alter ego, or other self, soliloquizes his *unspoken* thoughts. Then another character responds aloud to what the first said (not to what he thought), and then *his* alter ego too utters his thoughts.

Playing two equal selves is an extension of this alter-ego technique. One person imagines that there are two selves within him—like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde—and with a partner he improvises a conversation between these two selves. For example, a student might improvise or write a discussion between his hopeful and his cynical self. Staying close to real feelings and attitudes is what vitalizes this kind of writing. We all carry on interior dialogues, sometimes quite unconsciously, in order to sort out and make decisions about things. Improvising multiple interior monologues is a good way to focus on inner conflicts and problems. As these inner dialogues are discussed with peers, the nature of the different selves and of their relationship can be explored.

A vast literature exists of alter egos, from Castor and Pollux and the twins that Shakespeare borrowed from antiquity to Poe (“William Wilson”), Dostoyevsky (“The Double”), Conrad (“The Secret Sharer”), E.L. Konigburg’s (*George*), and many of today’s popular novels, teleplays, and comic strips (*Superman* and *Batman*). For some examples and discussion of it see Karl Miller’s *Doubles*. Because of the critical connection between doubling and the rest of literature we urge teachers to help students relate alter-ego improvisation to drama, fiction, and much poetry. See also in *PERFORMING TEXTS* how the apportioning of various lines or parts of lines in a script to various actors may be used to distinguish shifts within a person.

A character can have more than one alter ego. In accordance with the well-established concept of multiple personalities dwelling within a single person, performers can interplay any number of aspects of one character. Indeed, the cast of characters of most novels and plays constitutes a sort of deploying of human being into its various facets or potentialities. Double stories merely heighten, in other words, what happens in virtually all literature: together the personages sum up to a whole characterization of Everyman.

■ TESTING SCRIPTS BY PERFORMANCE

See *PERFORMING TEXTS*, for a full treatment of this process. Any student script can be given a trial reading in a small group, enacted either as a play or puppet show, and duplicated or put into little anthologies that can be read along with professional one-act plays. In small groups students read each other’s scripts aloud, taking parts and assigning a reader to the stage directions; they discuss the playability of the script for potential enactment and edit it for duplicating. Some scripts are memorized, rehearsed, and performed.

The most compelling motive for creating a script is to have it performed. So it’s very important that time and space be arranged for viewing live performances and tapes. Performance usually entails further revision during trial readings and rehearsals.

The matching of language to character is one of the more valuable issues that come up whenever students prepare to perform one another's scripts. For example, if they're going over interior monologues together, they might ask: Does the style sound "thought" or does it sound "spoken" aloud to someone else? As they juxtapose dramatic and interior monologues, they're helped to discriminate between inner and outer voices. Does the style seem appropriate to the character and to the situation and state he's in? (Is he agitated or reflective, for example?) Does the language flow with the movement of thought and feeling, or does it seem to be organized by some logic external to the character? This distinction helps to define "formal" writing.

■ READING

For the most part, solo silent reading of plays might be deferred until after creative dramatics and enactment have made it possible for students to bring a play script to life in their minds without missing or misunderstanding what is going on. Comprehension questions after reading cannot offset the failure to understand *as* one reads. And silent play-reading is difficult: plays are by nature incomplete texts and require more inference and imagination than narrated stories. We recommend that until fairly advanced in dramatic understanding, students read plays silently only as part of group preparation for rehearsed reading or memorized enactment.

Collections of short plays can be used for reference when children want to know how to set up and punctuate their own scripts, and they can be used along with student-produced plays as material for performing. Student scripts provide a much-needed type of classroom literature, for there are far too few good plays for children. Older elementary youngsters might find plays to perform in such collections as: Aurand Harris and Coleman Jennings's *Plays Children Love: A Treasury of Classic Plays for Children* (Doubleday, 1981) and volume II (St. Martin's Press, 1988); Rowena Bennett's *Creative Plays and Programs for Holidays* (Plays, Inc., Boston, 1966); Sylvia E. Komeran's *Plays of Black Americans* (Plays, Inc., Boston, 1987); or *Plays, The Drama Magazine for Young People*, edited by Sylvia K. Burack.

By junior high, many short scripts from adult literature, including teleplays, work well for small-group oral reading and performance. Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* and William Gibson's *The Miracle Worker* are popular.

As a teenager recognizes in published plays the kinds of vocalization and interaction he is familiar with from his own and other student playwriting, he finds it easier to relate to the goings-on in Shakespeare or Ibsen. Consider *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* as composed of duologues, dramatic monologues, and interior monologues and the drama achieved by interweaving these with trios, quartets, and crowd scenes. While reading or performing professional plays together, students can work out with arrows or other graphic symbols a representation of the character interactions.

There's something structural about both human emotions and human interactions. That is, you can replace the content of a feeling or the content of an exchange with another and something will still remain the same—something like the pitch, vibration, or intensity of the feeling (whether it is love or hate, fear or elation) and, in interaction, something like the pattern of energy, the lines of force.

We ride the momentum of a particular dynamic until another dynamic cuts across it. Once one is tuned into varieties of pitch and pace and lines of force, one is on to drama, because it is the intensities and vectors of energy that carry a play.

DIALOGUE POEMS AND STORIES

Not just play scripts but any pieces of literature that have this dramatic energy and one character voice or more can be read and performed as if they were scripts. Dialogue poems and stories provide a model for student writing. Treating this material dramatically also helps students pick out speaker, voice, and circumstances of utterance and discriminate between invented personas and real-life authors.

Collections of dialogues and monologues that cut across conventional lines of reading-matter classification to bring together disparate pieces of literature—be they scripts, stories, or poems—that have in common only the performance potential of created voices, can help students realize how performable much literature is and how many forms dramatic voicing can take. This is especially true if they can hear some of these performed as readings.

For many students the juxtaposition of scripts with poetry or with certain types of short stories told by subjective narrators makes the latter accessible for the first time. The voicing of a poem may be clearly a dialogue as shown by speaker indications, stanzaic assignments, or the breaking of lines or stanzas. On the other hand, voicing need not necessarily be according to different characters. It might be according to different voices of the same character or according to different moods or attitudes of the poet, as in a monologue.

Students need to see both prose and poetry as options in writing dialogues; this way they can become aware of the way characterization, tone, and other effects are sometimes more vividly rendered in poetry. They can also see that it's possible to tell an entire short story in little more than dialogue. Some short stories that are virtually all dialogue are "Petrified Man" by Eudora Welty, "Zone of Quiet" by Ring Lardner, and "How Do You Like It Here?" by John O'Hara. Stories containing no thoughts or commentary, only description and narration, come close to being scenarios. When students discuss one of these, for a rehearsed reading, they need to discuss whether there will be a loss in transfer, and, if they think so, to appoint one person as narrator. He can read only those parts of the narrator's lines that are not really the equivalent of stage directions (see also "Chamber Theater" on page 190).

Students can begin their reading of dialogue poems and stories with duologues such as old ballads like "Get Up and Bar the Door," ballad-like poems such as Kipling's "Danny Deever," light exchanges like William Butler Yeats's "For Anne Gregory," Dorothy Parker's short story "Telephone Conversation," the *Romeo and Juliet* duologue sonnet, or Dudley Randall's satiric "Booker T. and W.E.B." Since dialogue poems and stories usually contain little physical action and have no stage directions, the encumbrance of the script is not a great handicap, and they lend themselves conveniently to a rehearsed reading or enactment (see page 410 under "Dialogue of Ideas" for other duologue poems).

VALUE OF DISCUSSION PRECEDING PERFORMANCE. Small-group discussion to determine how to perform a duologue or dialogue is an opportunity for significant learning. For example, some of the best discussions of poetry students can

have may concern whether Henry Reed's poem "Naming of Parts" is uttered by one or two characters. Our understanding of it is that the first two-thirds of each stanza is spoken aloud by the army instructor to his trainees, and that the last one-third of each is the inner voice of a trainee ironically echoing the instructor while at the same time drifting away to more appealing things than rifle parts. In one class, some students made a good case for both voices issuing from the instructor—one being official and the other private. The alternating of interior and dramatic monologue by the same character is indeed sometimes used, as in Dorothy Parker's short story "The Waltz," to convey just such a discrepancy between what one really feels and how one has to behave outwardly. The story could be acted in alter-ego fashion, with three people—a woman dancing with a man while her other self curses his clumsiness.

When one person utters himself in two different voices, two roles are called for, so that both interpretations of the Reed poem produce essentially the same dramatic result. All the students agreed that the stanzas split into two voices, even though the voices are unmarked in any way by typography, because tone, language, and attitude all shift. But the last stanza breaks the pattern and causes disagreement about whether it is all interior monologue or a fusion of both voices. Discussion of the stanza is required in order to decide which actor will read it.

It happens that both Henry Reed and Dylan Thomas have recorded the poem, in very different ways. After dramatizing the poem themselves, students listened very intently to hear how these poets indicated the shifts of voice they had discussed (and also to find support for their interpretation). A companion poem by Reed, "Judging Distances," consists also of two alternating voices, but in this case both are clearly uttered aloud by different people—instructor and trainee again—though still unsigned by quotation marks or spacing.

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

As with dialogue, students read poems, short stories, and plays cast in this form as they write them. Recordings of dramatic monologues are particularly helpful. Some stand-up comedians' monologues qualify as dramatic when not just a series of jokes but an imitation of some character talking in particular circumstances.

PLAYS. Most plays have at least one good monologue, and certainly the theater can provide the literary equivalent for what students are writing. In fact, from Greek drama on, the developed solo speech has been a standard feature of drama. It's used to relate the past, reveal the thought and feeling of a character, build and sustain an argument, and so on. It's an elemental dramatic unit that, along with soliloquy, duologue, and dialogue, makes up the playwright's compositional repertory. August Strindberg's whole playlet "The Stronger" is a sustained dramatic monologue.

Whatever the source to which you turn for literary dramatic monologues, don't confuse students with other kinds of monologues; the solo speech must occur in a definite time and place and be heard by another character or so. Particular, external circumstances constitute what is meant by *dramatic*. Once the concept of dramatic or external monologue has been thoroughly established, however, it can serve as a base for other monologues having a character speaker but an unspecified setting and audience.

Dramatic monologues should be performed, and for a while any silent reading that is done would best be in preparation for orally interpreting it. Because different students will be presenting different selections for the class, everyone will become acquainted with a number of monologues. Performances of the *same* monologue by different players can be compared in discussion.

Dramatic monologue provides a fine occasion for learning to react. Stress the fact that the silent partner, in responding, stays with every line as much as if he were speaking. Partners reverse roles so that they play both sides of the duo. The other pair in their group watches them, comments, and takes its turn both ways. In this manner, both the understanding and expression of the lines gradually evolve. In passing, the teacher can ask and answer questions that will help this development.

POEMS. Poetry is rich in dramatic and interior monologue. Both of these shade off into other kinds of poems having a disembodied, unsituated speaker who is more the author himself than an invented persona. Students who have role-played the speaker in dramatic poems can more readily pick up the tone, style, attitude, and posture of a poet speaking distinctly in his own voice. Much of the reason for acting out poems with characters is to become attuned to "voice" in a text. When you read with an ear to performance, you try to conjure the tone, style, attitude, and posture of this voice in the text. Pre- and post-performance discussions further sensitize a student's ear for this voice so that when reading undramatic texts silently alone he can still register the style and tone of even unsituated authorial voices.

Langston Hughes' "Mother to Son" is a dramatic monologue written as a poem—one that invites performance, like Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess." Even mature high school students have seldom understood this classic when simply read and discussed in class. An actor should deliver the lines of the duke, drawing aside the alcove curtain, gesturing to the portrait, and so on, while another plays the emissary, reacting in revulsion to what he hears until finally he starts prematurely down the stairs, an action that prompts the duke to utter a line that few students seem to understand outside a dramatic context, "Nay, we'll go together down, sir" (*together* being stressed, of course). Students well grounded in such experience might then read silently with much pleasure and understanding some of Browning's longer dramatic monologues, such as "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," especially if the text glosses the unfamiliar words and allusions.

Working up dramatic monologue poems for performance will inspire some students to learn other sorts of poems by heart. Memorizing poetry is an old-fashioned practice that has now fallen into disrepute because it was so often unmotivated and arbitrary. The only justification (besides being able to pass a test on the lines) was that the lines were famous, and every well-bred person should know them. In the worst light, the purpose was only a kind of name-dropping, but the fact is that memorizing has another, very profound value. As poet Richard Wilbur put the matter in a poetry course in which he required memorization, one takes the poem to heart, makes it a part of oneself, absorbs the sounds and rhythms and images, warms to the language, becomes enthralled by the incantation. Every professional actor has had the experience, in learning a well written role, of discovering more and more beauty and meaning in his lines and of eventually falling in love with them. A couple of such experiences can permanently influence a young person's feeling about poetry and language power. When students select the poems, and when they memorize in order to perform, they don't simply rattle off

lines in rote fashion but interpret and render them. Connections between words and actions, furthermore, create cues that make memorizing easier.

SHORT STORIES. "Haircut" and "Zone of Quiet" by Ring Lardner, "The Apostate" by George Milburn, "Straight Pool" and "Salute a Thoroughbred" by John O'Hara, "The Lady's Maid" by Katherine Mansfield, and "Travel Is So Broadening" by Sinclair Lewis are short stories written as pure dramatic monologue, that is, having a specific audience and setting and often containing ongoing action. Such stories shade into others like "Why I Live at the P.O." by Eudora Welty, in which a less clearly situated character addresses the world at large in an amateurish way, giving a naive, unreliable, or prejudiced version of the events.

KINDS OF LITERARY MONOLOGUISTS. Some character monologues are uttered by types—John Suckling's "A Ballad upon a Wedding" (country bumpkin), Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed" (Wessex commoner), Lerone Bennett Jr.'s "The Idiot" (a powerless African American), and Rudyard Kipling's "Sestina of the Troop Royal" (professional soldier). All four of these are in dialect. If a poem does not indicate the exact setting or the particular listener, students should imagine a fitting place and audience—and also the motive for the monologue. Thomas Wolfe's short story, "Only the Dead Know Brooklyn," would go well with these poems. Other monologuists are well-known personages from history and mythology. Christ utters "The Carpenter's Son" by A. E. Housman; Simon of Zelotes, "The Ballad of the Goodly Fere" by Ezra Pound; and one of the three wise men, "The Journey of the Magi" by T. S. Eliot. Because they are centered on Christ, these three poems are interesting to take up together. Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses" is especially interesting because a student can make a good case for its being either exterior or interior monologue. Is Ulysses addressing his retinue in actuality or in his mind?

Like many a monologue poem in which the poet addresses his mistress, John Donne's "The Flea" is a love argument but an especially dramatic one because each stanza is a reaction to something the beloved does while he's talking. "Why So Pale and Wan" by John Suckling is also a monologue prompted by ongoing action. Many love poems spoken by the lover to his beloved do not indicate ongoing action and have only a vague setting but nevertheless are spoken now to a particular audience of one. John Donne's "Break of Day" and "The Good Morrow" have this sense of immediacy, and Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach" has, for all the lover's meditation, a strong setting and feeling for the present ("The sea is calm tonight..." "Let us be true to one another..."). Consider also Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress."

INTERIOR MONOLOGUE

Although interior monologue may seem at first glance to be a minor literary form, not worthy of much time, it would be a great mistake to think so. It cuts across genres, being found in plays, fiction, and poems—found in two senses.

First, some whole plays, short stories, poems, and even a few novels are cast as sustained interior monologues. Second, like dialogue and dramatic monologue, interior monologue is commonly embedded in poetry and fiction, as well as in plays, making up, in fact, a goodly portion of many short stories and novels. Some songs, like "If I Were a Rich Man" in *Fiddler on the Roof*, are modern

equivalents of the old soliloquy. An excellent commercial dramatization of *Alice in Wonderland*⁸ put all of Alice's thoughts as written by Lewis Carroll into the first person, prerecorded them, and played them through a speaker system at appropriate moments when the actress was not speaking. This ingenious separation of inner from outer speech makes one realize how much of the original book consists of Alice's thoughts. Keeping track of and interpreting different speakers may not be so difficult on stage, but in a novel speakers change with a minimum of signaling.

Interior monologue poems include Amy Lowell's "Patterns" and Robert Browning's "The Laboratory," both with women speakers, and, with a man, Browning's "Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister." Short stories such as "Late at Night" by Katherine Mansfield and "But the One on the Right" by Dorothy Parker also have female speakers. "The Laboratory" and the Parker story require non-speaking males for the drama. Either sex, of course, could perform most of the more meditative interior monologues such as John Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale." The writing and reading of reflections (see page 411) can coincide with interior monologues, which can shade off into philosophical poetry by disembodied authors. After an opening duologue, Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones* becomes soliloquy, addressed to dumb phantoms that actually appear to the audience. If done by a workshop group as a rehearsed reading, the role of Emperor Jones could be rotated while other students pantomime the figures from his past, the "little formless fears," and so on. T. S. Eliot's "Gerontion" and "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" are possible poems for very mature students.

MONOLOGUES AND THE UNDERSTANDING OF LITERATURE

Many plays contain both exterior and interior monologues, which are often set pieces like the sergeant's report at the beginning of *Macbeth*, or the disguised Orestes' account of his own death, or the great soliloquies from both Elizabethan and Greek tragedy. Many of the latter are reflective poems situated in a drama.

Since class reading and performing of long plays requires assigning different portions to different groups or individuals, such plays may as well be divided into duologues, dramatic monologues, soliloquies, and group colloquies when doing so does not break dramatic momentum. In older theater it's the entering and leaving of characters, in fact, that defines most of the scenes anyway. Greek tragedy, for example, lends itself very well to this division: the succession of episodes and interludes usually consists of rather clearly separated duologue confrontations, dramatic monologues, soliloquies, choral odes, and group dialogues. The acting groups deal with these excerpts in the manner described for complete short scripts—poems, one-scene plays, and short stories.

A surprisingly large number of poems may be successfully treated as some kind of monologue or dialogue and hence can benefit from dramatization. Reflective poems sometimes take the form of duologue as well as interior monologue (see page 417). The fact that dramatizing poems takes longer than reading them silently can be offset by letting different groups perform different poems before

⁸ By the Children's Theater of the Charles Street Playhouse, Boston, Massachusetts.

each other. In this way, everyone becomes acquainted with a large number of poems. Actors can explain to the audience any unfamiliar words, allusions, or background they have looked up. Presenting classmates a script they don't know adds more purpose to performance.

Most fiction contains characters' accounts of events inserted into the author's narrative. Whole chapters of *The Brothers Karamazov*, for example, are narrated by one character to another. And authors constantly quote directly as well as paraphrase the thoughts of characters. A lot of work with dialogues and monologues not only helps students stay alert to shifts of voice but also helps them size up what is said in the light of who is saying it.

Dramatic experience ties words to speakers and situations, and thereby grounds style, thought, rhetoric, and language to the realities that produce them. When reinforced by students' own writing, this experience will transfer itself to those remoter speakers who author books and to the anonymous voices of advertising and propaganda.