

**THE IMPORTANCE OF BROWNING'S DRAMATIC
LISTENER IN SELECTED POEMS**

BY

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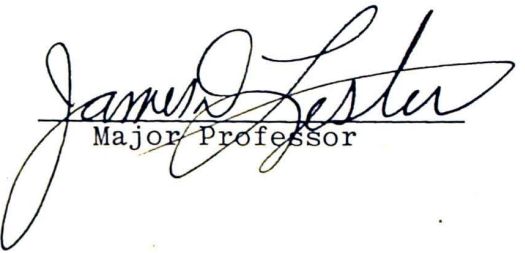
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts
in Education

by
Joetta Carol Bekus
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by Joetta Carol Bekus entitled "The Importance of Browning's Dramatic Listener in Selected Poems." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education with a major in English.


Major Professor

Accepted for the
Graduate Council:


Dean of the Graduate School

THE IMPORTANCE OF
BROWNING'S DRAMATIC LISTENER
IN SELECTED POEMS

W. David Shaw holds a typical critical view in The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning where he states that the listener simply hears the speaker's utterances but the listener does not determine what the speaker says or how he addresses his listener.¹ Stated simply, the listener plays no significant part in revealing the speaker's character. Michael Mason's article illustrates a more striking example in "Browning and the Dramatic Monologue" in which he fails to mention that the listener plays a significant dramatic role of the genre.² An important exception to this view is Donald Smalley's perceptive comment that in Browning's dramatic monologues the "auditor" clearly contributes to the "effect of immediacy," but Smalley does

¹W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), pp. 60-61.

²Michael Mason, "Browning and the Dramatic Monologue," Robert Browning, ed. Isobel Armstrong (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1968), pp. 231-266.

not develop his argument.³

Although critics have not addressed themselves specifically to the dramatic role of the listener in determining the speaker's utterances, two studies of Browning's dramatic monologues have contributed to our understanding of Browning's art. Shiv K. Kumar in "The Moment in the Dramatic Monologue" emphasizes that the speaker directs his speech outward so that through articulation he can learn more about himself.⁴ Robert Langbaum expresses another point of view in The Poetry of Experience in which he says that the listener's responses do not contribute to the speaker's self-knowledge because the listener's implied responses never allow the speaker to learn anything about himself nor do the implied responses change the meaning of the speaker's utterance.⁵

Both of these statements are partly true. But Kumar does not account for the situation in "Porphyria's Lover" in which the lover does not really learn anything about himself, and Langbaum's argument does not take into

³Donald Smalley, ed., Poems of Robert Browning (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956), p. xxiv.

⁴Shiv K. Kumar, "The Moment in the Dramatic Monologue," British Victorian Literature: Recent Revaluations, ed. Shiv K. Kumar (New York: New York University Press, 1960), p. 93.

⁵Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 201.

such monologues as "Fra Lippo Lippi" in which the speaker's articulations often change according to the listener's responses rather than to the speaker's own realizations about himself.

Thus, in analyzing Browning's dramatic monologues, the reader must understand exactly how the speaker addresses his non-speaking listener, and from the very outset how he reveals the significant details from his past that have a crucial bearing on the dramatic situation. Clearly each speaker has been strongly affected by his specific world, but his sudden contact with a particular silent listener causes him to reveal that hidden part of himself, that deeper meaning in his character that he himself does not always fully understand. But the reader does understand, and this understanding is the essence of Browning's dramatic art. Thus, the speaker's attitude at the moment of his revelation depends to a great extent on his attitude toward the silent listener. In addition, in some cases the "silent" response of the listener, that is the dramatic situation conveyed to the reader through the rhetorical statements of the speaker, directs the monologue. Thus, the complex relationship between the speaker and the listener creates the dramatic tensions in Browning's monologue. In every case the key depends on how Browning handles the concept of the listener.

This discussion is organized according to the following principal. Browning's dramatic monologues can be divided into two major divisions: first, several representative poems that have a non-identifiable listener: "Porphyria's Lover," "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," and "Rabbi Ben Ezra." The second major division of Browning's monologues includes several poems that have an identifiable listener: "My Last Duchess," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Andrea Del Sarto," and "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church."

In every case the listener plays an important role in the dramatic revelation of the speaker. Browning's poetic range is not the focus of this discussion but his creating tensions based on the speaker and the listener in unique dramatic situations. Perhaps critics have ignored the dramatic listener because Browning uses him with such dramatic ease; but however obvious, the importance of the dramatic listener needs to be emphasized.

In "Porphyria's Lover" the speaker is clearly mad. Thus, he would reveal what he has done yet state how he feels to anyone that might appear; that is, he will discuss his act and his reaction to the deed to any appropriate listener. A listener in "Porphyria's Lover" simply has no stated reason for being present. He may be a friend, a doctor, or a constable; his importance is in his allowing the speaker to reveal his madness and, perhaps, his self-

justifications.

In previous action the speaker, using Porphyria's own hair, "Three times her little throat around,/And strangles her" (ll. 40-41).⁶ Since the speaker cannot communicate his intention to Porphyria before the deed, he needs to present a rhetoric of persuasion to her body after her murder, for Porphyria is dead. Thus, Browning has created a situation in which the Lover articulates to a substitute listener. Since the unidentified listener lacks knowledge of what actually happened, he neither questions the speaker nor interrupts the speaker's monologue.

So the speaker begins his revelation with the night of the murder and at the same time he unwittingly reveals his madness when he is tormented and when he feels he is the last thing that deserves Porphyria's notice. Before Porphyria sits at her lover's side, she shuts out the cold, makes a fire, and takes off her outer clothing: "At last, she sat down by my side" (l. 14). Porphyria's Lover pouts and refuses to answer her call because he feels that his love for her is "all in vain" (l. 29). Porphyria braves a storm, leaves a "gay feast," and makes the initial advances, yet the speaker still considers her:

⁶Citations from Robert Browning in the text are to William C. DeVane, ed., "Robert Browning," Major British Writers II, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1959).

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavor,
 To set its struggling passion free
 From Pride, and vainer ties dissever,
 And give herself to me forever. (ll. 22-25)

Porphyria's Lover reveals himself as a murderer, a necrophiliac, and finally as a man so filled with twisted pride that he believes God's silence indicates that God condones his act. The lover's mind remains trapped within the memory of a night when he hoped to stop time and preserve forever the moment of perfect love.

The absence of an identifiable listener amplifies the isolation of the speaker, but it also raises the question of why, dramatically, the man speaks. The lover speaks because he "found/A thing to do" (ll.37-38) to preserve perfection. He murders Porphyria.

The density of a speaker--how simple or complex he may be--is determined by his participation in the action of the monologue and by the quality of his participation. The lover speaks because he must; he has to constantly re-live a moment, and the only way he can do this is to constantly tell the moment. The listener's effectiveness in "Porphyria's Lover" depends on his not being identified. Like an Ancient Mariner, the lover compulsively tells his world view from his demented mind to anyone and everyone.

Although the ravings of Porphyria's Lover illuminate his character and his characterization is the essential characteristic of the monologue, it is also important to

realize that it is the posture of the silent listener which contributes significantly to our appreciation of Browning's dramatic art.⁷

A reader of Browning's monologues must realize that all of his dramatic poems do not have listeners. For example, in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," the factual aspects of the exposition play an extremely important part in revealing the speaker's unfolding of character by showing the absence of a listener. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" has all the characteristics of a dramatic monologue except a listener. It would be out of character for the Spanish Cloister to call Brother Lawrence a "swine" or to articulate his wish that hell should burn "you up with its flames" (l.8). However, a dramatic listener out of earshot does exist; the "you" in line eight is Brother Lawrence. He is the audience; Brother Lawrence simply cannot hear. The subtle art of the "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" is that the audience functions as an integral part of the exposition. Although Brother Lawrence does not listen, his presence in the situation provides the Spanish Cloister with the opportunity to reveal his character through conflict and interaction with Brother Lawrence.

⁷ DeVane, Major British Writers II, p. 472. "The dramatic monologue is at its best when the poet employs all its elements: a speaker; his audience; interplay between them; dramatic occasion and present action; and, above all, revelation of character."

If Brother Lawrence could hear, he would inhibit the Spanish Cloister's outpouring of lust and hatred and would limit the revealing of the speaker's hypocrisy. To reveal his lust and hatred would be out of character for the Spanish Cloister and inappropriate because he is very conscious of outward appearance. He illustrates the Trinity by taking three sips of his "watered orange pulp" and by laying his knife and fork "cross-wise . . . In Jesu's priase" (ll. 34,36). Whereas Porphyria's Lover reveals himself to his listener, the Spanish Cloister conceals himself from his audience.

Since the Spanish Cloister stresses the outward appearance of piety, he laughs gleefully when Brother Lawrence cuts flowers: "He-he! There his lily [the symbol for purity and resurrection] snaps" (l. 24)! The striking irony of "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" emerges when the reader realizes that the Spanish Cloister should be living a life that prevents the damnation of souls, yet he wishes Brother Lawrence eternal damnation, and, consequently, damns himself:

There's a great text in Galatians,
 Once you trip on it, entrails
 Twenty-nine distinct damnations,
 One sure, if another fails:
 If I trip him just a-dying,
 Sure of heaven as sure can be,
 Spin him round and send him flying
 Off to hell, a Manichee? (ll. 49-56)

The nakedness of the Spanish Cloister's sensations

represents more than stylistic device; it unfolds his way of seeing life. If the Spanish Cloister had not watched "while brown Dolores/Squats" (ll. 25-26), he could not revel in the sensuousness of Delores's "blue-black, lustrous, thick" (l. 29) hair; nor could he believe Brother Lawrence capable of enjoying the same taboo. As the Spanish Cloister attempts to create Brother Lawrence in his own likeness, Brother Lawrence further precipitates the Spanish Cloister's revealing his hypocrisy. Believing Brother Lawrence capable of sin does not make him sinful. Ironically the reader learns a great deal about Brother Lawrence because the reader understands the nature of the Cloister's hatred for him. The real cause of hatred comes from within the Cloister; Brother Lawrence exists to give form to this revelation of character:

If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
 God's blood, would not mine kill you!
(ll. 3-4)

The Spanish Cloister revels in his literal world of religious hypocrisy, but at the same time he cannot reveal himself to anyone without damning himself outwardly as he damns Brother Lawrence privately, which in turn damns himself. So Browning presents the Spanish Cloister in a traditional soliloquy rather than in a dramatic monologue; an active listener would prevent the Spanish Cloister's disclosing himself. But most significant

generically, there is an intended, identifiable audience, and in this sense, not only has Browning stretched the resources of his form to reveal character in the only possible way, but he has also placed Brother Lawrence at the outer boundaries of the Cloister's world.

"Rabbi Ben Ezra" has no identifiable listener. Possibly the poem is a sermon or a public address, but there is a subtle yet convincing suggestion that the listener is a specific individual who disagrees with Rabbi Ben Ezra's religious view of life. Evidently the passion and total conviction of the speaker's views are precipitated by the listener. Yet Roger L. Slakey ignores this context, and in "A Note on Browning's 'Rabbi Ben Ezra'" Slakey writes: "That the poem is a public address is clear from the generalization of whoever is addressed. He is given no personal identity, and nothing of reaction is hinted."⁸ The point that Slakey does not pursue is that Rabbi Ben Ezra totally controls the dramatic situation in revealing his religious view of life. When Slakey discusses the Rabbi's questions as being rhetorical, he does not account for the four climatic stanzas in the poem (ll. 158-180) in which Rabbi Ben Ezra specifically addresses the listener as "Fool" (l. 159), "thee" (l. 163), "thou" (l. 165), and "thy" (l. 167).

⁸Roger L. Slakey, "A Note on Browning's 'Rabbi Ben Ezra,'" Victorian Poetry, 5 (Winter, 1967), p. 291.

The listener can only be a specific individual; but, at the same time, because of the theological views of Rabbi Ben Ezra, the monologue does indeed transcend the immediate dramatic situation. In this sense the poem may be considered a public address or sermon, as it were, and becomes an apologia.

The major analogy used by Rabbi Ben Ezra is not open to dispute; it is a syllogism based on faith. God creates man as a Potter creates a cup; and as a cup endures to quench thirst, man endures to serve God:

So, take and use thy God's work;
Amend what flaws may lurk.

.
Perfect the cup as planned! (ll. 187-188, 190)

An involved listener could refute Rabbi Ben Ezra's metaphor of the "Potter's Wheel," but the listener could refute with no more authority than the Rabbi does with "'Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone, seize today'" (l. 156). Whether the question comes directly from the listener or from Rabbi Ben Ezra, the question remains rhetorical. The double entendre of the "Potter's wheel" cannot be resolved because it is a philosophical metaphor which becomes a metaphysical view to prepare for death. Rabbi Ben Ezra prepares for death according to his strong belief in immortality and remains completely convinced of his own interpretation of life's plan. The striking aspect of this view is that Rabbi Ben Ezra ex-

plains it with a classic metaphor:

Ay, note that Potter's wheel,
That metaphor! and feel
Why time spins fast, why passive lies our clay--
Thou, to whom fools propound,
When the wine makes its round,
"Since life fleets, all is change; the Past gone seize
today!" (ll. 151-156)

Limitations and distortions exist in Ezra's point of view that earth functions as a fermentation for the human cup, but any listener does not inhibit Rabbi Ben Ezra's flow of rhetoric. The Rabbi's impassioned view of old age would not stand a true logician's questions, but Rabbi Ben Ezra's argument is not based on logic; it is based on a poetic metaphor. Although the Rabbi's questions may be an echoing of his dramatic listener's utterance, the reader can infer no responses from the dramatic listener; so the rabbi's questions are a rhetorical device used for emphasis. Questions like "Irks care the crop full bird? Frets doubt the Maw-crammed beast?" (l. 24) and "Thou, heaven's consummate cup, what need'st thou with earth's wheel?" (l. 180) demand no answer; they are statements in question form. Questions like "Right?" (l. 126) serve the same purpose as "Fool" (l. 157). They are used for emphasizing the following statements containing Rabbi Ben Ezra's beliefs:

Right? Let age speak the truth and give
us peace at last! (l. 126)

Fool! All that is, at all,
 Lasts ever, past recall;
 Earth changes, but thy soul and
 God stand sure. (ll. 157-159)

Rabbi Ben Ezra has attempted to persuade his listener to embrace the point of view that he himself believes, but the reader never learns whether or not the listener is ever convinced with Rabbi Ben Ezra's view of life. Thus, the dramatic listener does indeed become everyman.⁹

If there is a dramatic flaw in "Rabbi Ben Ezra," it is that Browning switches point of view in the last two stanzas in which it appears that Rabbi Ben Ezra completely ignores the listener and addresses God; and by Browning's doing so, the listener may be identified with the reader's listening to a man reveal the essence of his religious views on life and on growing old. Browning sacrifices a continuous, dramatic point of view to reveal character, which illustrates the subtle range of Browning's art. Rabbi Ben Ezra stands revealed as a man who uses faith to argue faith and a man so confident in his beliefs

⁹Robert Langbaum, p. 105.

Robert Langbaum states that "Browning's 'Rabbi Ben Ezra' is a dramatic monologue by virtue of its title only; otherwise it is a direct statement of a philosophical idea, because there is no characterization or setting." Characterization is shown through the very lack of setting; Rabbi Ben Ezra is talking to everyman, and sermonizing is never limited to setting. A philosopher flings forth his world view wherever he goes.

that he attempts to persuade anyone to accept them.

The Rabbi's attitude toward the listener reflects his attitude toward his world and, thus, reflects his character. To know a man's philosophy is to know the man, and we have certainly come to know Rabbi Ben Ezra.

In "My Last Duchess" the listener is more easily identified than the listener in "Porphyria's Lover" or "Rabbi Ben Ezra," but as the dramatic listener, the envoy exists to reflect the speaker's character. In drama the attitude of a principal character toward his world determines his dealings with secondary characters. The same situation and resulting characterization exists in "My Last Duchess." The way the Duke reacts to the envoy's actual presence will subject the Duke to a test of his attitudes through direct conflict with an identifiable but non-participating dramatic listener. It is important that the Duke tell the story of his last duchess to the envoy of his prospective bride's father. The outrageousness of the Duke's articulations reflect his confident superiority and control over his listener. In fact, the Duke controls his world to such an extent that he anticipates the questions and responses of his listener: "Who'd stoop to blame/This sort of trifling" (ll. 34-35)? The envoy must understand the Duke's world view as a holder of a "nine-hundred-years-old name" (l. 32), so the envoy will convey a code of behavior for the next duchess. The

Duke's ability to manipulate reveals his character to both the reader and the envoy.

In the Duke's character, pride perverts to possessory domination; the Duke's pride in station and domination leads him to treat people as possessions, art objects, things. As a painting, the last duchess takes her place as an object in an art collection, and the Duke can finally call "that piece a wonder, now" (l. 3). Now that the duchess is captured on canvas, the Duke can control his world "since none puts by/The curtain I [Duke] have drawn for you, but I" (ll. 9-10).

As Porphyria's Lover found a way to preserve forever the moment of love that Porphyria showed him, the Duke found a way to preserve the beauty of his wife's existence. "I gave commands" (l. 45). The Duke murders because of his connoisseur's pride; he murders the duchess rather than tell her his objections to her behavior because:

if she let

Herself be lessoned so,

 --E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. (ll. 39-40, 42-43)

As the reader becomes aware of how the Duke took only what he wanted from his wife, the reader is thrust into a more confirmed belief in the Duke's conviction of aristocratic superiority. At this point the monologue discloses the listener's identity. The characterization of the Duke is so powerfully presented that he still con-

trols the situation even after his confession of murder, in fact, more so. The dramatic listener raises no demur. There is no indication in the poem that the listener makes any comment or protest to the Duke's having given commands. Immediately after "There she stands/As if alive" (ll.46-47), the Duke addresses the envoy; and the Duke, not the envoy, suggests returning to the "company below."

As the poem closes, the Duke leisurely continues to point out his art collections to the envoy as they proceed side-by-side downstairs. The patronizing waiving of rank's privilege as the two walk down the stairs stresses the Duke's confident superiority through his condescending mock-humility.

After hypocritically assuring the envoy that the new bride's self is his desire and not her dowry, the Duke stands fully revealed. All his previous character revelations come together with symbolic clarity in the final lines:

Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.
(ll. 54-56)

The Duke shows off yet another possession, a possession which simultaneously reminds the reader that the Duke takes pride in possession and that he will also try to "tame" the new duchess. The duke is a possessive, egocentric, self-complacent character who must bend everything to his will. The Duke is conditioned by his own special world in which he is caught. He takes actions affecting himself and others

according to his specific world view. The Duke's characterization is dramatically effective because of the appropriateness of his identified listener. The listener, an envoy from the Duke's prospective father-in-law, is subjugated to the Duke's will. The Duke impresses the listener from his own personal point of view, not the envoy's or the reader's, and the appropriateness of the dramatic listener allows this consistency of character. Only through the manipulating of the envoy can the Duke be seen as a man who feels so superior that he will confess to murder and still feel that his position in the world makes the murdering of his last wife justified in his future father-in-law's eyes.

A significant variation occurs in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" in which there are several listeners instead of one. They are identified and have a purpose for being there. Since the Bishop is dying, he appropriately addresses his "Nephews . . . sons mine" (l. 3) who stand at his bedside and are the dramatic listeners. Anselm, seemingly the eldest, sets the dramatic listeners' force by his unresponsiveness to his father's condition: "Draw round my bed; is Anselm keeping back?" (l. 2). As his sons, they control his characterization not through their reactions to his utterances, but through their lack of reaction. Manipulation of his sons is the Bishop's aim, but the Bishop lacks control. The Bishop views not

only from the attitude of a dying man but also from the view of a worldly hypocrite. It is the Bishop's nature to be suspicious; he judges others from his own special attitudes. Greedy and dishonest himself, he believes that others are too, especially his sons:

Will ye ever eat my heart?
 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick.
 They glitter like your mother's for my soul.
 (ll. 103-105)

Prevented from marrying by the rule of celibacy, the Bishop has illegitimate sons whom in public he calls nephews. His treatment of these sons when he reminds them of their bastardy and their mother's possible promiscuity immediately shows the Bishop's insensitivity:

Nephews--sons mine . . . ah, God, I know not! Well--
 She, men would have to be your mother once,
 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! (ll. 3-5)

Since dramatic listeners set the boundaries in which a speaker reveals his character, the Bishop can persuade only as a dying father to his sons, and he is limited by his sons' indifference:

For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
 To death--ye wish it--God, ye wish it! (ll. 114-115)

The hypocrisy and greed of the Bishop are intensified with each mention of his sons. Materialistic in life, the Bishop becomes even more so at the prospect of his death. Not only has the Bishop taken a mistress, he has also taken a "lapis lazuli" to rest in his lap so that Gandolf shall

not choose but see and burst!" (l. 50).

As the poem proceeds, it becomes clear that the Bishop desperately enlists his sons' aid in defeating Old Gandolf. Although he "fought/With tooth and nail" (ll. 15-16) to save his niche from Gandolf, Gandolf won "the corner south." So the Bishop desires to at last gloat over his enemy in funeral prominence as well as he did in life with illicit love. The Bishop attempts every kind of persuasion, including the threat that he will turn over his villas to the Pope.

A speaker's desires reveal his character by showing his priorities for what he thinks he needs most for his own self-satisfaction. The Bishop is dying, and he wants a tomb that he thinks will insure his dominance over Old Gandolf. He designs his tomb so that it will appear more lavish than Gandolf's and will assure the final victory in a life-long rivalry. Yet, through his responses to his sons, the reader sees that the tomb will never be built. His sensual vision of life causes him to see that "like father, like son" his sons will be more interested in providing for their own pleasures than for his desire:

Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
(ll. 64-67)

An important distinction separates the speaker's characterization in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church" from the speakers discussed in the previous monologues. Significantly, the Bishop's attitudes toward the world change because of the dramatic listeners. As the Bishop meets with his sons, he adjusts to them, and, as he does so, he changes his attitude by accepting the loss of a tomb that would insure dominance over Gandolf. The Bishop does not change; his attitude does. After the actions he has been forced to take to persuade his sons, he sees his world more clearly. Through his attempts to enlist his sons' aid, the Bishop is revealed as a man who seeks dominance over an enemy and a bishop who desires worldly possessions and pleasures. So still reacting to his listeners' boundaries, the Bishop realizes that further persuasion will not sway his sons, so he blesses them and bids them go. Finally he reverts to the only satisfaction that remains--the memory of his dead love and Gandolf's envy.

Unlike the Bishop, Andrea Del Sarto reveals his character through a progression of responses rather than utterances to his identified, participating dramatic listener, his wife Lucrezia, who is more fully developed than the previously discussed dramatic listeners. The reader is even given her physical appearance; she has soft hands, perfect ears, and golden hair.

Unlike the sons in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," Lucrezia is an integral part of Andrea's past: "--You, at the point of your first pride in me/(That's gone you know)" (ll. 37-38). Art is also an integral part of Andrea's world view and a major theme through which Andrea reveals his character and actions. Andrea Del Sarto's painting is technically perfect, "aye, but the soul" (l. 197). But it shows no depth of feeling. Lucrezia is also perfect, "with the same perfect brow,/And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth" (ll. 122-123) if she had only "brought a mind" (l. 126) instead of moral deficiencies.

Andrea Del Sarto is forced to interact with his world view personified by Lucrezia and limited by her sharing his previous actions and environmental details. Since Andrea and Lucrezia are husband and wife, artist and model, she understands his description to her of the long years of conflict between his artistic and materialistic desires.

The very wrong to Francis!--it is true
I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
My father and mother died of want. (ll. 247-250)

In conflict with Lucrezia, Andrea emerges as a man who believes his wife is unfaithful yet does nothing other than beg her to remain at home with him one evening. Lucrezia does remain until Andrea bids her go: "Again the

Cousin's whistle! Go my Love" (l. 267). Lucrezia remains to listen to an often-repeated soliloquy and even smiles at his compliments and teasings about her loans and gaming debts.

That Lucrezia is unfaithful does not dim Browning's characterization of Andrea Del Sarto, which depends on his point of view toward his world. Andrea wants to blame Lucrezia for his failures, but he lacks even the courage to confront her directly. As he places blame, he immediately withdraws it. Even if Leonard, Rafael, and Agnolo paint heaven better than he does because they have no wives, Andrea would still prefer Lucrezia [--as I choose (l. 226)].

Through the conflict of Lucrezia's desire to leave and Andrea's need for her to stay, Andrea's character unfolds. He not only has limited insight into art, he has limited insight into life and humanity. The failure of Andrea's art is symbolic of (but not a consequence of) his failure as a man. Because he lacks moral discipline in his life, he suffers a corresponding vacuum in his work. The "faultless painter" envisions "one picture, just one more--the Virgin's face/Not yours this time" (ll. 230-231). But he falls away from his task, for he cannot do it without Lucrezia--whose Cousin whistles. Andrea learns too late that incentives "come from the soul's self" (l. 134).

Thus, Andrea uses Lucrezia as a scapegoat for his own failures; she is appropriate because she is his wife and model. Since she shares his vocation as well as his life, she is perfect for reflecting that the fault lies within Andrea, not within her. As a model and wife she typically would be a help rather than a hindrance. But Andrea Del Sarto needs a scapegoat; Robert Browning provides a perfect listener that fulfills the need of a man who lacks the inner resource to generate the grand vision within himself. The irony is that his words to Lucrezia temporarily enable him to accept his act which has no soul and his marriage which has no love.

The dramatic listener in "Fra Lippo Lippi" also controls the speaker's utterances by his responses. Caught trying to climb back into the monastery in an alley close to a brothel, Fra Lippo Lippi must account for his conduct to an officer who sets the boundaries to which Fra Lippo must conform. Hoping to avoid being asked why he is abroad at such an early hour, Fra Lippo attempts to divert the officer's attention by identifying himself. "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave" (l. 1) is a response appropriate to Fra Lippo's defensive position. When the officer recognizes Fra Lippo's name and identifies him as an artist, Fra Lippo is flattered and tells the truth about his relationship with "sportive ladies." A twinkle in the officer's eye as he chastises Fra Lippo for being a promis-

cuous monk prompts Fra Lippo to further disclosures about himself as well as his dilemma regarding the dichotomy between his personal view of art and society's view of art. That is to say, he demonstrates very clearly his honesty about his weakness of the flesh, but indicates that he is less than honest about his painting for the Prior. The reason for this hypocrisy is that Fra Lippo reacts to his situation. Fra Lippo responds to the officer's charge of being a beast and explains, "I did renounce the world . . . all at eight years old" (ll. 98-101). He further explains that hunger drove him to become a monk before he was old enough to know what he renounced. Fra Lippo's attitude toward his dramatic listener allows him to feel unchallenged about a double standard in sexual morality because he is a man talking to a man: "You understand me: I'm a beast, I know" (l. 270). The officer seems to understand Lippo's "beast" side that longs to paint realistically rather than giving "no more of body than shows soul" (l. 188). Encouraged by the officer's understanding of his "beast" sensuousness, Fra Lippo continues with an explanation of the sensuousness of his paintings:

--The beauty and the wonder and the power
 The shape of things, their colors, lights and shades,
 Changes, surprises--and God made it all!"
 (ll. 283-285)

Fra Lippo believes that men can understand their own lives and God's purpose better when they are forced to focus their attention on daily common life. Art interprets God's works to man. But in becoming theoretical about his painting, Fra Lippo is too enthusiastic in his criticism of the church and the "pious People" who in a religious fervor rub Lippo's painting of Saint Lawrence until they wear the painting to "the bricks beneath" (l. 332). Since the officer represents these pious hords, he is naturally taken back by Fra Lippo's violent criticism, "Hang the fools!" (l. 335); and in order not to incur the officer's wrath, the monk immediately makes amends:

--That is--you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,

Oh, the Church knows! don't misreport me, now!
It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
Should have his apt word to excuse himself.

(ll. 136-342)

Fra Lippo repudiates his former opinions on the nature of art by promising "for the church/A pretty picture" (ll. 388-389). Realizing that he has gone too far in expressing his views to the officer, Fra Lippo responds to the listener's disapproval: "Harken how I plot to make amends" (l. 343). After appeasing the officer by describing his on-the-spot, planned painting, Fra Lippo shakes the officer's hand in a show of camaraderie and finality. Eager to quit the scene, Fra Lippo assures the

officer that, "I know my own way back" (l. 391) which prevents further discourse and, consequently, further incrimination or revealment of character.

The self-revealing action of "Fra Lippo Lippi" has an inevitability guiding it. Under the impact of conflict with the officer, Fra Lippo has to respond so that the buried qualities of the speaker stand revealed through a progression of defensive comments. As Fra Lippo adjusts his comments to appease the officer who is society's figurative and literal representative, Fra Lippo changes his view of art to conform to the prevailing artistic views of society. Clearly, Fra Lippo is a man ahead of his time which is not ready for his advances in realistic art; so to survive, Fra Lippo must conform to his dramatic listener's control.

In all of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues treated in this discussion, the silent listeners or audience determine why and what the speakers articulate, and each listener or audience is appropriate to the dramatic situation. Each speaker reveals himself in a fashion that is appropriate to the dramatic situation, but more significantly in a way that is uniquely his own. The silent listener or audience is largely responsible for the psychological realism or truth of what the speaker discloses. Thus, the appropriateness of the listener in

the exposition and his interaction with the speaker provides the key to all of Browning's extraordinary characterizations.

Porphyria's Lover talks to a substitute listener because Porphyria is dead. In this dramatic situation it is not altogether important who the listener is, but it is important that the listener does not interrupt. This lack of interruption preserves the delicate balance that allows Porphyria's Lover to attempt to justify his actions which are clearly those of a madman. Any gesture by the listener could destroy the lover's train of thought, thereby, jeopardizing Porphyria's Lover the few moments during which he feels the need to justify his actions.

Because of his hypocrisy, the Spanish Cloister cannot speak directly to Brother Lawrence. His being a religious cloister belies his inner character which is dramatically unfolded in a series of comments that mock and debase not only Brother Lawrence and the religious order of which he is a member but Christianity itself, especially when the Spanish Cloister reveals that his most outstanding characteristic is his hatred of Brother Lawrence. The Cloister's pride and hatred comprise the one sin that excludes him from the brotherhood of the Cloister. Thus, a listener would prohibit the Spanish Cloister from revealing his innermost vices.

Rabbi Ben Ezra attempts to convince his listener that old age completes a part of God's divine plan and that he should embrace it with commitment. Thus, it is evident that the listener must have a contrary view to Rabbi Ben Ezra or at least the listener has intimated to Rabbi Ben Ezra that he has some question concerning God's divine plan. The listener, therefore, is directly responsible for the speaker's impassioned plea to approach old age with joy and commitment to God. Because of his eloquent rhetoric to an individual, Rabbi Ben Ezra's words become a heightened sermon to all humanity who might have a similar view.

In "My Last Duchess" the reader not only knows who the listener is but knows his reason for being present. The Duke reveals not only that he was displeased with his wife's "stooping" friendliness with social inferiors but that he was more outraged that such action debased his nine-hundred-years-old name. Instead of informing her of his displeasure, the Duke ruthlessly commands her death. Since he had been sent by the Duke's perspective father-in-law, the envoy's presence illustrates most dramatically the Duke's feeling of aristocratic superiority as shown by the Duke's stressing the murder of his last duchess while discussing the terms of his next marriage.

In "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's

Church" the speaker asks his sons to carry out his wishes regarding his burial. In his delirium the Bishop exposes his sensuality, his jealousy of Gandolf, and his life-long aspirations in the church; all of which indicate his total disregard for his religious vows. He only discloses such information about his life because he is delirious; but, at the same time, he hopes that through bribing his sons they will carry out his last wishes for his burial. Thus, the sons are the only particularly appropriate listeners. It is perhaps in this dramatic monologue that the past and the relationship of the speaker to his listeners play the most significant role. The monologue then ties together a series of loosely joined allusions of which the listeners are a significant part. In addition the listeners, in this case in their apparent reaction to what the Bishop says and his interpretation of their responses, direct the Bishop's fear that they will not enforce his last wishes. In this monologue more than any other the speaker changes his attitude toward his world as a result of his listeners' influence. The reader feels that the Bishop's last requests fall on deaf ears and the Bishop realizes that his wishes will be thwarted.

One of the most fully developed listeners appears in "Andrea Del Sarto" in which Andrea, the perfect painter, converses with his wife Lucrezia who wishes to join her

cousin rather than to model for her husband. As Andrea talks with his wife, the reader immediately feels that she wants to leave; consequently, the suggestion is that the discussion is a frequently repeated one. Andrea's rhetoric becomes a defense of his perfect but uninspired painting which is juxtaposed with his perfect but unreceptive wife. Andrea is an uninspired artist; he lacks the grand vision of art and of life. Artistic perfection is no substitute for inspiration as beauty cannot replace love. Browning, then, has succeeded in creating a striking double entendre--an extraordinary metaphor, in which Lucrezia and Andrea, and Andrea and his art, become inextricably interwoven in a human dilemma that illustrates both the frailty of the man and the frailty of the artists.

Fra Lippo Lippi conforms to his listener's control more than any other character in the monologues previously discussed. Fra Lippo wants the people to understand his sensual yet religious art; so when the officer stops him outside the monastery, Fra Lippo at first defends his love of realism. However, when the officer takes offense at some of his comments of life and art, Fra Lippo immediately changes his utterances to accommodate the officer's view of art. Yet in speaking to the officer, Fra Lippo Lippi does get a singular chance to inform society

of his own artistic views; thus, Fra Lippo's character is revealed as a man who compromises. It is through Fra Lippo Lippi's world that the reader fully appreciates Fra Lippo's longing to be totally and honestly creative, but it is through this one incident that we realize, as he does, that he cannot. This compromise, however, does not mean that Fra Lippo Lippi has given up; it simply means that he is both an artist ahead of his time and a practical man who knows how to survive.

By studying the conflict of the speaker and listener and the explicit effects the listener has on the speaker, one can see the scope of the speaker's complex character. The speaker attempts to either conceal or reveal his special world to his listener by which the shape of the dramatic monologue is declared through the force and function of the dramatic listener who not only allows the speaker's character to unfold but actually determines and directs his dramatic utterances.

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