ROBERT BROWNING: AN INTERPRETER'S ANALYSIS
OF SELECTED MONOLOGUES

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STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an oral interpreter's approach to selected dramatic monologues by Robert Browning. After discussing Robert Browning as a man and as a poet, the author sets up a framework for analysis of the poems. The focus of analysis for each monologue is upon clues to character, attitudes, and dramatic situation. Three poems are then examined: "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," and "Fra Lippo Lippi." Suggestions regarding the form of oral presentation of the selected monologues are included in a concluding chapter. A copy of each poem included in this study will be found in the appendix.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Through the years Robert Browning's skill as a writer of dramatic monologues has been recognized, although he has had his share of detractors and in the first half of this century suffered some loss of reputation. Recently, however, serious readers and critics have attempted to re-claim Browning from the grasp of his early readers—members of the Browning societies, in particular—and to establish his position as a poet of some esteem. William DeVane states:

... during the first four decades of the twentieth century the critics, led by T. S. Eliot, were scornful of the Victorian poets, but now there are clear evidences of a reviving interest in them and a willingness once again to rank the greatest of them with their peers of older times in the main tradition of English literature. Browning has weathered the reaction, and now may be spoken of in the same breath with Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne, Milton, Dryden, Wordsworth, and Keats.¹

Much of the current interest in Browning relates to his development of the dramatic monologue into a

subtle, distinct, and meaningful literary form. For example, in *The Bow and the Lyre*, Roma A. King, Jr., states that Browning, "generally considered to have contributed more than any other poet to the development of the monologue,"[^2] wrote outstanding dramatic poetry. With regard to Browning's style of writing as evidenced in the dramatic monologues, Park Honan says, "Browning . . . appears to have written with notable precision, concentration, and subtlety, and to be a poet who has indeed much to teach us about the potentialities of verse itself."[^3] Similarly, James Reeves indicates that Browning "was a poet on a big scale. There is wealth and variety in his work . . . . At his best Browning has ample felicity of style, grace in diction, vividness in imagery, charm in atmosphere."[^4]

Modern-day theory in interpretation emphasizes the importance of good literature as a starting point


for the oral interpreter, and it is not unusual to find one or more of Browning's dramatic monologues included in interpretation textbooks. The dramatic monologue affords the interpreter a unique opportunity to re-create definite attitudes and ideas of the speaker in the literary work, yet still requires "the interpreter . . . [to] give the audience a clear, three-dimensional picture . . . in order that they will understand . . . [the] thoughts and feelings [expressed]."^6

**Purpose**

This study examines selected dramatic monologues by Robert Browning from the point of view of an oral interpreter. The purpose is to make an analysis of the selected monologues and to relate the analysis to the oral interpreter's performance of them. The focus of each analysis will be upon clues to character, attitude, and dramatic situation in each poem. The dramatic


^6Lee, p. 369.
monologues included for analysis are: "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," and "Fra Lippo Lippi." These were written within a period of time regarded by King as the period of Browning's best writing. "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," the first dramatic monologue to be analyzed, was written in 1842; "Fra Lippo Lippi," the last poem in this study, was written in 1855. Between these two dates, Browning wrote many other dramatic monologues, including "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church" (1845). Roma King, Jr., says:

All his [Browning's] works are not of equal value . . . . I conclude that his poetic career reached a height during the period of the . . . forties and terminating with The Ring and the Book [1868] . . . . The poems from this period, then provide a perspective from which one can . . . view the whole of Browning's work in developing the dramatic monologue . . . .

Current theory in interpretation stresses the value of analysis in order for the interpreter to achieve clear understanding of the literary text. Grimes and Mattingly state, for instance, that "interpretation is a doing that rests on a foundation of knowing." This

7King, pp. 6-7.

8Grimes and Mattingly, p. 6.
"foundation" comes as a result of thorough and critical analysis. As Lee indicates:

The interpreter must thoroughly investigate everything to be found within the particular piece of literature itself. He must know precisely what the author has given him to work with. Only when he fully understands the author's achievement can the interpreter decide how he will use his techniques to re-create that achievement for his audience.9

This study focuses on clues to character and attitude of the speaker as revealed through certain aspects of content and structure in each selected monologue. Grimes and Mattingly say: "Different as . . . selections are in content and structure, there are aspects they share in common with all literature, and there are means of analysis that will further our understanding of them . . . ."10 Lee, however, cautions an interpreter when she writes:

We may conveniently speak of content and structure . . . . But this separation is useful only in the sense that it provides a way of getting at understanding. Content and structure do not in fact exist as separate entities; they form one organic whole. They

9Lee, p. 17.

10Grimes and Mattingly, p. 25.
must always be examined in relation to each other in an attempt to arrive at the total achievement of the writer.\textsuperscript{11}

Therefore, even though the analyses of the selected monologues will have reference both to content and to structure, this writer is aware that "the total effect [of the dramatic monologues] is achieved only when content and structure are perfectly coordinated."\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Method}

Charlotte Lee writes that in literary analysis, "It is usually helpful to learn something about [the author] as a person—to see the individual selection[s] in the light of his whole experience."\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, Woolbert and Nelson say, "It is not possible to interpret well without establishing some kind of relationship with the author."\textsuperscript{14} Chapter II of this study, therefore, will include a summary of Robert

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11}Lee, pp. 5-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}Lee, p. 358.
  \item \textsuperscript{13}Lee, p. 22.
  \item \textsuperscript{14}Woolbert and Nelson, p. 47.
\end{itemize}
Browning's life and achievements. Also, some critical statements pertaining to Browning's literary abilities will be presented, as well as specific criticism relating to the dramatic monologues.

Next, the study will trace the development of the dramatic monologue as a distinct literary form and give a definition of the term "dramatic monologue" as it will be used in later chapters. In addition, Chapter III will include a discussion of the specific aspects of analysis to be used in the examination of content and structure of the selected dramatic monologues. Chapters IV through VI will examine the dramatic monologues according to the frame of analysis previously set up. Finally, a chapter of conclusions will contain suggestions for the oral interpreter's performance of the selected monologues. A copy of each monologue analyzed is included in the appendix of this study.
CHAPTER II

ROBERT BROWNING: MAN AND POET

The Man

Robert Browning was born at Camberwell, a suburb of London, on May 7, 1812. A biographer has written, "Of his birthplace no trace is to be found . . . . The only memorial of Browning's early life there [Camberwell] is Browning Hall, once York Street Independent Chapel, where the Browning family worshipped . . . ."¹ Two years later, on January 7, 1814, his sister, Sarah Anna, was born. So with his mother and father and sister there were "four who composed the household at Southampton Street, Camberwell, where, wrote one who knew them well (Alfred Domett), 'father, mother, only son, and only daughter, formed a most united, harmonious, and intellectual family.'"²

Lovett describes Browning as "a bright, handsome youth with long black hair falling over his shoulders," and he continues that Browning "looked, to the actor

William Macready, 'more like a youthful poet than any man I ever saw.' Yet of himself, Browning says that "he was born with light yellow hair, and that he was born 'supremely passionate.'"

Sarah Anna Wiedermann, Browning's mother, had in her childhood also lived in Camberwell. She brought up her son in an atmosphere of sincere "evangelical piety, and implanted in him the love of music, and delight in a garden which were her own special pleasure." Browning was very close to his mother, and Dowden says that "the attachment of Robert Browning to his mother--'the true type of a Scottish gentlewoman,' said Carlyle--was deep and intimate. For him she was, in his own phrase, 'a divine woman'; her death in 1849 was to Browning almost an overwhelming blow." Another biographer states that "from his mother he [Browning] inherited that love of birds and animals for which he

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4Griffin and Minchin, p. 2.


was remarkable throughout life, just as he inherited from her his highly nervous nature, his love of music and of flowers."  

The poet's father also was named Robert Browning. The elder Browning "was a senior clerk in the Bank of England, a cultivated man who was by nature more of the quiet scholar than ambitious businessman. In his son's words: 'He might have been a great man had he cared a bit about it.'"  

Extremely devoted to his father, the poet described him as "a man of high principle, pure character, and sympathetic and cheerful temperament."  

Mr. W. J. Stillman, who knew Browning's father in Paris in his elder years, said of him:

He had . . . the perpetual juvenility of a blessed child. If to live in the world as if not of it indicates a saintly nature, then Robert Browning the elder was a saint; a serene, untroubled soul, conscious of no moral or theological problem to disturb his serenity, and as gentle as a gentlewoman; a man in whom, it seemed to me, no moral conflict could ever have arisen to cloud his frank acceptance of life, as he found it come to him . . . . His unworldliness had not a flaw.  

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7 Griffin and Minchin, p. 36.
8 Bryson, p. 12.
9 Lovett, p. vii.
10 Dowden, pp. 3-4.
But not only were the moral and social characteristics of the elder Browning extraordinary; his intellectual prowess was another enviable trait. We are told that "the poet's father was a scholar and knew Greek, as well as Latin, French, Spanish, Italian, and Hebrew."\textsuperscript{11} Reuben, the uncle of the poet, has placed on record his impressions of his half-brother, and this is his description:

His wonderful store of information might really be compared to an inexhaustible mine. It comprised not merely a thorough scholastic outline of the world, but the critical points of ancient and modern history, the lore of the Middle Ages, all political combinations of parties, their description and consequences; and especially the lives of the poets and painters, concerning whom he ever had to communicate some interesting anecdote not generally known. In short, he was a living encyclopedia . . . . His own library became his treasure.\textsuperscript{12}

It was said of the poet's father that "one could not know him without being inspired with regard and admiration."\textsuperscript{13} He lived almost to the close of his eighty-fifth year, "and if he was at times bewildered by his son's poetry, he came nearer to it in intelligent

\textsuperscript{11} Griffin and Minchin, p. 7. \\
\textsuperscript{12} Griffin and Minchin, p. 12. \\
\textsuperscript{13} Griffin and Minchin, pp. 7-8.
sympathy as he grew older, and he had for long the satisfaction of enjoying his son's fame."\textsuperscript{14} It seems natural, then, this poet, artist, student of classical literature, and great explorer among curious books would exert great influence upon his precocious son.

The Browning family home was a happy home, and Bryson says that

\begin{quote}
like more than one other Victorian poet, Browning was fortunate in his early surroundings. All his life he remained devoted to his parents, and to his sister, their only other child. The influence of this happy, uncramped home-life can be felt in the spirit of confidence which runs throughout his work.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

Similarly, Griffin and Minchin state: "Rightly to understand the poet's own development it is absolutely essential to understand his home, for there to all intents and purposes he received his whole early education . . . ."\textsuperscript{16} From his parents, Robert and Sarah, Robert Browning "inherited his character and tastes, if not his genius."\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14}Dowden, pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{15}Bryson, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{16}Griffin and Minchin, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{17}Lovett, p. vii.
Of Browning's education one author says, "His school life counts for very little; of college life he had practically none; but among his father's books he read voraciously. 'It was in this way,' said his sister, 'that Robert became very early familiar with subjects generally unknown to boys.'"\(^\text{18}\) Before he was even five years old, the quick-witted and precocious child "had been removed from a neighboring . . . school because his proficiency in reading and spelling had roused the jealousy of the parents of the other pupils . . . ."\(^\text{19}\) Browning was not happy with the curriculum of formal education, and in "Pauline" he describes his school days and the effect that they had upon him:

Long constraint chained down
My soul till it was changed. I lost myself;
And were it not that I so loathed that time,
I could recall how first I learned to turn
My mind against itself; and the effects
In deeds for which remorse were vain as for
The wonderings for delirious dream; yet thence
Came cunning, envy, falsehood.

As the years passed, the lad could hardly avoid coming to the conclusion that his father was considerably more learned than any of his schoolmasters. Bryson tells us that "Browning had little formal education after he

\(^\text{18}\)Griffin and Minchin, p. 9.

\(^\text{19}\)Griffin and Minchin, p. 31.
left school at the age of fourteen. He worked with tutors, and had the run of his father's ample library, and every opportunity was given him for physical and mental development at home. He read extensively among the historical works in his father's library and grew increasingly intolerant of the ways of schools and schoolmasters. Once,

as he was passing the old playground and orchard at Peckham School with his friend Domett, Browning spoke of the "disgust with which he always thought of the place", and quoted an epigram he made years before expressive of the "undiluted misery" of the 'hapless childhood' he had spent there.

Browning was instructed in Latin and Greek by his father; he was privately tutored in French, and Angelo Cerutti was secured to be his tutor in Italian. The youth became interested in music because of his mother, and in time he came under the tutelage of John Relfe, the great musician. Browning was later to remark, "I was studying the grammar of music ... when most children are learning the multiplication, and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music."

For other subjects,

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20 Bryson, p. 13.

21 Griffin and Minchin, p. 33.

22 Griffin and Minchin, p. 16.
Browning could go any place, and to his father's library he usually retired. Thus, the education which he received at home was extensive, and it is with wonder that John Kenyon should speak of his "inexhaustible knowledge," or that the historian Kinglake, after spending a few days with Browning in a country house with a large library, should come away "quite astounded" at the versatility of his learning.23

Located near the Browning home was the Dulwich Gallery, the chief English public picture gallery during the early years of the nineteenth century. The Brownings lived only two miles from Dulwich, and his art-loving father always had tickets-of-admission for his son. It may be correctly assumed that this gallery bred and maintained in Browning his intense interest in art. Here he first learned to study and interpret painters and pictures. Browning later referred to Dulwich as the "gallery I so love and am so grateful to, having been used to going there when a child far under the age (fourteen) allowed by the regulations .... I have sate [sic] before one, some one of those pictures I had pre-determined to see, a good hour, and then gone away."24

It was at Dulwich that Browning first saw a Madonna by Andrea del Sarto.


24 Griffin and Minchin, pp. 11-12.
Browning began to read the works of Voltaire and Shelley, and he rapidly became a vegetarian, a scoffer, an atheist and "gratuitously proclaimed himself everything that he was and some things that he was not." He lacked the formal discipline which a school could provide and developed into quite a cocksure and self-centered young man. Shelley, in particular, was to exert a great and lasting influence upon the Victorian, and his works were to be the most potent literary influence which Browning ever would experience. As DeVane says, "Shelley made Browning the poet he was; he gave him poetical and political ideas, methods, and technique, and pointed out that the proper subject of poetry is the soul of the poet himself."26

In January, 1833, Browning completed work on his first major poem, "Pauline," and his aunt, Mrs. Silverthorne, provided the money necessary for its publication. The volume appeared anonymously under the name of Saunders and Otley, and Browning sent twelve copies to W. J. Fox, editor of the Monthly Repository, to be

25 Alexandra Leighton Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning (Boston, 1908), p. 43.

distributed for review. Although Fox sincerely praised and welcomed the poet, not a copy of the poem was sold.

In the spring of 1834, Browning took a two-month journey through Russia. He returned in May and subsequently began to work on his second poem, "Paracelsus." In August of that year it was published. Although sales of the poem were not great, and generally the reviews were not extravagant in their praise, still Browning was welcomed into the literary world of London. William Wordsworth personally praised Browning one evening and said, "I am proud to drink to your health, Mr. Browning." 27

It was the actor-manager Macready who suggested to Browning that the poet write him a tragedy, and "save him from going to America." 28 This suggestion fired Browning with an ambition to make good his career as a playwright, an aim which he faithfully pursued, but with little tangible success, for the next ten years. His first play, Strafford, was acted five times in May, 1837, and enjoyed an indifferent success. The hard work and poor reaction of Strafford took some of the life from

27 DeVane, p. 14.

28 DeVane, p. 14.
the young poet, and he appeared to Macready to be "jaded and thoughtsick." In February, 1843, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon was produced, and this play was received as was the first, except that this time the results were magnified. He wrote several other plays which were equally unsuccessful. Nowadays, critics generally agree that Browning was not a successful playwright simply because the time did not appear propitious for him, and because the poet used much intellectual subtlety and an amazingly expressive style in the plots of his plays. Apparently the poet needed to work his way through modifications of the drama toward his true province, the dramatic monologue.

Browning was in Naples in September, 1844, when Elizabeth Barrett published her "Poems." He read them upon his return from the Continent, and was gratified to find his name linked with those of Wordsworth and the newly-great Tennyson in "Lady Geraldine's Courtship":

Or from Browning some pomegranate which, if cut deep down the middle, Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.

In January, 1845, Miss Barrett received her first letter from Browning, the first letter of a now-famous

29 DeVane, p. 15.
and unparalleled correspondence. The well-known story of their courtship has been retold by dramatists, biographers, and movie-producers and will not be elaborated upon in this discussion. On September 12, 1846, in Marylebone Church, Elizabeth Barrett was married to Robert Browning. The following week, the couple fled to Italy and eventually settled in Pisa. They later moved to Casa Guidi in Florence, where on March 9, 1849, a son, Robert Wiedmann Barrett Browning, was born.

Though the years passed quietly and pleasantly for the family, Browning gradually became discouraged by the reception of his poetry. Then suddenly Mrs. Browning's health began to decline. She continued to be frail and sickly, and in June, 1861, her health took a final turn for the worse. On June 23rd, 1861, Elizabeth Barrett Browning died.

The poet was only forty-five years old when he returned to live in London after the death of his wife. A friend wrote of him: "Of personal objects he seems to have none except the education of his son. . . ." But during the next twenty-six years Browning was to

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30 Griffin and Minchin, p. 224.
accomplish a great deal. His poems were becoming increasingly popular, and by 1868 when The Ring and the Book was published, Browning became, second to Tennyson, "the most honored living poet of England." The University of Oxford conferred upon him the degree of M. A., a distinction awarded for eminence in the field of learning.

In the winter of 1887, for the first time Browning's friends became apprehensive about his health. One severe head cold followed another. He paid no attention to these illnesses and went about continuing to write. Stronger by the spring of 1888, he was busy revising some of his poems, which appeared in monthly volumes during 1889.

While in Venice in November of 1889, Browning caught a cold, which quickly developed into bronchitis and ultimately heart failure. Although he continued to look forward to more years of activity, he was aware of his condition. At ten o'clock on the night of December 12, 1889, "without ... pain or suffering other than that of weakness or weariness, he passed on." Robert Browning was buried in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey on December 31, 1889.

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31 DeVane, p. 28.
32 DeVane, p. 36.
The Poet

While still a young boy, Robert Browning wrote his first formal poem. Of that poem he once wrote:

...the first composition I was guilty of was something in imitation of Ossian, whom I had not read, but conceived through two or three scraps in other books—I never can recollect not writing rhymes, but I knew they were nonsense even then; this, however, I thought exceedingly well of, and laid up for posterity under the cushions of a great armchair...I could not have been five years old, that's one consolation.33

Browning's first two major poems, "Pauline" and "Paracelsus," were not especially popular with the critics. They agreed that the influence of Shelley, who had greatly influenced the nature of the speaker of "Pauline," was not far away from "Paracelsus." In the Athenaeum for August 22, 1835, the following article appeared:

"Paracelsus" by Robert Browning. There is talent in this dramatic poem (in which is attempted a picture of the mind of this noted character), but it is dreamy and obscure. Writers would do well to remember (by way of example) that though it is not difficult to imitate the mysticism and vagueness of Shelley, we love him and have taken him to our hearts as a poet, not because of these characteristics—but in spite of them.34

33DeVane, p. 7.
34DeVane, p. 53.
It was as a result of Browning's meeting with W. C. Macready that his endeavors with dramatic literature really began. All in all, Browning wrote seven plays intended for the stage and two closet dramas, none of them very successful. Of Browning's efforts as a playwright, Park Honan says: "In the last sixty years scholarly opinion of Browning as a playwright has been united in at least one conclusion: that he failed in his task." Thomas R. Lounsbury summarizes five reasons for Browning's failure as a playwright:

(1) not one of Browning's actions gives the impression of inevitable development; (2) his human portraits are unfaithful to human nature; (3) despite powerful passages, the plays lack in sustained interest; (4) dialogue tends to be obscure; and (5) although Browning's characters speak vaguely and endlessly about their feeling, they do not act upon them.

However true these reasons may be, Browning's dramatic attempts were not wasted effort for, as Bryson comments, "No more than Tennyson was Browning by nature a writer for the stage . . . . Practice in play-writing led to the discovery of where his special dramatic talent lay—in the study of the single character presented in

35 Honan, p. 43.

36 As quoted by Honan, p. 45.
monologue form." That Browning's "practice" as a playwright aided him later in writing the subtle dramatic monologues is commented upon also by Park Honan:

The revelation of character . . . was of paramount importance in Browning's art almost from the beginning . . . One would thus expect that the theater was an absolute necessity for Browning—granting his emergence from it with the store of techniques necessary to write the dramatic monologues; it is doubtful whether the poetic laboratory of "Sordello" and a few short lyrics alone—after "Paracelsus"—could have supplied the needed artistic experience. It would also seem likely that Browning's failure in the theater taught him something about the nature of his own dramatic talent, and thus guided him toward the form and techniques of the monologues.

Once, while writing Colombe's Birthday, Browning wrote to his friend Domett in New Zealand: "But I feel myself so much stronger, if flattery not deceive, that I shall stop some things that were meant to follow and begin again. I really seem to have something fresh to say."

This feeling forecasts the short dramatic poems of the Dramatic Lyrics and Dramatic Romances.

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38 Honan, pp. 46-47.

39 DeVane, p. 136.
Between the years of 1841 and 1846—that is, after the publication of "Sordello" and until his marriage—all of Browning's poetry was published in a series which the poet called Bells and Pomegranates. The series began with "Pippa Passes" and reached a high-point in the poet's abilities in the shorter poems of the Dramatic Lyrics of 1842 and the Dramatic Romances of 1845. Included in the Lyrics were "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "My Last Duchess," "Porphria's Lover," and "Count Gismond." The Dramatic Romances contained "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church." Men and Women was published in 1855, and included in this volume were "Saul," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Andrea del Sarto." There were considerable numbers of reviews of these poems and almost all of them were appreciative of Browning's abilities. Browning, however, was not satisfied with the reception the poems received, and he wrote to Ruskin, "I look on my own shortcomings too sorrowfully, try to remedy them too earnestly: but I shall never change my point of sight, or feel other than disconcerted and apprehensive when the public, critics and all, begin to understand and approve me."\(^{40}\) Since

\(^{40}\)DeVane, p. 190.
1855, however, the fifty-one poems of *Men and Women* have steadily grown in popularity, and they are now recognized as perhaps representing the highest level of Browning's poetic achievement. In May of 1864, *Dramatis Personae* was published, and "Rabbi Ben Ezra" was included in this volume.

Greatly heartened, Browning aspired to write a poem of epic length in which he would employ all his peculiar techniques and talents—his mastery of the dramatic monologue in blank verse, his ability in interpreting fact, his defense of innocent and misunderstood virtue, his analysis of motive and character, the variety in expression. This great work, *The Ring and the Book*, was published in four volumes during the years 1868 and 1869. The poem, based upon an obscure Roman murder case of the seventeenth century, was in the form of twelve dramatic monologues and amounted to more than 21,000 lines. The volume, called by one critic "the greatest spiritual treasure since Shakespeare," received immediate and unqualified praise. DeVane says:

> The finished poem is the crown of his work, in thought as well as technique, and into it he put all his skill, ingenuity, and learning. The poem is the apex of his long development of

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41 DeVane, *Major British Writers*, p. 471.
the dramatic monologue, and it must be accounted one of the boldest and most successful experiments in history. 42

Contemporary writers were mixed in their feelings toward Browning's poetry. The Victorian Carlyle was a sincere admirer of Browning, and he called him "one of the bravest and most gifted English souls now living . . . . The finest poetic genius, finest possibility of such, we have got vouchsafed to us in this generation." 43 Yet even Carlyle admonished Browning for his "unintelligibility." He wrote, "That is a fact: you are dreadfully difficult to understand; and that is really a sin. Admit the fact." Yet Ruskin, in the fourth volume of Modern Painters, said: "Robert Browning is unerring in every sentence he writes about the Middle Ages, always vital, right and profound . . . ." Swinburne wrote of Browning that "he is something too much the reverse of obscure; he is too brilliant and subtle for the ready reader of a ready writer to follow with any certainty the track of an intelligence which moves with such incessant rapidity . . . ." Oscar Wilde praised Browning and states: "Taken as a whole the man was great . . . . He

42 DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 29.

43 Short quotations of this paragraph are from F. R. G. Duckworth, Browning, Background and Conflict (New York, 1932), pp. 31 f.
is the most Shakespearian creature since Shakespeare."
Similarly, Osbert Burdett remarked, "Browning is the only modern poet whose range, humanity, humor, mastery of language and variety of gifts invited comparison with Shakespeare." Francis Thompson named Browning "an indisputable poet," and denied that Browning had or thought himself to have any message "for his public."
Somewhat later, G. K. Chesterton wrote that "no criticism of Browning's poems can be vital, none in the face of the poems themselves can even be intelligible which is not based upon the fact that he was successfully or otherwise a conscious and deliberate artist."44

As indicated in Chapter I of this study, Browning's poetry today is being read with interest--although mixed comments continue to be drawn from critics. For example, Roma King, Jr., says:

Browning's poetry as a whole is of uneven value. Much in the seventeen volumes which he wrote need not be salvaged, nor indeed, preserved. A considerable portion may be prized . . . for its effectiveness in communication a significant version of life in a structure capable of stimulating diverse aesthetic responses. Browning's scope, intensity, and vividness assure his being read long after his early devotees have found other exciting inspiration for their "positive thinking."45

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45King, p. 151.
James Reeves, editor of *Selected Poems of Robert Browning*, further comments on Browning's poetry:

The most obvious thing about it [Browning's poetry] is its volume. Browning lived a full poetic life, unhampered by material wants; we may be sure that anything he wanted to write he wrote; nothing he could achieve was frustrated by accidental happenings . . . . Browning had immense creative energy, uninhibited by psychological or social causes, though directed to some extent by the nature of Victorian susceptibilities, of which his own intense conventionalism made him continuously aware.46

With regard to the dramatic monologues in particular, Park Honan summarizes some of the criticism against Browning into four main objections:

1. All Browning's monologuists talk alike—all in fact, like Browning.

2. Browning was unconcerned with words; he is verbose, capricious, and insensitive to the finer qualities of language.

3. Browning was perversely concerned with words; he twists language for exhibitionary purposes and adopts preposterous coinages.

4. Browning disdained simplicity; he uses technical terms that are not poetic, or that do not turn into poetry at his hands.47

Yet Honan disagrees with these statements and feels that the poet "perfected a kind of mesh for catching

46 Reeves, p. xxv.

47 Honan, p. 208.
character that consisted of a remarkably intricate set of
dramatic, prosodic, and verbal techniques...."\(^{48}\)

In a discussion about Robert Browning, the poet, some things must be said about his personal philosophy
as revealed in his poetry, and especially his dramatic
monologues. This was his creed: "I believe in God, in
Truth, and Love and Art."\(^{49}\) What has most come under the
fire of contemporary readers is Browning's Christian
optimism. Though he found sadness in his life, Browning
still could write in "Pippa Passes":

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The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven—
All's right with the world!
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Commenting on this optimism, Chesterton says, "The supreme
value of Browning as an optimist lies in [the fact] ....
that beyond all his conclusions, and deeper than all his
arguments, he was passionately interested in and in love
with existence .... He is a happy man."\(^{50}\) Bryson

\(^{48}\) Honan, p. 4.

\(^{49}\) John Hopper, A Comprehensive Outline of Browning:

\(^{50}\) Chesterton, p. 186.
comments: "His poetry squarely faces the evil and inexplicable in existence; the optimism and faith which are his answer to them remain unimpaired because they are based not on assertive self-confidence but ultimately on humility." But Browning's optimism was not a trifling kind of naivety. Many of his central poetic figures are churchmen, and most of them suffer under his pen. The Bishop at St. Praxed's, the monk of the Spanish Cloister, the church in "The Confessional," the ecclesiastics in The Ring and the Book—all come in for a share of the poet's scourge. Yet faith is the central core of his creed. Believing that Divine love is manifested both in nature and in the human intellect, Browning asserted love as the catalytic force at the human level.

Commenting on Browning's philosophy as revealed in his poetry, Reeves states:

There is an element of truth in Shelley's idealised statement about poetry—"Poetry is the record of the best and happiest moments of the happiest and best minds." Much of the happiness for a poet comes from the recording of those moments. The moments when he was improvising, in his own personal idiom and manner, on the worth and beauty of the world of which his senses brought him abundant daily evidence—these were the best moments in the life of Robert Browning, poet.52

51 Bryson, p. 1.
52 Reeves, p. xxxiii.
"I like Browning," said Lockhart, Sir Walter Scott's son-in-law. "He's not the least like one of your damned literary men."\(^5^3\)

**Summary**

Chapter II has presented information pertaining to Robert Browning as a man and a poet. Although critical comment today is not always favorable, Browning's poetry is being read with renewed interest.

The next chapter discusses the dramatic monologue as a particular literary genre. The development of the form of the dramatic monologue will be traced, a definition of the term as used in this study will be submitted, and a frame of analysis will be formulated.

\(^{53}\)DeVane, *Major British Writers*, p. 497.
CHAPTER III

THE DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE

Development of the Form

Although the dramatic monologue had literary predecessors before the nineteenth century, we may say that it was developed as a separate poetic art by Robert Browning. In 1908 two critics commented on the relationship between Browning and this particular literary genre. Robert Huntington Fletcher wrote, "Robert Browning . . . was the first to bring the form into distinct prominence, gave it greatly increased significance, and in it achieved his most conspicuous successes."¹ In Browning and the Dramatic Monologue, S. S. Curry stated that Browning "was led to invent, or adopt, a dramatic form different from the play. From the midst of the conflict between poet and stage, between writer and stage artist, the monologue was evolved, or at least recognized and completed as an objective dramatic form."²

¹Robert Huntington Fletcher, "Browning's Dramatic Monologs," Modern Language Notes, XXIII (1908), 108.

²S. S. Curry, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue (Boston, 1908), p. 10.
The dramatic monologue had its beginnings as far back in time as Greek literature and in such an Anglo-Saxon poem as "The Sea-Farer." Two critics, Claud Howard and S. S. Curry, feel that the letter was the earliest form of literature which clearly revealed the "dramatic monologue attitude of mind."\(^3\) Some of the prologues of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* reveal this same dramatic attitude. The sly Pardoner, in explaining to his fellow pilgrims how he duped the naive religious country folk by use of fake relics, reveals his avarice, hypocrisy, and cunning; and the lustful Wife of Bath in her long apology defending her five marriages and the supremacy of wife over husband frankly reveals her sensuality, her materialistic philosophy and her inner restlessness. Complex character studies though they are, the prologues are part of a larger narrative framework.

Howard believes that the love lyric, incorporating speaker and hearer, gave the "form in which the first tendencies toward the dramatic monologue are found.\(^4\) He says that Chaucer's "To Rosamonde" was one

\(^3\)As quoted by Ina Beth Sessions, "The Dramatic Monologue," *PMLA*, LXIX (1947), 505.

of the earliest illustrations of this type of love lyric. Howard also states that Drayton's sonnet beginning, "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part," is one of the first examples of a dramatic monologue with the three characteristics of speaker, audience, and occasion. Many of the soliloquies of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists were forerunners of the dramatic monologue. But Howard feels that after the Elizabethan era, the lyric and soliloquy gave way to poems like the ode and the elegy. For many years the dramatic monologue did not progress as a distinct literary type.

Howard cites several factors which he feels contributed to the development of the dramatic monologue during the Victorian age. He says that "the importance of sociology, the rise of subjectivity over objectivity, and the spread of democracy" affected the development of the monologue. Tennyson is credited with using the dramatic monologue form, but he did not perfect it. Sessions quotes Howard as saying, "The period of conscious art arrived with Browning. In the dramatic monologues of this Victorian poet, dramatic occasion and spirit superseded the lyrical, and style and

5 Howard, p. 15.
characterization were greatly improved." Many critics feel that "Browning's followers in the twentieth century --notably Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot--have tended to make the monologue an internal one (through stream-of-consciousness), to eliminate the dramatic presence of the auditor, and to blur the critical moment." Morris Sweetkind, however, writes:

As a result of the interest in Freudian psychology and the unconscious, as well as the use of the stream of consciousness and "free association" technique developed in the twentieth-century novel, modern poets have further refined the dramatic monologue. Contemporary poets like Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Archibald MacLeish have used it effectively to illuminate the dark recesses of the human psyche, to dramatize a situation, and to expose the complex ironies of life and character.

Regardless of the twentieth-century acceptance or rejection of this literary form, Browning should be recognized for the innovator that he was. S. S. Curry says: "Browning has no peer in the monologue. Others

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6 Sessions, p. 506.


have followed him in its use, but his monologues remain the most numerous, vivid, and expressive."⁹ Although the form of the dramatic monologue was long before anticipated, it was Robert Browning who carried it to perfection. Many critics have discussed Browning and the monologue, but this relationship is best described by Curry when he writes that "in Browning . . . the monologue becomes profoundly significant. Browning remains the supreme master of the monologue. Here we find the deepest interpretations of the problems of existence, and the expression of the depths of human character."¹⁰

**Definition of the Form**

A brief survey of dictionaries and textbooks reveals several definitions of a dramatic monologue. (In this study, monologue and dramatic monologue will be used interchangeably.) Sir James Murray, in *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, explains "monologue" as

a scene in which a person of the drama speaks by himself, contrasted with chorus and dialogue . . . . A long speech or harangue

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⁹Curry, p. 10.

¹⁰Curry, p. 131.
delivered by one person who is in company or conversation with others. In modern use, a dramatic composition for a single performer; a kind of dramatic entertainment performed throughout by one person.\textsuperscript{11}

Gertrude Johnson says:

The monologue is one end of a conversation and presupposes a listener or listeners in a definitely conceived dramatic situation. It reports a complete story or revelation of events, showing at its best the subjective workings of the character speaking, together with such reactions as are caused by the presence of other characters. It is always vivid, intense, and personal.\textsuperscript{12}

Some definitions take into account the voice (persona) of the monologues. Park Honan, for example, defines a "monologue" as "a single discourse by one whose presence is indicated by the poet but who is not the poet himself."\textsuperscript{13} Another critic writes that a monologue is a poem of moderate compass in which the poet ostensibly does not speak but gives us the speech of a particular character, speaking to an unheard auditor who stands in a dramatic relationship to the speaker at a critical moment in the speaker's scheme or career.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{11}\textit{A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles}, ed. J. A. A. Murray (Oxford, 1908), VI, 621.


\textsuperscript{13}Honan, p. 122.

\textsuperscript{14}Bloom et al., p. 147.
Charlotte Lee says:

The dramatic monologue is spoken by a single character created outside the poet's own personality. The speaker directly addresses other characters, who are also affected by the incident taking place and who help to motivate the speaker's reactions and train of thought. The other characters do not speak, but they are nevertheless rather fully developed as personalities, or at least as forces in relation to the speaker.\(^{15}\)

Similarly, Woolbert and Nelson say:

Insofar as it tells a story, the monologue can be classified as narrative poetry, but it is usually on a highly dramatic level, with many background details suggested rather than narrated. It is, however, a dramatized narrative having one character speaking under special circumstances which are revealed along with the personality of the speaker.\(^{16}\)

Also commenting on the persona of a monologue, Sweetkind indicates clearly that "the dramatist tries to keep himself out of the picture. By means of words and actions, the speaker reveals himself to the reader or listener."\(^{17}\) James E. Frey, in accordance with what has already been said, defines a monologue as "a poem in which a single character reveals his own nature as well

\(^{15}\)Lee, p. 369.

\(^{16}\)Woolbert and Nelson, p. 89.

\(^{17}\)Sweetkind, p. 181.
as the details (time, place, other characters, etc.) of the dramatic situation."\(^{18}\) The persona of a monologue, thus, is emphasized in many definitions.

Relating the term to the art of interpretation, Gertrude Johnson states that in a monologue

> the interpreter has at his command a means of revelation at once intense, imaginative, subtle, and interesting. Through him the audience sees the effect of circumstances and events focused upon a single character whose complete reactions may be revealed.\(^{19}\)

In *The Poetry of Experience*, Robert Langbaum says, "The dramatic monologue is unprecedented in its effect . . . . Its effect distinguishes it, in spite of mechanical resemblances, from the monologues of traditional poetry . . . ."\(^{20}\) As related to the art of interpretation, then, it may be concluded that the "effect" of a monologue is important and should be kept in mind when arriving at any definition of the term.

In 1947, Ina Beth Sessions published an authoritative article about the dramatic monologue, defining the term as "that literary form which has the definite


\(^{19}\)Johnson, p. 157.

characteristics of speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present." In her article she groups the dramatic monologue into four sub-classifications:

**Perfect Example**

1) Speaker  
2) Audience  
3) Occasion  
4) Interplay between speaker and audience  
5) Revelation of character  
6) Dramatic action  
7) Action taking place in the present  

**Approximations**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Imperfect</th>
<th>Formal</th>
<th>Approximate</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Shifting of center of interest from speaker; or</td>
<td>1) Speaker 2) Audience 3) Occasion</td>
<td>Speaker 1) Lacking one or more of the characteristics listed under the Formal or the Imperfect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2) Fading into indefiniteness of one or more of the last six Perfect characteristics.</td>
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21 Sessions, p. 508.

22 Sessions, p. 508.
Miss Sessions explains:

The term Formal indicates that the form of the dramatic monologue is presented; there is a speaker or there could not be a monologue at all; there is an audience, without which there would be no genre . . . .; there is an occasion, which characteristic is a minimum necessity because the speaker and audience are thrown together in some accountable way . . . . If a poem or bit of prose has these three characteristics, but does not develop interplay or character revelation or dramatic action and so on, then the work is recognized as having the form of a dramatic monologue.23

No mention has been made in any of the preceding definitions of a difference—if one does exist—between a monologue and a soliloquy. Tallcott, in The Art of Acting and Public Reading, defines soliloquy as "a composition written in the first person representing a single character in meditation, or talking to himself."24 He emphasizes the idea that in a soliloquy no other characters are supposed to be present at any time during the speech. S. S. Curry says, "Strictly speaking, a soliloquy is only a revelation of the thinking of a person entirely alone and uninfluenced by another; but a monologue implies thinking influenced by some peculiar type of hearer."25 Gertrude Johnson observes that

23 Sessions, pp. 512-513.


25 Curry, p. 58.
"monologues are really little plays, dramas, with one person doing all the talking . . . . Often they are much like soliloquies, but never quite the same"; and she continues, "a variety of meanings are given the word 'monologue': a speech or soliloquy spoken by a character in a story or play. Several of Browning's best monologues are titled soliloquies, such as 'Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister' . . . ."26

Curry's definition of a monologue includes some ideas which also relate to the soliloquy:

The monologue, as Browning has exemplified it, is one end of a conversation. A definite speaker is conceived in a definite, dramatic situation. Usually we find also a well-defined listener, though his character is understood entirely from the impression he produces upon the speaker. We feel that this listener has said something and that his presence and character influence the speaker's thought, words, and manner. The conversation does not consist of abstract remarks, but takes place in a definite situation as part of human life.27

Curry concludes, therefore, that "Browning's soliloquies are practically monologues. We feel that the character almost 'others' itself and talks to itself as if to another person . . . ."28

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26 Johnson, p. 156.
27 Curry, p. 7.
28 Curry, p. 58.
Literature lists as dramatic monologues "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" and "My Last Duchess." The editors of this anthology state: "Browning varies the techniques of his dramatic monologues: the Spanish monk soliloquizes, but the Duke of Ferrara . . . talks to the envoy." 29

In a like manner, Arthur Edwin Krows uses the terms monologue and soliloquy more or less interchangeably, "implying that they are one and the same dramatic form." 30 The Universal Dictionary of the English Language makes no distinction between the monologue and the soliloquy when defining the former as "a dramatic scene in which a person speaks by himself; a soliloquy; a long speech or dissertation uttered by one person in company." 31 Likewise Webster's Third New


International Dictionary makes no distinction between the two terms, stating that a monologue is "a dramatic scene in which one person soliloquizes; a literary composition written in the form of a soliloquy; a long speech uttered by one person while in company with others . . . ."\(^{32}\)

On the other hand, Robert Langbaum differentiates between the two terms when he says that it is the incidental nature of the self-revelation that distinguishes the dramatic monologue from the form which is most often confused with it, the soliloquy. The difference is that the soliloquist's subject is himself, while the speaker of the dramatic monologue directs his attention outward. Since talking about one's self necessarily involves an objective stance, the soliloquist must see himself from a general perspective. It is not enough for him to think his thoughts and feel his feelings, he must also describe them as an observer would; for he is trying to understand himself in a way that the reader understands him --rationally, by relating his thoughts and feelings to general truths . . . . The soliloquist is concerned with truth, he is trying to find the right point of view; while the speaker of the dramatic monologue starts with one established point of view, and is not concerned with its truth but with trying to impress it on the outside world.\(^{33}\)

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\(^{33}\)Langbaum, p. 146.
Langbaum continues, saying that in a dramatic monologue we understand the speaker's point of view not through his description of it but indirectly, through seeing what he sees while judging the limitations and distinctions of what he sees. The result is that we understand, if not more, at least something other than the speaker understands, and the meaning is conveyed as much by what the speaker conceals and distorts as much by what he reveals.\(^{34}\)

In the light of what Langbaum and others say, "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" appears to be a dramatic monologue. M. W. MacCollum, in a Warton Lecture of 1925, says that in every instance . . . the object [of the dramatic monologue] is to give facts from within. A certain dramatic understanding of the person speaking, which implies a certain dramatic sympathy with him, is not only the essential condition, but the final cause of the whole species . . . .\(^{35}\)

The speaker in this monologue definitely gives the reader "facts from within"; as a result, the reader understands him better. Commenting upon the poem, Langbaum says: "Although Brother Laurence does not hear the imprecations directed against him, the speaker is entirely absorbed in them and manages to communicate

\(^{34}\)Langbaum, p. 146.

\(^{35}\)As quoted by Langbaum, p. 156.
about Brother Laurence and himself something quite other than he intends."³⁶ Curry concludes: "In the 'Soliloquy . . . ' the monk talks to himself almost as to another person, and his every idea is influenced by Brother Laurence, whom he sees in the garden below him, but to whom he does not speak and who does not see him."³⁷ The sources cited justify classifying "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" as a dramatic monologue.

In summary of the preceding discussion, this definition is offered for the term "dramatic monologue":

A dramatic composition in prose or poetry for a single performer, in which that performer gives one end of a conversation, presupposing one or more [persons within sight of the speaker] . . . in a clearly conceived and clearly set forth dramatic situation [of conflict]. It portrays the subjective processes, the inner psychological mechanisms, of the speaking character, brought about by the presence of other implied characters who do not speak, and by the stimulus-response processes of those silent, implied characters. The side of the conversation given by the single speaker is not made up of abstractions, but takes place always in a very definite situation, revealing the dramatic experience of the speaking characters, and sometimes of the characters who never speak.³⁸

³⁶ Langbaum, p. 156.

³⁷ Curry, p. 58.

Analysis of the Form

Earlier in this study, it was stated that knowing a text well is the first step toward a good performance of oral interpretation. A successful interpreter of Browning will seek to understand the ways in which Browning's technique operates in the character-revealing monologues and to remember that Browning's monologues are not impersonal thoughts, but the expression of one individual to another:

The monologue is like a lyric . . . in that it must be recognized as a complete whole. Each clause must be understood in relation to others as part of the whole . . . . But the monologue differs from all these in that the whole must be felt from the beginning. The monologue resembles the lyric in being simple and in being usually short, but it is unlike it in that its theme is chiefly dramatic, its interest indirect, and that it lays bare to a far greater degree human motives in certain situations and under the ruling forces of life.39

In similar vein Grimes and Mattingly say:

Be it lyric or story or drama, as silent readers we respond, of course, to the total effect of the composition, but for greater understanding--which precedes full appreciation--it is necessary to perceive the elements of the work of art.40

40Grimes and Mattingly, p. 25.
The question arises as to what method the oral interpreter will use to examine these elements.

Discussing methods to use in literary analysis, Park Honan says:

A great deal may be learned about poetry by taking up a few select "objective criteria" and exploring a group of poems for what they tell when examined solely in the light of these criteria. For certainly any way of examining a poem or a group of poems is worth while, and not misleading, if that way seems to bring to light something new and interesting without implying that its way is the only way, or that it is the most proper way, or that it is a way which suggests a permanent system of classification.\textsuperscript{41}

King and Geiger, writing about methods which employ the terms content and structure, recognize the close relationship of the two. King states:

By matter [content] . . . [is meant] all the materials out of which the poem is made (sensuous, emotional, and intellectual), and by structure all the devices used to arrange and hold matter in artistic form (diction, sentence structure, rhythm . . .). Meaning is that end produced by the union of matter and structure; it is . . . an incarnation in structure.\textsuperscript{42}

Similarly, Don Geiger indicates:

\textsuperscript{41}Honan, pp. 124-125.

\textsuperscript{42}King, p. 9.
In accepting the identification of form [structure] and content, the oral reader adopts the generally accepted view that "meter, diction, methods of organizing the poem . . . are parts of the total meaning."

In brief, then, the oral interpreter, wanting to convey the attitudes of the poem can only know them when he has traced out the function of diction, meter, symbols . . . etc. 43

And commenting on attitudes in a poem, Cleanth Brooks writes: "The unifying principle of the organization which is the poem is an attitude or complex of attitudes." 44 The actor and producer Stanislavsky calls this "complex of attitudes" the "subtext" of a dramatic situation and says:

The subtext is a web of innumerable, varied inner patterns inside a play and a part, woven from "magic ifs," given circumstances, all sorts of figments of the imagination, inner movements, objects of attention, smaller and greater truths and a belief in them, adaptations, adjustments and other similar elements. It is the subtext that makes us say the words we do in a play. 45

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Although there is clearly much to examine in any literary object, analysis of the selected monologues in this study will focus, as stated earlier, upon clues to character, attitude, and dramatic situation. These clues will be sought in two steps: (1) determination of the situational components; and (2) examination of certain aspects of style—thought patterns, diction, and rhythm.

Situational Components:

According to Grimes and Mattingly,

In analysis of the literary object, our starting point . . . concerns the situational components of the work. Any human utterance is a composite of these. It is spoken by someone (Who?), to another (to Whom?), in a place (Where?), at a time (When?), for a reason (Why?), to communicate something (What?), in a certain manner (How?) . . . . In a given piece of writing these factors may or may not be equally obvious or clear; some may be subservient to others.\(^{46}\)

These factors parallel what Ina Beth Sessions, quoted earlier in this chapter, lists as constituting the "Perfect Example" of a dramatic monologue. Don Geiger approaches literature in the same manner, and he adds, "Frequently enough our analysis and understanding of a

\(^{46}\)Grimes and Mattingly, pp. 26-27.
given piece may become more secure when we discover in
the work answers to these questions and to a seventh:
how do the answers to who, what, why, etc., relate to
one another?" 47 Grimes and Mattingly divide the
situational components into the cognitive and affective
elements. They add: "Generally a reader will look for
the cognitive aspects first, since . . . for the most
part there is no feeling without comprehension of
cognitive elements," 48 which include speaker (Who?),
subject (What?), place (Where?), time (When?), and
listener (to Whom?). The affective ones are attitude
and pervasive feeling (How? and Why?).

Likewise, Curry states that in a monologue "we
must realize the situation, the speaker, the hearer,
before the meaning can become clear; and it is failure
to do this which has caused many to find Browning
obscure." 49 Curry also lists questions for analysis
which include: Who speaks? What kind of man says
this? To whom does—He speak? Of whom is he talking?
Where is he? At what point in the conversation do we

47 Geiger, p. 62.

48 Grimes and Mattingly, p. 27.

49 Curry, p. 7.
break in upon him in the unconscious utterance of his life and motives? What is the argument?

Determining the situational components, particularly the cognitive elements, will be the first step taken in the analysis of each monologue in this study. The affective elements will involve word choice and rhythm and will become clear as style is discussed.

Certain Aspects of Style--Thought Patterns, Diction, and Rhythm:

The monologues in this study present a speaker (persona) in conflict with a force within or outside himself. Style, "an all-inclusive term pertaining to the choice and arrangement of words [diction], the selection and arrangement of content [thought patterns], rhythm,"\textsuperscript{50} often provides some assistance in the analysis of the persona of a poem. Lee agrees that style does this and says:

\begin{quote}
The language which a character uses should indicate a great deal about his background and attitude . . . . The arrangement of ideas gives a clue to the clarity of his thinking and is likely to be affected by intensity of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{50}Grimes and Mattingly, p. 41.
emotion. The length of the thought units may also reveal much about his personality, his forcefulness, and his authority, as well as his degree of tension.  

Thought Patterns:

This study will examine the various patterns of thought groups in the monologues in order to ascertain what they reveal about the character speaking. Though by some of his Victorian critics Browning's syntax— "the due arrangement of word forms to show their mutual relations in the sentence" — was called obscure, indeed, wilfully obscure, Roma King, Jr., feels this apparent difficulty "arises only indirectly from his profundity, his dialectical and psychological subtleties; directly from his structure, which he intended to be an embodiment, an externalization of matter."  

Commenting on Browning's syntax, an aspect of structure, Reeves states:

His inversions and tortuosities of syntax can too often be ascribed only to an unwillingness to revise. His main fault is what we should

51Lee, p. 272.


53King, pp. 138-139.
expect from an artist; he was careless of technical perfection, impatient of correction. . . . Browning improvised and experimented. His syntax is often clumsy. His monologues sometimes show the faults of his prose—a looseness of structure betrayed in his fondness for dashes instead of other punctuation-marks, an inability to speak gracefully and lucidly.54

But King finds Browning's syntax functional: "His structure is a precise expression of clearly formulated ideas and emotions; his monologues are dramatic, presenting a fully developed speaker compelled to communicate to a listener . . . ."55 King further states:

Browning's attempt to communicate dramatically the total experience of the speaker produces an unconventional syntax. Often the arrangement of the sentence is governed by the relative importance which the speaker attributes to its elements. He uses words associationally in thought and emotional groups so that distortion of syntax and omission of words--particularly of function words not ordinarily used in conversation--are inevitable. This makes many of his lines characteristically cryptic and elliptical. The effect is that of a mind in the act of communicating thought—thought that is emotional and sensuous.56

Browning's syntax, therefore, is of interest in this study of selected monologues.

54 Reeves, pp. xxv f.

55 King, pp. 139-140.

56 King, p. 147.
Not only the sentence structure but also shifts of thought are important in character revelation. Curry indicates that it is especially necessary in the monologue that action should show the discovery, arrival, or initiation of ideas. Sudden and abrupt transitions, says Curry, "are the peculiar characteristics of Browning's monologues." Although the abrupt transition may result in an unconventional syntax, Curry feels they are an integral part of the poem since they connect the speaker (persona) with the unwritten situation or the unwritten thought of the listener.

This study will examine sentence structure and thought units to determine what they reveal about character and attitude of the speaker. Shifts in thought as indicated by transitions also will be noted.

Diction:

Browning's use of diction is a vital part of the interesting style of the monologues and helps to reveal character in each poem. In this study, "diction" will refer to (1) vocabulary, (2) allusions, (3) dramatic irony, (4) figures of sound, especially alliteration and cacophony.

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57Curry, p. 91.
The American College Dictionary defines "vocabulary" as "the stock of words used by a people, or by a particular class or person." Grimes and Mattingly indicate that an author's choice of vocabulary may set the tone for the entire selection. As a general rule, Browning's vocabulary is suited to the particular persona and to the particular situation in each monologue. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," for instance, there are learned, poetic, archaic, unfamiliar, colloquial, and slang words. Nevertheless, all the words have functional purposes. According to King, "Browning used a distinctive diction for each of his better poems. In 'Fra Lippo Lippi' there are forty words that occur nowhere else in Browning's poetry." This study will scrutinize Browning's vocabulary in the selected monologues for clues to character and attitude.

Sometimes Browning uses an allusion, "an indirect reference, by means of mention or quotation, to something real or fictitious outside the work," in order to indicate character and attitudes in the poems.

59 See Grimes and Mattingly, p. 49.
60 King, p. 141.
61 C. F. Main and Peter J. Seng, Poems (Belmont, California, 1961), p. 36.
Allusions, says Laurence Perrine, "are a means of reinforcing the emotion or the ideas of one's work with the emotions or ideas of another work or occasion."62 Browning often makes reference to figures and events in the history of the Renaissance, especially in Italy and Spain, and to romantic legends of the past. The use of allusions will be examined to ascertain what character traits or attitude changes are revealed.

Another aspect of Browning's diction which illuminates the character of the persona is the use of dramatic irony. Perrine says:

In Dramatic Irony the discrepancy or incongruity is not between what the speaker says and what he means but between what the speaker says and what the author means. The speaker's words may be perfectly straightforward, but the author, by putting these words in a particular speaker's mouth, may be indicating to the reader ideas or attitudes quite opposed to those the speaker is voicing . . . . It may be used not only to convey attitudes but also to illuminate character, for the author who uses it is indirectly commenting not only upon the value of the ideas uttered but also upon the nature of the person who utters them.63

The idea of a speaker revealing more than he intends is similarly commented upon by Alan Thompson, who finds

63 Perrine, pp. 95-96.
this type of irony to occur when "a speaker is made to use words bearing to the audience, in addition to his own meanings, a further and ominous sense, hidden from himself . . . ." In Browning's monologues, dramatic irony is used whenever there is a discrepancy between what the character says about himself and what the poet wants the reader to think about him. Examples of dramatic irony will be cited in the chapters of analysis.

Although poets may employ many different sound devices, attention in this study will be given primarily to two, alliteration and cacophony, where they seem to relate to character or attitude. Alliteration has been defined as "the repetition of initial consonant sounds . . . in close proximity." Cacophony is a "discord, or harshness of sound." Honan, writing on Browning's use of the sounds of the language to portray character, says:

Browning, we are told, was a crude poet: "He is indeed one of those writers who treats language not as a musical instrument, needing

64 Alan R. Thompson, The Dry Mock (Berkeley, California, 1948), p. 4.

65 Grimes and Mattingly, p. 134.

66 Main and Seng, p. 193.
delicacy no less than power in its handling, but rather as an iron bar which they are to twist and tangle in an exhibition of their prowess as professional strongmen."67

Yet Honan later defends Browning's choice of language and says:

Browning was . . . sensitive to the finer qualities of words, and . . . his diction, when investigated in the light of character requirements in the character-revealing dramatic monologues, certainly seems to justify itself.68

Browning's use of alliteration is an important aspect of the sounds of his poems. Main and Seng state: "When used to create a connection or a contrast between ideas or events, alliteration is a legitimate device . . . ."69 King says that Browning's alliteration is intended primarily to accentuate idea or to enforce symbolic meaning.70 Browning's heaping alliteration on his monologues seems legitimate because there appears to be a definite connection between the persona and the use of alliteration.

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67Honan, p. 2.
69Main and Seng, p. 179.
70See King, p. 141.
Once in a while, certain consonant clusters appear in the monologues to give the effect of cacophony. Then, this repetition makes Browning's verse creak and grind, as in these lines from "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets the maw-crammed beast?

Honan concludes his discussion of Browning's diction in the monologues by saying:

We should at least suspect at this point that many of the so-called "Browningisms" of Browning are nothing more nor less than verbal devices for the revelation of character, and that special kinds of words . . . may be resorted to by Browning again and again to fill slightly different requirements of character delineation in different monologues . . . .

In summary, then, diction as a character-revealing device will relate to vocabulary, allusions, dramatic irony, and figures of sound, notably alliteration and cacophony.

Rhythm:

Rhythm, a third aspect of style, has been defined as "the total effect of the arrangement of words within word groups, word groups within sentences, sentences within . . . stanzas, and . . . stanzas within the

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Honan, p. 242.
entire composition."\(^72\) Boleslavsky defines the term as the "orderly, measurable changes of all the different elements comprised in a work of art—provided that all those changes progressively stimulate the attention of the spectator and lead invariably to the final aim of the artist."\(^73\) Main and Seng observe: "All human utterances are rhythmical: the voice rises, falls, then rises again; stressed words precede and follow unstressed words; words said hastily alternate with words said slowly."\(^74\) Lee speaks about rhythm of content which, she says, "is established by the organization of the thought progression and the emotional progression. It depends upon the placement of key words and phrases, and of the major and minor climaxes, both logical and emotional, throughout the entire selection."\(^75\) She adds:

\(^72\) Grimes and Mattingly, p. 53.


\(^74\) Main and Seng, p. 153.

\(^75\) Lee, p. 134.
Rhythm in literature is usually thought of as an element of poetic structure, such as the relationship between stressed and unstressed syllables. But it is an important aspect of content as well. Rhythm of content begins to emerge as the interpreter examines details of organization. The recurrent shift of attention from one character to another, or from one place or time to another, or the alternation of description and narration, dialogue and exposition can set up a rhythm of content. The rhythm of emotional quality can be measured by the increased and decreased intensity of the reader's response, and will become evident as the minor climaxes are discovered.76

Although many factors contribute to rhythm—meter, sense stress, rhyme, and the like—observations about rhythm in the monologues selected for this study will be limited to rhythm of content, especially to progressions of thought and feeling, implications of tension, and points of emotional intensity or climax.

Summary

This chapter has traced the development of the form of the dramatic monologue, has submitted a definition of the term as used in this study, and has set up a frame of analysis to be followed in the succeeding three chapters.

CHAPTER IV

"SOLILLOQUY OF THE SPANISH CLOISTER"

In 1886, Mrs. Sutherland Orr wrote:

Mr. Browning's choice of subject is determined by his belief that individual feeling and motive are the only true life: hence the only true material of dramatic art. He rejects no incident which admits of development on the side of feeling and motive . . . . His range of subject covers, therefore, a great deal that is painful, but nothing that is simply repulsive: because the poetry of human life, that is, of individual experience is absent from nothing which he portrays.¹

The "range of subject" about which Mrs. Orr writes is well exemplified in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," as well as the other selected monologues in this study. In these poems, Browning writes about religious person­ages, though not necessarily in a favorable manner.

One critic has called "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" a "poem of pure hate."² Ina Beth Sessions classifies it as an imperfect dramatic monologue, saying:


"It has a speaker, audience, occasion, interplay, character revelation, and dramatic interest. The only lacking prerequisite is that the 'audience' does not hear the speaker, despite the fact his every move induces imprecations." DeVane feels the monologue "exhibits a Protestant's [Browning's] dislike and distrust of asceticism."

However valid the preceding comments may be, they are offered in this discussion as introduction to the poem's actual analysis, which is concerned with finding clues to character, attitude, and dramatic situation. These clues will be sought according to a previously set up frame of analysis.

Situational Components

The speaker of the monologue is a monk, not named, but one who has "fallen in hate." A critic has said that this monologue is a "brilliant analysis of the passion of hate such as too close and steady propinquity

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3 Sessions, p. 512.

4 DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 103.

5 Whiting et al., p. 941.
might develop in an uncharitable man."⁶ No period of history is specified in the poem, and the setting is a Spanish monastery. About the setting, Abrams writes: "The monastery setting is timeless and serves to intensify the pressure of meanness and hatred that is boiling up in the speaker."⁷

The speaker is observing Brother Lawrence, his fellow monk, as the latter moves about his flower garden. As the unnamed monk talks, he reveals intense hatred toward Brother Lawrence:

Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flowerpots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you! (Lines 1-4)

He hates Lawrence so much, in fact, that he wants to damn Lawrence's soul:

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? (Lines 53-56)

In line 9 the speaker's hatred toward Brother Lawrence is succinctly stated: "Hell dry you up with its flames!"


⁷Abrams et al., p. 799.
The persona—who, according to Crowell, "must have the smallest soul in villaindom,"—is highly delighted when Brother Lawrence's flower-buds fall from their stems, and he says in a petty manner: "(He-he! There his lily snaps!)" (Line 24). Since he is in a cloister and is not able to escape from behavior expected of him, the speaker plays a hypocritical role when face to face with Brother Lawrence. According to Hopper, "The monk does more than tolerate his lot; he learns the letter of the law he serves, but the spirit escapes him completely." Curry remarks that possibly this poem manifests "the strongest interpretation of hypocrisy in literature." The monk's hypocrisy is indicated in such lines as:

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork crop; scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt;
What's the Latin name for "Parsley"?
What's the Greek name for "Swine's Snout"? (Lines 9-16)

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays
Crosswise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.

8Hopper, p. 11.
9Curry, p. 60.
I, the Trinity illustrate,
  Drinking watered orange pulp—
In three sips the Arian frustrate;
  While he drains his at one gulp. (Lines 33-40)

How go on your flowers? None double?
  Not one fruit-sort can you spy?
Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble
  Keep them close-nipped on the sly! (Lines 45-48)

Hatred of Brother Lawrence is an extremely strong
trait in the speaker's character; yet, he does have
other faults. He seems to be quite sensual, though he
tends to impute his own lustfulness to Brother Lawrence,
as in lines 25-32:

  Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
     Squats outside the Convent bank
  With Sanchicha, telling stories,
     Steeping tresses in the tank,
  Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
     --Can't I see his dead eye glow,
  Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
     (That is, if he'd let it show!)

Another indication of the speaker's lustfulness occurs in
line 57 when he admits to possessing a "scrofulous French
novel."

The monk seems to be very proud, and continually
bolsters his own ego with the reminder that he is a
better formalist—or adherent to prescribed forms—than
Brother Lawrence:

  When he finishes refection,
     Knife and fork he never lays
Crosswise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise.
I the Trinity illustrate,
Drinking watered orange pulp--
In three sips the Arian frustrate,
While he drains his at one gulp. (Lines 33-40)

It seems difficult, however, to believe that the speaker ever does anything sincerely "in Jesu's praise." Even his use of the Diety in this instance seems blasphemous.

The speaker appears envious of Lawrence's table manners:

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial,
Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps--
Marked with L for our initial! (Lines 17-23)

Indeed, the speaker's greedy nature cannot even content itself with a slice of melon, and his gluttony is revealed in the bitterness of the following lines:

Oh, those melons! If he's able
We're to have a feast! So nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
All of us get each a slice. (Lines 41-44)

The persona, then, clearly reveals himself to be hate-filled, petty, sensual, proud, hypocritical, envious, and greedy.

The speaker's antagonist is Brother Lawrence, an "easily contented, somewhat puttering, probably not too
intelligent" man. Sessions feels that Brother Lawrence does not actually hear the speaker, though the very sight of the man causes an explosion of rage in the speaker. Curry finds that "so intense is his [the speaker's] feeling that, in his imagination, he talks directly to Brother Lawrence." Yet Lawrence knows nothing of the speaker's presence, and he quietly walks about his garden tending the plants as the speaker watches him:

What? Your myrtle bush wants trimming?
   Oh, that rose has prior claims— (Lines 5-6)
(He-he! There his lily snaps!) (Line 24)
Oh, those melons! . . . (Line 41)
How go on your flowers? None double? (Line 45)

Lawrence's generous nature, a source of annoyance for the speaker, is pointed to in lines 41-44:

Oh, those melons! If he's able
   We're to have a feast! So nice!
One goes to the Abbot's table,
   All of us get each a slice.

Brother Lawrence appears to be free from the lustful tendencies of the speaker, who seems to assume

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10 Whiting et al., p. 941.
11 See Sessions, p. 512.
12 Curry, p. 60.
that Lawrence, or any man, would lust after Dolores or Sanchicha (lines 25-32). He accuses Brother Lawrence of hypocrisy in his true feeling toward these women, "(That is, if he'd let it show!)(Line 32), though the speaker himself is guilty of this trait. Brother Lawrence, without a doubt, is a continual source of annoyance for the speaker.

William Phelps, in *Robert Browning*, comments on the relationship between the persona and Brother Lawrence:

Friar Lawrence unconsciously and innocently fans the flames of hatred in our speaker's heart, simply because he does not dream of the effect he produces. Every time he talks at table about the weather, the cork crop, Latin names, and other trivialities, the man sitting opposite to him would like to dash his plate in his face; every time Friar Lawrence potters around among his rose bushes, the other looking down from his window, with a face distorted with hate, would like to kill him at a glance. Poor Lawrence drives our soliloquist mad with his deliberate table manners, with his deliberate method of speech, with his care about his own goblet and spoon. And all the time Lawrence believes that his enemy loves him.13

Sessions, writing about these two men, says: "The speaker is a traditionalist in theology, and Brother Lawrence's liberalism is anathema to him."14 For example,


14Sessions, p. 512.
the speaker prides himself on crossing the silver at dinner's close, doing this in "Jesu's name," something Lawrence never does:

When he finishes refection,
Knife and fork he never lays,
Cross-wise, to my recollection,
As do I, in Jesu's praise. (Lines 33-36)

Even when the Vesper bell rings, the persona shows no softened feelings toward Brother Lawrence:

'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r--you swine! (Lines 71-72)

These two, then—the speaker and Brother Lawrence—create a scene quite dramatic in its effect, and the speaker—without really intending to do so—reveals his own character traits as he talks about the other monk.

Phelps concludes:

We know nothing about . . . Lawrence except what his deadly enemy tells us; but it is quite clear that Lawrence is a dear old man, innocent as a child; while the speaker, simply in giving his testimony against him, reveals a heart jealous, malicious, lustful; he is like a thoroughly bad boy at school, with a pornographic book carefully concealed. Just at the moment when his rage and hatred reach a climax, the vesper bells sound; and the speaker, who is an intensely strict formalist and ritualist, presents to us an amusing spectacle; for out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing.  

Phelps, pp. 186-187.
An examination of the cognitive elements in this monologue, therefore, reveals a defined hate-filled speaker, who is talking to—but not with—another person, in a definite setting—the garden of a Spanish monastery. Of the Seven Capital Sins, the persona appears guilty of lust, anger, pride, gluttony, and envy. These strongly defined character traits contribute to a feeling of hatred and sensuality which pervades the poem as the speaker's heightened emotions are revealed.

Style: Thought Patterns

Certain aspects of style reveal clues to the character and attitudes of the speaker, thought patterns being one of these aspects. The structure of the monologue consists of nine stanzas of eight tetrameter lines each, primarily in trochaic meter. Within these nine stanzas the pattern of thought shifts back and forth from the speaker's memory of Lawrence's behavior to the immediate garden scene before him. The poem begins with the speaker's terrible imprecations against Lawrence in lines 1-4. At line 5 attention is directed to Brother Lawrence as he moves from his myrtle bush to the rose plant. Then in line 10, the speaker begins to talk to himself, as he mimics Lawrence's Salve tibi!, a Latin
greeting meaning "Hail to thee." Brother Lawrence is imitated once again in lines 13-15, as the speaker describes Lawrence's conversations at dinner. The second stanza concludes with the hate-filled question: "What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?" (line 16). The speaker continues to belittle Brother Lawrence in lines 17-23, and then in line 24, his thoughts are brought back once again to the scene before him--Brother Lawrence in the garden--and he says with glee: "(He-he! There his lily snaps!)
In lines 25-32, the speaker again is reflective as he imputes his own sensual desires to Brother Lawrence. "Saint, forsooth!" he says, aware that his own frailties and weaknesses with regard to sexual matters are problems for his concern, not Lawrence's. Lines 33-40 reflect a bolstering of the speaker's ego as he indicates that he is a better formalist than Lawrence. The speaker continues to describe some of Lawrence's "faults" in lines 41-48, again only emphasizing his own evil intentions. Then in lines 49-64 the speaker speculates on the possibility of tricking Lawrence out of his salvation. Yet within such a speculation is an implicit admission that unless he is tricked, Lawrence is sure of salvation. The final lines in the monologue, lines 65-72, reveal a now desperate
speaker, vainly trying to damn Brother Lawrence to Hell. He will risk his own soul to destroy one man and his rosebush.

Examination of the syntax—or sentence structure—indicates that the speaker usually talks in complete thought groups. Compared to the other two monologues in this study, this poem seems to contain fewer omissions and elisions in the speech patterns of the persona. Though the speaker begins to talk on a high emotional level, he seems to be in better control of himself than the speakers in the other selected monologues. Only when the monk begins to "plot" Lawrence's damnation (lines 49-64) does the syntax become elliptical. In lines 49-64 Browning appears to leave the construction incomplete grammatically, the implication on the part of the speaker being, "Do you really suppose I could do that?" Or, there's Satan--one might venture

Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave
Such a flaw in the indenture
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,

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16Whiting et al., p. 941.
Blasted lay that rose acacia
We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine . . . .
'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia, Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r--you swine! (Lines 65-72)

The speaker perhaps feels a sense of urgency in his plot to damn Brother Lawrence, and when the bell rings, he cannot decide which to do first: to pray or to curse Lawrence.

The thought patterns and the structure of the sentences clearly indicate certain character traits about the persona. But transitions within the poem also are important in seeking clues to character and attitude. At line 8 a transition occurs when the speaker is describing his hatred for Lawrence, "Hell dry you up with its flames!", and also when he begins to talk about Lawrence's table manners in lines 10-15. At lines 16 and 24 two shifts of thought occur as the speaker returns to the scene before him and expresses his hatred of Lawrence:

What's the Greek name for "Swine's Snout"? (Line 16)

(He-he! There his lily snaps!) (Line 24)

Again at lines 29-30, there is a shift of thought when the speaker is telling of Dolores and Sanchicha, and then he tries to shift his own lecherous desires onto Brother Lawrence: "(That is, if he'd let it show!)"
A clear transition appears at line 47, when the speaker feigns concern over Brother Lawrence's plants: "Strange!" At the beginning of lines 49, 57, and 65, there are three definite transitions as the speaker begins to elaborate upon his plans for damning the soul of Brother Lawrence:

- There's a great text in Galatians, (Line 49)
- Or, my scrofulous French novel! (Line 57)
- Or, there's Satan!-- (Line 65)

At line 71 there occurs a very abrupt transition from the speaker's intense, highly emotional thoughts at that moment to the sound of the Vesper bell, and this in turn leads to the beginning of the speaker's prayer: "Plena gratia, / Ave, Virgo!" (Lines 71-72). Finally, in line 72, attention is shifted for the last time to the speaker's hatred of Brother Lawrence: "Gr-r-r--you swine!"

The many transitions in the poem, abrupt though they may be, reveal that the speaker cannot long digress from his main stream of thought: his hatred of Brother Lawrence. The transitions, together with the usually
logical progression of the thought patterns in the poem, emphasize the intensity of the speaker's feeling toward his antagonist.

Style: Diction

Diction, another aspect of style, reveals clues to character and attitude of the persona. An examination of the monk's vocabulary, for example, indicates he speaks colloquially and uses words which, although unflattering, do reveal an intimate picture of him.

"Gr-r-r," he says in the first line, and this utterance sets the mood for the entire monologue. The speaker is angry and extremely jealous of Brother Lawrence, and he concludes with the same thoughts with which he began:

"Gr-r-r--you swine!" (Line 72)

Even the speaker's choice of nouns is expressive of his feelings toward Lawrence; for example: abhorrence (line 1), hate (line 3), blood (line 4), hell (line 8), flames (line 8), snout (line 16), tresses (line 28), horsehairs (line 29), pulp (line 40), damnations (line 51), swine (lines 16 and 72). The monk's choice of verbs seems to reflect his inner feelings: killed (line 3), dry up (line 8), burnished (line 17), snaps (line 24),
squats (line 26), glow (line 30), frustrate (line 39),
damn (line 40), trip (line 50), spin (line 55), and
grovel (line 59).

The speaker's few Latin usages seem to indicate
his insincerity about the monastic life. In line 10,
for example, the term Salve tibi! is uttered only because
he is making fun of Brother Lawrence's cheerful greeting
to the other monks; in lines 71-72, Latin is uttered
along with curses to indicate the hypocrisy of the monk.
In this latter usage, the subtext of the lines uttered
seems to indicate that the speaker's heart is not in the
prayers he says but on Brother Lawrence.

Certain monosyllables in the poem are indicative
of the high level of emotion at which the speaker finds
himself: Gr-r-r (lines 1 and 72), Whew (line 17), He-he
(line 24), Oh (line 41), Hy, Zy, Hine (line 70).

The monk's vocabulary is seen to be colloquial
and very emotional and reveals a great deal about the
intensity of his feelings toward Brother Lawrence.

The speaker uses several allusions which help to
indicate his true intentions toward his antagonist. Line
31 mentions a "Barbary corsair," referring to a privateer
or pirate of the Barbary coast (North Africa), not noted
for sexual or any other virtues. The Arian, whom the monk intends to frustrate (line 39), is one who adheres to the doctrines of Arias, a heretic of the fourth century who denied the equality of the Son with God the Father and held Christ to be created inferior to God, though first among created beings. Line 49 contains the reference to a "great text in Galatians," and here the speaker hopes to trap Lawrence in a heresy just as the good monk is dying, and thus damn his soul. Two texts usually are suggested for this allusion, Galatians 3:10 and Galatians 5:19-21. The latter passage enumerates only seventeen sins (as opposed to the twenty-nine mentioned in the monologue), but one of them is heresy, the particular sin the speaker hopes to trap Lawrence into committing. In line 56 a reference is made to "a Manichee," a heretic who is a follower of the Persian prophet of the third century, Mani. Belial is referred to in line 60, the term being used as another name for Satan. All of these allusions heighten the persona's emotional intensity and clearly emphasize the monk's hatred of Lawrence.

17Information regarding these allusions has been obtained from DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 103; DeVane, Major British Writers, pp. 483-484; Whiting et al., pp. 941-942.
Dramatic irony as a character revealing device is an important aspect of style in this monologue. Defining irony, Perrine—quoted earlier in this study—says that a discrepancy usually occurs between what the speaker says and what the author means. In this poem, the monk considers himself a devout, clever, scholarly man and pours out his secret venom of hatred on the garrulous, fussy Brother Lawrence. Unconsciously, the monk reveals his own envious, selfish, lustful nature, in direct contrast to the kindly, generous, pure character of Brother Lawrence. For example:

At the meal we sit together:
Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork crop; scarcely
Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt;
What's the Latin name for "parsley"?
What's the Greek name for "Swine's Snout"?(Lines 9-16)

In the cited lines the speaker inadvertently reveals the cheerfulness and pleasantness of Lawrence and his own irritability and meanness. In lines 25-32 the monk tries to indicate Lawrence's lecherousness, but only succeeds in revealing his own lustfulness. In line 42, when the monk says "... so nice!" the reader knows the monk is not at all appreciative of Brother Lawrence's gesture of providing melons for everyone; instead, he is quite bitter toward the other's generosity.
And in line 47, when the monk utters "Strange!" one knows he is not at all sincere in his concern for Lawrence's flowers. It also seems highly ironic that a monk voicing the intense hatred of the opening stanza (lines 1-8) would resort to such a petty act as nipping the buds of Brother Lawrence's plants (lines 47-48). Dramatic irony in this instance serves to emphasize the petty nature which is part of the monk. In the closing lines of the poem (lines 70-72) dramatic irony again functions as a character revealing device as the monk vainly tries to pray, but his emotions completely overwhelm him, and he can only cry, "Gr-r-r— you swine!" This use of name calling on the part of the speaker only contributes to the already unfavorable impression of him. Certainly, a great deal is learned about the persona by the poet's use of dramatic irony.

Use of alliteration and cacophony, two figures of sound, is not so apparent a character revealing device in this monologue as in the other two monologues in this study. In the poem's first stanza, alliteration seems to drive home the idea of the speaker's hatred toward Brother Lawrence:

Gr-r-r—there go, my heart's abhorrence!  
Water your damned flowerpots, do!  
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,  
God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle bush wants trimming?
Oh, that rose has prior claims--
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
Hell dry you up with its flames! (Lines 1-8)

In this stanza the repetition of initial sounds (g, m, w, d, b, f, l) helps to reinforce the idea of the speaker's hatred of Lawrence. Perhaps the most obvious use of alliteration in the monologue appears in lines 25-31, where Browning is trying to create a very sensual atmosphere and, thereby, indicate the real motives of the persona:

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories;
Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,
--Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?

Such repeated initial consonants as s, b, d, k, t, and l help to create a strongly sensual feeling in these lines, and the often-used [s] permits a slowing down of the sounds in the line in order to create the desired mood.

Sometimes alliteration seems to contribute to a sense of urgency which the speaker feels as he plots to damn Lawrence's soul:

There's a great text in Galatians
Once you trip on it, entails
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? (Lines 49-56)

In this stanza, the use of £, _ t ,  d, f, and _ s seems to convey the feeling of urgency in the speaker, and this feeling points to the poem's major climax in the final stanza.

Cacophony—grotesque or harsh sounds—apparently is used to highlight the hateful character of the monk. In line 13, for example, the words "plenteous cork crop" are an example of such a usage. "Swine's Snout" in line 16 seems to emphasize the intensity of the monk's feelings. Line 24 contains the sounds "He-he", another example of unpleasant sounds which reflect the character of the speaker. Even in line 29, the consonant clusters tend to emphasize meaning: "Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs . . . ." Perhaps the most striking example of cacophonous sounds in the poem occurs in line 70, as the speaker cries "Hy, Zy, Hine . . . ." DeVane feels that no satisfactory explanations have been given for these sounds, and that they are "often assumed to represent the sound of the Vesper bells, or the first words of a spell to conjure up the Devil."\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\)DeVane, *Major British Writers*, p. 484.
These two aspects of diction, alliteration and cacophony, help to reveal the hate-filled and sensual nature of the monk. Such sound devices also contribute to a feeling of urgency on the part of the persona in damning Lawrence's soul, and this feeling pervades the final three stanzas in the monologue.

Style: Rhythm

Rhythm of content aids the finding of clues to character and attitudes in the monologue. Definite progressions of feeling appear in the poem, and each of the nine stanzas builds upon the preceding stanza until points of emotional climax are reached. The poem begins on a high emotional key with the speaker spewing forth terrible thoughts at Brother Lawrence (lines 1-8). Then there occurs a period of decreased intensity (or passivity) in lines 9-23, as the speaker describes some of Brother Lawrence's actions at the dinner table. In line 24 the tension is picked up once more with the sinister and very revealing laugh: "(He-he! There his lily snaps!)" Another section of passivity occurs in lines 25-40, as the speaker dwells on thoughts of "brown Dolores" and then turns to trivial formalities of behavior. Beginning at line 49 and continuing steadily
through the rest of the monologue, tension increases. The speaker admits he has clipped buds from Lawrence's plants (lines 45-48); then he begins to reflect upon how he might be able to damn Lawrence's soul. First, there is a text in Galatians (lines 49-56), or else he might trap Lawrence in a mortal sin (lines 57-64), or he might put himself in Satan's power just long enough to blast the rose acacia of which Lawrence is so proud (lines 65-70). When the speaker is completely wrapped up in these terrible thoughts, the Vesper bell rings and brings him back to reality, "Hy, Zy, Hine . . . ." He now is aware of the time of day, and he dutifully begins to pray: "Plena gratia,/ Ave, Virgo!" Yet not even prayer will afford a release from the high emotional plane he is in, and the monk is compelled to utter one final curse at Brother Lawrence: "Gr-r-r--you swine!"

The monologue builds steadily through a series of minor climaxes which seem to occur in lines 16, 24, 32, and 48. Lines 49, 57, and 65 seem to be major climaxes in the poem revealing the absolute heights to which the speaker will resort in order to bring evil upon Lawrence.

The rhythm of content in this dramatic monologue reveals a definite progression of thought and feeling as
the speaker observes Brother Lawrence in the garden and as he muses about Brother Lawrence's behavior at other times. In these progressions and at the height of emotional intensity, the unnamed monk continues to reveal himself as a hate-filled, jealous individual. Shifts of tension indicate the changes which exist in the monk's attitude toward Lawrence, from intense hatred to almost humorous, petty jealousy.

Summary

"Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" is a dramatic monologue with a clearly developed speaker, a definite listener who may not hear the words of the speaker but is certainly the cause of the words, and a defined setting. Through examination of the cognitive elements of the situational components, as well as the thought patterns, diction, and rhythm, certain clues to the character of the persona have been observed. He is seen to be a hate-filled, jealous, hypocritical, lustful, and egotistical individual, one whose attitudes toward Brother Lawrence vary a great deal, from intense hate to humorous pettiness. These character traits and attitudes contribute to a sensual and highly emotional feeling which pervades the entire dramatic monologue.
CHAPTER V

"THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB
AT ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH"

In "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church" Robert Browning again turns to a man of religion for his subject matter, this time, a dying Renaissance Bishop. Despite the peculiarity of subject matter and circumstance, the poem is considered as great a masterpiece as "My Last Duchess."¹ Curry calls the monologue "one of the ablest criticisms ever offered upon the moral and artistic spirit of the Renaissance."² Phelps says: "It has not a superfluous word, and only in a few lines gives us the spirit of the Italian Renaissance."³ Ruskin similarly comments:

I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as in these lines, of the Renaissance spirit,—its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin.⁴

¹See Phelps, p. 193.

²Curry, p. 91.

³Phelps, p. 193.

⁴As quoted by Curry, p. 92.
Reeves terms the monologue "a penetrating exposure of vain and cynical materialism in high places."  

These comments are offered in the discussion as introduction to the monologue's actual analysis, the focus of which is upon clues to the character and attitudes of the persona. In this poem there is a definite situation of conflict as the speaker talks about himself and his vain desires. Indeed, as Sessions classifies monologues, this might be regarded as a Perfect Example.

Situational Components

The voice of the poem is that of a Bishop who is at the point of death. His audience consists of his sons (whom he publicly refers to as his "nephews") who are gathered around his deathbed, and he is instructing them on how he wants to be buried: "And so, about this tomb of mine." (Line 15). He speaks to many sons: "Nephews--sons mine . . .," although he calls out only Anselm by name: "... is Anselm keeping back?" (Line 2). The tomb is to be located in St. Praxed's Church in Rome, the original of which Browning is said to have known as

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5Reeves, p. xxix.
the church of St. Prassede, so called for the virgin daughter of Pudens, a Roman Senator under Antoninus Pius in the second century, who used her wealth to aid poor Christians. But as DeVane remarks, "The poem... owes little to the church save for its name and the fact that it was ornate in its decoration."^6

This study will reveal in the speaker a passion for luxury, and the pride, sensuousness, and jealousies of possession. One critic has summarized what appear to be the chief character traits of the Bishop: "In this portrait of an imaginary Bishop, Browning characterizes the worldliness and sensuality of a certain type of Renaissance churchman. He portrays jealousy and covetousness which are scarcely disguised by religious professions."^7 Park Honan states:

The superbness of the Bishop's portrait is partly due to the fact that Browning is able, in a mere one hundred and twenty-five lines, to use three aspects of the Renaissance—its sensuality, art, and religion—to create a kind of multiple character-revealing tension within the Bishop. Each of these Renaissance qualities is present in the Bishop's make-up, and his love of art becomes clear against the

^6DeVane, Shorter Poems of Robert Browning, p. 340.

^7Reeves, p. 135.
background of his love of God and his love of things sensuous, just as his religion and voluptuousness are each brought to light by the presence of the other two qualities. Of the Seven Capital Sins, the dying Bishop appears to be guilty of pride, lust, covetousness, and envy. How these are revealed in his character and attitude will be indicated in this discussion.

The Bishop is a proud man; indeed, says King, "pride is a distinguishing characteristic of the Bishop." He is proud of his mistress:

She, men should have to be your mother once, Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! (Lines 4-5)

He is proud of his accomplishments as Bishop: "True peach,/ Rosy and flawless; how I earned the prize!" (lines 32-33). He is proud of his Greek manuscripts (line 74), of his knowledge of Latin (lines 76-78), and of his art objects (lines 106-110). King states:

Isolated by his pride, the Bishop feels no great need for human relationships ... . . . [He] ... is . . . a mere collector. The sons' mother was a major acquisition along with his villas, baths, manuscripts, and art objects. She, of course, was forbidden him by the laws

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8Honan, p. 134.

9King, p. 55.
of his church, and the sons were illégimate; but neither she nor they created for him a moral problem.\(^{10}\)

In his passion for worldly possessions, the Bishop shows himself to be extremely materialistic. His tomb, as he has planned it, is to be a showplace of costliness and beauty. After all, the tomb is to secure him a double end: the indulgence of his own tastes and the humiliation of his former rival, Gandolf, who lies modestly buried in the same church (lines 20-30). The Bishop wants jasper for his tomb: "All of jasper, then!/ 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, ..." (lines 68-69); basalt (black antique) for its slab:

Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--'
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! (Lines 53-54)

He also desires peach-colored marble for its columns (lines 29-30) and only the richest design for its bronze frieze:

How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Savior at his sermon on the mount,
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . (Lines 54-62)

\(^{10}\text{King, p. 55.}\)
A certain lump of lapis lazuli is to "poise" between his knees (lines 42-50) and with what overt sensuality he blurts forth the secret of how he saved this stone and then buried it out of sight in a vineyard! It is almost as if he were staking his very life on this extraordinary revelation.

Extremely jealous—especially of Gandolf, his former rival—the Bishop covets Gandolf's place of burial:

I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, you know—
Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner south
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same! (Lines 15-19)

Fotheringham comments on the motives for the Bishop's jealousy:

He has been done out of the best place in the church, but he will have the best tomb—one that will move the envy of his rival even in the grave. He has worked out the design for it, and enjoys the triumph of it as much as if it already stood in St. Praxed's.11

The Bishop is quite sensual, and this perhaps is his chief characteristic. Whether it be his description of the Madonna's breast, "Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . . ." (line 44), or of the brilliant

colorings in his art objects, or the hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting appeals he makes toward the ritual of the Mass, the Bishop appears a sensual man. For example, he describes the Mass in this manner:

And then I shall lie through centuries,  
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,  
And see God made and eaten all day long,  
And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste  
Good strong thick stupefying incense smoke! (Lines 80-84)

King remarks on the Bishop's sensuality:

[The Bishop] is attracted particularly by the sensuous qualities of both art and religion. . . . He enjoys the sensuous stimulus which art provides and he judges it by its monetary value or its size. He sneers at Gandolf's tomb because of its paltriness, an antithesis to the rare and costly one which he plans for himself. Typically, he is more impressed by the size than the beauty of the lapis. 12

Phelps similarly comments on this characteristic of the Bishop:

His love for a Greek manuscript is as sensual as his love for his mistress, and having lived a life of physical delight, it is natural that his last thoughts should concern themselves with the abode of his body rather than with the destination of his soul. 13

The dying Bishop's lustfulness also is implied as he speaks:

12 King, pp. 62-63.

13 Phelps, p. 195.
and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off

And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs? (Line 75)

Honan feels that in this monologue four different audiences seem to be addressed by the persona, although because of the Bishop's delirium in the last part of the poem, it becomes difficult to tell which among the four is foremost in his mind. He says:

The Bishop begins by talking to all of his sons, "Nephews--sons mine" [line ], mentioning Anselm, but not addressing him directly until line 63:
"What do they whisper thee, /Child of my bowels, Anselm?" As his delirium creeps on, the Bishop's shift of address, from words directed to his first audience (his sons as a group) to those directed to his second (Anselm alone) becomes quicker and less marked:

All lapis, all sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for my soul . . . (lines 102-105)

At the height of his delirium the Bishop seems to address, in effect, a third audience consisting of himself alone:

... Stone--
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through--
And no more lapis to delight the world! (Lines 115-118)

At this point, a fourth, imagined audience also seems to be present--the ghost of Gandolf,
listening and gloating. Gandolf marks the Bishop's delirium: early in the poem Gandolf is a dead figure of the past, one who "envied" and "cozened" but is no more . . . . A little later Gandolf appears to the Bishop to be living a ghostly existence, confined to his sepulcher:

---Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,  
Put me where I may look at him! . . . (Lines 31-32)

For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst! (Line 50)

Then Gandolf moves up to "his tomb-top" from which he "chuckles" . . . . At the peak of the Bishop's delirium in lines 115-118, Gandolf at last seems to become a spectral audience, for the Bishop's mind burns with the feeling of his rival's likely triumph now, and Gandolf is more with him than ever. The four audiences . . . help to suggest the state of his mind at each point in the poem . . . .

Clues to character, then, indicate that the Bishop is a proud, materialistic, jealous, and sensual man. These characteristics set the tone of the poem as one of extreme sensuality and corruption: sensuality in the Bishop's inordinate love of material things; corruption in his distorted sense of values. As Hopper says, "The keynote [to the attitude] of this old Bishop's corruption is in the first line, which he quotes without realizing its implications, or if realizing,

---Honan, pp. 149-150.
dismissing [them]: 'Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity.' Fotheringham similarly states: "The Bishop has had, by his own confession, his share of life's pleasures; he means to have his share of death's honors. Both may be 'vanity,' but both are the world's way and good to man." Certainly the Bishop's corrupt nature pervades the feeling of the entire poem, and one can but agree with Hopper when he writes: "Browning's churchman is not satisfied to die naked before the cross with the words, 'I have nothing but myself to declare.' He must leave life as he has lived it, a fine rococo flourish of stone."

Style: Thought Patterns

As he lies dying, the Bishop is a confused individual, "a fact dramatically revealed by the variance between his fully conscious and his semi-conscious speech," and the syntax of the poem indicates such a state of mental confusion. According to Honan:

15 Hopper, p. 15.
16 Fotheringham, p. 157.
17 Hopper, p. 16.
18 King, p. 54.
The Bishop must be shown at a moment of mental "haziness" if he is to expose his own character. More than that, it would seem, he must be shown at a moment when the "haziness" of his state is most evident: not when he is merely mumbling to himself, daydreaming, musing about his past ... but when he is attempting to do something quite specific and exacting. The Bishop sets out to order his tomb.19

Browning seemingly intended the Bishop's incoherent speech to be an interpretive comment upon his inner confusion, and he is reported to have remarked: "In 'St. Praxed,' the blunder as to 'the sermon' is the result of the dying man's haziness; he would not reveal himself as he does but for that."20 The reference here is to the following lines:

... a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals, and priests,
St. Praxed at his sermon on the mount ... . (Lines 92-95)

Interestingly enough, in line 59, the Bishop is correct in his reference to the speaker of the Sermon on the Mount: "The Savior at his sermon on the mount ... ."

Few of the dying Bishop's sentences are completed, and about this feature of the syntax King comments:

19 Honan, p. 141.

20 As quoted by Honan, p. 141.
The total effect of the Bishop's rhetorical and sententious style suggests a superficiality of which the divorce of structural devices from thought is symbolic. The sterility of his mind is suggested by his formal sentence structure. He is more fixed than Andrea and less creative than Lippo . . . . The Bishop's . . . limited sphere is communicated appropriately in a stylized and rigid structure. In his normal state, he has neither the emotional nor intellectual impulse to break through the bonds established by rhetorical discipline. It is only when he faces death and frustration that his sentence structure breaks down . . . .21

Honan, however, disagrees that the Bishop's incoherency is a result of a sterile mind, and he attributes "the Bishop's typical constructions . . . to the prevailing sensuousness of his character--sensuousness that leads and dominates the thought."22 He cites the following sentences as examples of this sensuality:

Well--
She, men would have to be your mother once,
Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was! (Lines 3-5)

--Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize! (Lines 31-33)

One block, pure green as a pistachio nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--
(Lines 71-72)

21King, p. 59.

22Honan, p. 282.
Commenting further on the Bishop's sentence construction, Honan states:

His dead mistress, or the delicious picture of his rival's paltry headstone, or the color and quality of the stone that he contemplates for his own tomb, all press upon the Bishop's imagination so that he expresses these visions without regard to the way they will fit into his argument or impress his auditors... The Renaissance Bishop struggles with heady delights even as he speaks. Again and again his visions carry him off from the purpose at hand. As delirium comes upon him at the end of the poem he does not speak in sentences at all, but in fragments which express only the horror before his eyes:

There, leave me, there!  
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude 
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone--  
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat 
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through-- 
And no more lapis to delight the world! (Lines 113-118)

Quick transitions are found in the Bishop's sentence patterns; for example:

Nephews—sons mine... ah, God, I know not! 
Well--
She, men would have to be your mother once, (Lines 3-4)

Peace, peace seems all.  
St. Praxed's ever was the church for peace;  
And so, about this tomb of mine. (Lines 13-15)

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Honan, p. 283.
--Old Gandolf with his paltry onion stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless; how I earned the prize! (Lines 31-33)

--Aha, ELUCESCABAT quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All lapis, all, sons! (Lines 99-102)

There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death--ye wish it--God, ye wish it! Stone--
Gritstone, a-crumble! (Lines 113-116)

Honan attributes these transitions, or shifts in thought, to the wanderings of the speaker's state of mind: "He starts briskly and lucidly, approximately quoting a verse in Ecclesiastes, and issuing a brief command that turns into a query,"24 "Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!/ Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?" (lines 1-2). But then the Bishop begins a sentence that is not finished: "Nephews--sons mine . . . ah God, I know not!" (line 3). According to Honan:

He [the Bishop] breaks off [in line 3] because the implication of "Nephews--sons mine," once the words are uttered, suddenly strikes him as an unallowable one; he hastens to cover up his mistakes and even to excuse himself in the rest of the line . . . . A number of other sentences in the poem are incomplete [and show quick transitions of thought]; the dying Bishop

24 Honan, p. 281.
struggles constantly with two sets of conflicts that he can scarcely control: first the conflict between facts (that his "nephews" are his sons . . . or that, as in lines 36-44, he has actually secreted a lump of lapis . . . for his tomb) and his awareness of the impropriety of the facts; and second, the conflict between sensuous visions connected with his tomb, which lead him to dwell excessively on certain details, and his awareness of the purpose of his talk, to persuade his sons to carry out an order for the monument.25

King comments on the Bishop's incoherent speech and says: "The real poem here is not contained within the one hundred and twenty-five lines, but rather in the complex world of thought, emotion, and experience which they represent."26

Through use of thought groups—expressed and not expressed—and by use of quick transitions to reveal shifts in thought, Browning emphasizes the extremely sensual and materialistic spirit of the dying Bishop.

Style: Diction

King feels that both the Bishop's materialism and his sensuousness are reflected in his diction,27 a term this study understands to mean vocabulary, allusions, dramatic irony, and figures of sound.

26King, p. 70.
27See King, p. 60.
As already stated, vocabulary—word choice—in Browning's monologues often reflects the character of the persona. This poem is no exception to that statement—the Bishop's pride, sensuality, and materialism are revealed as he speaks. King observes that "the most frequently repeated words in [the Bishop's] vocabulary are I and mine." He further adds:

The Bishop is a man of external brilliance, displaying catholic learning... in his cultivated speech, and in his vocabulary, which is learned rather than colloquial. Characteristically, he uses such words as limb, carrion, and conflagration, sharp contrasts to Lippo's more homely diction... A learned vocabulary... gives polish and elegance to his speech.

Most of the Bishop's nouns are concrete: marble (line 29, according to Honan, "so vivid for the Bishop that it seems to live and talk—'marble's language,' 'great smooth marbly limbs'"); onion-stone (lines 31 and 124), lapis lazuli (line 42), basalt (line 53), travertine (line 66), jasper (line 68), gritstone (line 116), tabernacle (line 26), mortcloth (line 89), for

28King, p. 55.
29King, p. 57.
30Honan, p. 236.
example. Honan remarks: "Despite haziness, he [the Bishop] is most concrete about what he 'orders' for his tomb."\textsuperscript{31} For example, the Bishop asks for

The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me
Those \textit{Pans} and \textit{Nymphs} ye wot of, and perchance
Some \textit{tripod}, \textit{thyrsus}, with a \textit{vase} or so,
The Savior at his sermon on the mount,
Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last \underline{garment} off,
And Moses with the \underline{tables} . . . . (Lines 56-62)

Honan concludes: "The result [of the Bishop's word choice] is that a majority of his substantives seems to represent sensuous objects . . . . [His] nouns and noun substitutes reveal his all-pervading, all encompassing sensuousness . . . .\textsuperscript{32}

Among the few abstract words which the Bishop uses, "those which occur most frequently, \underline{God}, \underline{death}, \underline{life}, \underline{peace}, and \underline{world}, are habitually converted into materialistic values."\textsuperscript{33} For example, the Bishop says:

So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay, (Lines 47-49)

\textsuperscript{31} Honan, pp. 236-237.

\textsuperscript{32} Honan, p. 237.

\textsuperscript{33} King, p. 60.
One block, pure green as a pistachio nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--
(Lines 71-72)

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

The dying Bishop appears to use abstract words as part
of the traditional vocabulary of a Bishop, but constantly
changes them from spiritual to material values.
According to King, "Even the words which often are used
abstractly remain concrete: church designates a spe-
cific building and pulpit, a platform in that
building." King also has found that there are more
adjectives, dominantly sensuous, in this poem than in
others--"Fra Lippo Lippi," for example. He states:
"Every sense is addressed, but the poem appeals par-
ticularly to sight, touch, and smell. It contains some
of the most sensuous lines in Browning." Lines 30 and
75 exemplify what King means:

As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse. (Line
30)

And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs. (Line
75)

34 King, p. 61.
35 King, p. 61.
The Bishop's vocabulary, learned though it is, reveals a great deal about his apparent sensual and materialistic spirit.

Allusions, especially to ancient literature and art, also reveal something about the Bishop's character. In line 1, the Bishop refers to the passage in Ecclesiastes, 1:2, "Vanity of vanities saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity." Line 46 contains a reference to the "Frascati villa with its bath," Frascati being a wealthy suburb, twelve miles southeast of Rome. Line 49 refers to Jesu Church, and there appears to have been such an image as the Bishop refers to in the Church of the Jesuits in Rome. With characteristic irreverence the Bishop says he would take upon himself the posture of God. Line 58 contains a reference to a tripod and thyrsus: the tripod was the three-legged stool connected with the Delphic oracle; the thyrsus was the staff used by the followers of Bacchus. Both of these terms are used to point out the pagan and materialistic nature of the Bishop's

Information regarding these allusions has been obtained from DeVane, Major British Writers, pp. 490-491; DeVane, Shorter Poems of Robert Browning, p. 340; Whiting et al., pp. 944-945.
ornaments. The reference to St. Praxed (line 60) already has been mentioned in the first part of this discussion. Line 62 talks of "Moses with the tables," a reference to Exodus, 24-36, in which Moses is described as bringing tablets down from Mount Sinai with the Ten Commandments written upon them. The Bishop's sensual nature is emphasized once again in line 74 when he talks of "brown Greek manuscripts." Because of their hunger for learning, Renaissance society greatly prized Greek manuscripts, and the Bishop offers them to his sons if they agree to his demands for the tomb. Tully, in line 77, is Marcus Tullius Cicero, whose Latin style was classic, while Ulpian, in line 79, is Domitius Ulpianus, whose style was ornate and regarded as degenerate. Both of these names are used by the Bishop—proud man that he is—since he demands only the best Latin for his tomb. In line 99, ELUCESCEBAT, that is, "he was famous," is scorned by the Bishop as decadent Latin for its redundancy. He prefers the classical form elucebat on his headstone. Thus, whatever allusions the Bishop uses, and regardless of how learned these allusions are, the worldly, sensual, and prideful nature of the man is revealed by them.
Dramatic irony is an important aspect of diction in this monologue. King feels that the "irony of the poem arises from the juxtaposition of two ways of seeing and two standards of values."\(^{37}\) As in the other selected monologues in this study, irony occurs in this poem when there occurs a discrepancy between what the speaker says and what the author means. King states: "The apparent discrepancy between what he [the Bishop] requests and what he gets proposes that the title is ironic and suggests an approach to the poem's meaning."\(^{38}\)

Throughout the monologue are instances of disparity between the Bishop's imagined and his obviously real status, and these instances contribute to the dramatic irony of the poem. King remarks on this idea:

\[\text{Irony] provides a means of bringing together the diverse ways of seeing. The central ironies result from a juxtaposition of the Bishop's high evaluation of himself and his actual insignificance when he comes to die; his illusion that he has controlled great wealth and the final discovery in the defection of his sons that his ownership is only temporary; his materialistic one-dimensional view of life and his grotesque desire for a kind of immortality; his pride in the exercise of authority and the realization of the ineffectualness of his "order."}^{39}\]

\(^{37}\) King, p. 52.

\(^{38}\) King, p. 52.

\(^{39}\) King, p. 71.
The Bishop's use of quotations also contributes to the dramatic irony in the monologue. The quotations are applicable to him, yet any real meaning they might have has been submerged in his own sensuality and worldliness. As King states:

Like the priestly blessing which he gives his sons, they [the quotations] are echoes of ecclesiastical duties performed emptily in the past. Appearing only during his semi-conscious moments, they convey more truth than he is able or willing to admit.  

The Bishop quotes without feeling and then abruptly returns to his own sensual thoughts:

Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slabs, sons? Black--
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! (Lines 51-54)

Ironically enough, the Bishop does not realize how much death really will end for him. He displays a characteristic attitude in his reference to his sons' mother:

. . . she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since. (Lines 6-7)

As he lies dying, the Bishop still believes that weakness and death belong to his mistress and to Gandolf, strength and life to him alone. The final irony, according to King, is in line 119, "Well, go! I bless ye." According to King:

40 King, p. 72.
The Bishop has one thing in mind and makes the statement lightly. It has been part of his ecclesiastical duty to give empty blessing, but unwittingly, it is no longer empty. What he had once given nominally he now gives actually. Dying, he leaves "all" to his sons, and by his own definition of the good life he bestows on them the greatest blessing. It is doubly ironic that this, the first genuine blessing he has ever given, brings no spiritual comfort.41

Dramatic irony, then, aids in revealing clues to the Bishop's character which is seen to be extremely worldly, sensual, and proud.

Alliteration, a figure of sound, is used in this monologue to expose the Bishop's mind. Honan suggests some interesting ideas about the speaker's use of alliteration in the poem:

The Bishop speaks at a time when his mind is not entirely clear so that his thoughts follow in an order which is not precisely logical but psychological. Setting out to "order" his tomb, he is carried away by considerations of his dead mistress, his dead rival, his sons, life and world itself, and even by sensuous visions of the materials and ornaments that may glorify his tomb. His reverie is linked by alliterated words . . . 42

The following passage is cited by Honan as an example of what he means:

What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,

---

41 King, pp. 74-75.
42 Honan, p. 255.
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
--Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!

Honan concludes his discussion on the uses of alliteration in the above passage saying:

It begins with an alliterated movement of (d)-words, done, dead, died, die, dying, dream, degrees, and do, which by line 13 has been supplemented by an (l)-word one: Life, lie, long, live. Lines 13 and 14 are linked by Praxed's and the thrice-occurring peace; and movements of (t)-and (n)-words combine in the next two lines. Words beginning with sibilants and the phonetic (k) link lines 17-19: cozened, care, ... . The progression --from (d) and (l), to (p), to (s) and (n), and then to (k) and the sibilants--in part replaces the structural element of thought that is missing. In this way alliteration helps to expose the Bishop's mind, for the sound of his words to some extent guides what he says, reflecting the subordination of intellect to feeling in his character. Sound in the monologue ... becomes a mark of the Bishop's extreme sensuousness ... .

Repetition of initial consonants also emphasizes the sensuous nature of the dying Bishop in the following lines:

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43 Honan, p. 256.
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle flame, and taste
Good strong thick stupefying incense smoke! (Lines 81-84)

In these lines the m, s, g, f sounds seem to slow down the tempo of the lines and therefore highlight the sensuality of the persona.

Cacophony, as well as alliteration, helps to reveal the extremely sensual character of the speaker. Line 66, "Bricked o'er with beggar's moldy travertine . . ." is an example of this sound device. Again, in line 84, "Good strong thick stupefying incense smoke!" the Bishop's sensual nature is emphasized by Browning's use of consonant clusters to highlight meaning. The following lines also seem to contain cacophonous sounds which reveal something about the speaker's character:

... and add a visor and a term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature . . . . (Lines 108-111)

In these lines the consonant clusters slow down the tempo of the lines and thereby emphasize the materialistic nature of the man.

These two sound devices, alliteration and cacophony, aid the search for clues to the character of
the persona. He is seen to be sensual and materialistic, and these two traits influence the feeling of the entire dramatic monologue.

Style: Rhythm

King feels that rhythmically this monologue is one of the most nearly regular of Browning's monologues. He says: "Every line has ten syllables, and for the most part the stress pattern, though not strictly iambic, is basically regular." But this study is concerned with the rhythm of content—that is, progression of thought and feeling, implications of tension, and points of emotional intensity.

There is definite progression in this monologue, though the speaker constantly shifts back and forth in thought as he goes from objective reality to his own egotistical view of life. The Bishop begins with a quotation on vanity (line 1) and goes on to a description of the elaborate tomb he desires (lines 25-30); then from describing the peace of St. Praxed's (lines 13-14) to the tooth and nail fight with Gandolf (lines 15-19); from the angels in the aery dome (lines 20-24) to the

\[44^{44}\text{King, pp. 58-59.}\]
cursed Gandolf in the tomb (lines 31-32); from the dying corpse (lines 85-90) to lighted tapers (lines 91-125). The monologue, which is both ironical as well as tragic, ultimately heads in a direction of self-realization for the dying Bishop.

There are many changes in tension in this poem. Sections of activity and passivity in tension occur continually as the Bishop muses about the past as well as the present. For the Bishop life had meant very active "tooth and nail" fighting with Gandolf (lines 15-16), and he was used to having his orders obeyed and respected. But now that he lies dying the Bishop becomes rather passive, his strength and power gone (lines 13 and 113). For the Bishop passivity must mean death: "Do I live, am I dead?" (line 113). King comments on the changes of tension which occur in this monologue:

\[45\]

\[45\] King, p. 73.
Tension builds in the poem from the very opening lines and continues to mount as the Bishop realizes that instead of lapis to please the world there will be only

\[ \text{Stone--} \]

Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through--
And no more lapis to delight the world! (Lines 115-118)

Instead of reposing in luxury, the dying Bishop will

\[ \text{gasp} \]

Bricked o'er with beggar's moldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb top chuckles at! (Lines 65-67)

Nor does tension decrease as the poem ends, since the Bishop appears resolved to continue his tirade toward Gandolf:

And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers--
Old Gandolf--at me, from his onion stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was! (Lines 122-125)

Minor climaxes in the poem, for example at lines 31, 65, 78, and 115, build up to the major climax in the monologue (line 118): after being feared and obeyed all his life, the Bishop issues his last "order" only to discover that he has no real power. He tries to bribe his sons but finds that what he offers has already passed from his hand to theirs. According to King, the Bishop by the end of the poem "discovers what already existed
only vaguely in his subconscious: all, indeed, is vanity."46

Summary

An examination of the persona in this monologue reveals him to be an extremely sensuous Bishop, one who values material objects more than spiritual effects. The cognitive elements of the situational components have exposed certain characteristics of the Bishop, and certain aspects of style also have indicated clues to his character. He is seen to be quite sensual and materialistic, even on his deathbed, and these characteristics influence the feeling of the entire monologue.

46 King, p. 74.
DeVane calls "Fra Lippo Lippi" "one of the happiest expressions of Browning's belief in art and in the joy of living." In it, Robert Browning once again turns to a Renaissance churchman for the speaker of his poem, in this case a religious friar. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is based on Browning's reading of Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Painters, wherein is discussed the life of the Florentine painter and friar, Lippo Lippi (1406-69), as well as the friar's ideas about art. As DeVane says, "It was from this account of Lippi, inaccurate and rather highly colored, that Browning drew most of the facts for his poem." Yet many of Browning's ideas in the poem are barely hinted at in Vasari's account. DeVane continues: "Browning has woven his own interpretation of the history of Italian painting and his own conception of the function of art in general." Abrams

1DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 196.
2DeVane, p. 194.
3DeVane, Shorter Poems of Robert Browning, p. 345.
states: "This monologue portrays the dawn of the Renais­
sance in Italy at a point when the medieval attitude
towards life and art was about to be displaced by a
fresh appreciation of earthly pleasures."4 How this
attitude is reflected in Fra Lippo Lippi will be revealed
as the poem is scrutinized for clues to character and
attitudes.

Situational Components

An examination of the cognitive elements reveals
the speaker of the poem to be a lively friar, Fra Lippo
Lippi, "a grotesque mixture of monk and man."5 He has
been out socializing and is returning to the palace of
his patron, Cosimo de Medici, when he is caught in the
wrong section of Florence by the city guard. Our first
impression of the monk is not favorable, as his par­
ticular predicament is clarified and emphasized in the
opening lines of the poem:

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? You think you see a monk!
What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar? (Lines
1-6)

4Abrams et al., p. 825.
5King, p. 47.
Once again in this poem, as in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," Browning exploits a moment of great intensity in order to reveal the character of the speaker. The "crisis-moment" which in this poem occurs as a result of Lippo's apprehension by the Florentine guard, has the effect "of splitting the speaker's own personality into two or more opposing elements; and the conflict of these elements may be such that the speaker in effect illumines himself." Fra Lippo Lippi, a creature of the Renaissance, is both a man of God and a frank sensualist, and this dichotomy in his character is revealed throughout the poem. For example, the following lines emphasize the friar's inner conflict:

I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards. (Lines 266-269)

Lippo's religious nature provides a revealing backdrop against which his sensuality becomes vivid; in the same way, his sensuality is a characteristic against

6This is a term used by Claud Howard in his discussion of the dramatic monologue, p. 77.

7Honan, pp. 132-133.
which his religion is contrastingly seen. These two quite opposed character traits in the man accentuate one another. Roma King, Jr., writes about this dichotomy in the persona's character:

Lippo is caught at the beginning of the poem between the street where "sportive ladies leave their doors ajar" and his monastic lodging. The situation and the terms are symbolic. The street and monastery represent apparently contradictory forces, both religious and artistic, which Lippo is challenged to reconcile. They pose a tension between sensuous beauty and animal passion, on the one hand, and self-abnegation and spiritual discipline on the other . . . . 8

According to Fotheringham, "Lippi had a frank love of the world and its pleasures, and a warm impulsive nature . . . . His free, joyous energy, his humor, his cordial nature and love of the common life of man are in every line." 9 King states:

His early life in the streets gives him insight beyond that of the ordinary monk; and perhaps for this reason his experience within the order has left upon him a less traditional, more personal imprint . . . . He has retained his close contact with the world, and his awareness of spiritual values—in spite of his little respect for monasticism. His problem is to achieve integration in his painting, to bring together successfully body and soul, nature and spirit. 10

8King, p. 33.
9Fotheringham, pp. 336-337.
10King, p. 47.
Lippi, then, is inwardly divided. He is, indeed, sensual:

And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar? (Lines 5-6)

Round they went.
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight—three slim shapes,
And a face that looked up... zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
That's all I'm made of! (Lines 57-61)

Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all around,
And day-long blessed idleness beside! (Lines 102-105)

His sensual, earthy spirit is not able to accept the demands of monastic life, though Lippo is not so rebellious and vicious as the monk of "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister":

I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds;
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls. (Lines 223-225)

And he has found the strain of life's forces too strong for him:

... my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! (Lines 250-254)
The audience Fra Lippo Lippi addresses in the first twenty lines is composed of a small squad of Florentine police. Caught by these men in the wrong section of Florence, Lippo quickly runs through a whole gamut of emotions—both real and feigned. About this encounter Honan states:

In a very few lines Lippo's audience [draws] him out considerably. Lippo's shrewdness and quick wit are demonstrated; his robustness, self-control under tension, his awareness of human nature, his ability to cope with society, are also plain. The humor and effervescence of his character—central to it—come immediately to light in his swift run through a gamut of attitudes. Moreover, his historical and social identity are strongly established. A characteristic episode in his career has been recounted, and we have Lippo's apparent reaction to it. His own personal philosophy and his relationship to the Church are hinted . . . . Still we have at this point a fair notion of his sensuality . . . .

In lines 21-22, Lippo addresses a single auditor, the Chief of the guard, who in turn draws from Lippo everything else of importance we learn about the friar: "But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves/ Pick up a manner nor discredit you." The relationship between Lippo and the guard is commented upon by Honan:

. . . the police in the first twenty lines are an embodiment of the robustness, earthiness, even the crudeness, that are essences of Lippo's own make-up. The monk is physical: the bodily

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11 Honan, p. 155.
handling he receives from the watch is in character for him—a man caught shortly after a chance engagement with "sportive ladies." The Police Chief is far more sophisticated and worldly . . . and the worldliness, the good-humored twinkle, even the difficulty the Police Chief experiences in reconciling Lippo's nightly recreation with his manhood are all Lippo's own: for Lippo twinkles, knows the world, and encounters the same moral dilemma in private.12

Interspersed throughout most of the monologue are bits of songs, called stornelli, and these songs appear to contribute to the sensuousness and earthiness of the persona:

Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good is life since?
Flower o' the thyme-- (Lines 53-57)

Flower o' the rose,
If I've been merry, what matters who knows? (Lines 68-69)

(Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)

(Lines 248-249)

Lippo sings these songs and, according to King, "their sensuality and their suggestiveness represent one side of Lippo's character and supply by implication information not directly given in the poem."13

12 Honan, p. 158.

13 King, p. 39.
Whereas the ecclesiastical protagonists in the other two selected monologues were very sensual, Lippo's sensuality does not appear to be his strongest character trait. He does not seem to have passion for a Sanchicha or even for Greek manuscripts as the other two clergymen have. Instead, "his passion is for the beauty and good and joy of man's life. He had always loved it, and in his early work had drawn it frankly."¹⁴ This friar is "an artist constrained to break the bonds of rigid monasticism in order that his natural instincts as a man may have free play; otherwise he cannot fulfill himself as an artist."¹⁵ Lippo's artistic concepts, according to King, "develop naturally from his interpretation of life: Nature reveals God when it is interpreted and ordered by a creative mind."¹⁶:

Art was given for that;  
God uses us to help each other so,  
Lending our minds out. (Lines 304-306)

Lippo appears perfectly well to understand the relation of art to life—the artist makes us see what we otherwise might pass by in the flesh without so much as a glance:

¹⁴Fotheringham, p. 337.  
¹⁵Reeves, p. xxix.  
¹⁶King, p. 48.
For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. (Lines 300-304)

A philosophy of aesthetics, Phelps believes, has never been more truly or succinctly stated than in some of the lines uttered by Fra Lippo Lippi:

Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
(I never saw it—put the case the same—)
If you get simple beauty and nought else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks. (Lines 215-220)

Phelps interprets these lines to mean:

Contemplation of beautiful objects in nature, art, and literature, which perhaps at first sight have no significance, gradually awakens in our hearts a dawning sense of what Beauty may mean; and thus enlarges and develops our minds, and makes them susceptible to the wonder and glory of life. 17

Fra Lippo Lippi, a sensualist and a lover of the material world, views the world not with contempt for the earthly life, but with an eye toward the beauty in the world. He is first an artist and second a monk, and his apparent earthiness and sensuality ought to be interpreted with that understanding. As Mrs. Orr writes:

17Phelps, p. 204.
He [Lippo] will never believe that the world, with all its life and beauty, is an unmeaning blank. He is sure, "it means intensely and means good." He is sure, too, that to reproduce what is beautiful in it is the mission of Art. If anyone objects, that the world being God's work, Art cannot improve on it, and the painter will best leave it alone: he answers that some things are the better for being painted; because, as we are made, we love them best when we see them so. The artist has lent his mind for us to see with. That is what Art means; what God wills in giving it to us.\textsuperscript{18}

Phelps concludes: "Browning loves Fra Lippo Lippi, in spite of the man's impudence and debauchery because the painter loved life, had a tremendous zest for it, and was not ashamed of his enthusiasm."\textsuperscript{19}

Fra Lippo Lippi, sensual and earthy, has difficulties resolving such traits with his monastic way of life, and this apparent dichotomy in his personality is important to an understanding of him. Out of this dilemma, revealed as he talks to the guard, emerges a picture of Lippo not as merely a sensualist, but as a thoughtful--though frustrated and often compromising--creative artist. Such a notion of the monk is summarized by King:

The poem begins in darkness with the face of Lippo only dimly lighted by the watchman's torch;

\textsuperscript{18}Orr, \textit{Handbook}, pp. 243-244.

\textsuperscript{19}Phelps, p. 205.
but as the painter gropes his way toward a clearer understanding of himself and his mission, the morning dawns murkily, its dimness a symbol of Lippo's partly unsuccessful attempt to integrate monastery and street into one clear vision.\textsuperscript{20}

Fra Lippo Lippi is earthy, sensuous, and perhaps, compromising. But because he is these things, he will become a better artist. The pervasive feeling of the poem is of assurance and warmth of feeling, quite the contrary to what was indicated as the attitudes expressed in the previously discussed monologues.

Style: Thought Patterns

Certain aspects of style reveal clues to the character of the persona in this monologue. For instance, the syntax or sentence structure indicates his "nervous vitality" as he talks about the conflict he is experiencing between sensuous beauty and spiritual discipline.\textsuperscript{21} King has some interesting ideas on this aspect of style:

Sentence structure is closely related with meaning: it reflects sensitively the dramatic situation, changing in form and tone as Lippo moves from one stage of his drama to the next.

\textsuperscript{20} King, p. 51.

\textsuperscript{21} Whiting \textit{et al.}, p. 964.
Initially explosive, the sentences reflect Lippo's immediate surprise at being caught and also the intensity of feeling which he has long curbed but which now at last, under the influence of wine and with rational excuse, he releases. They contrast with the more sustained, more deliberate statements of the middle and latter sections of the poem. Their fragmentariness suggests Lippo's lack of inhibition, the intensity of thought and feeling that throbs in his head and presses for expression. Though always coherent, the sentences in the earlier part are less consciously formulated than those in which he later tries to express his theory of art, or still later, those in which he rationalizes his failure.22

The short sentences in the beginning appear to reveal Lippo's mental alertness, in spite of the "Chianti wine." His first reaction is one of alarmed surprise: "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!" (line 1). This short statement is followed by a protest, motivated in part by the discomfort of having torches thrust at his face, but also by Lippo's desire to draw attention from himself--from the unusual circumstances in which he finds himself:

You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooky, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar? (Lines 2-6)

In these first six lines Lippo does not "fumble with his thoughts, play with his ideas, wander hopelessly

22King, pp. 38-39.
because he is unable or fears to arrive at a conclusion. He speaks straightforwardly, confidently."\(^{23}\)

The shortness of the sentences in the poem's beginning also appears to be a result of Browning's faithfulness in recreating the actual movement of the speaking voice as Lippo talks. The style, therefore, seems to be impulsive, fragmentary:

Aha, you know your betters! Then you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off— he's a certain . . . how
d'ye call?
Master--a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you
were best! (Lines 12-18)

In these lines Lippo talks to the men of the guard, and he states his ideas with directness and conviction. According to King, "His purpose is clear, sharp communication of ideas. His omissions . . . help maintain the syntax and cadence of conversation: the ordinary shortening of verbs, some ellipses, a few articles, and an occasional preposition."\(^{24}\)

By the middle of the monologue, the sentences appear longer and more controlled:

\(^{23}\) King, p. 42.
\(^{24}\) King, p. 43.
But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets,  
Eight years together, as my fortune was,  
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling  
The bit of half-stripped grape bunch he desires,  
And who will curse or kick him for his pains—  
Which gentleman processional and fine,  
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,  
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch  
The droppings of the wax to sell again,  
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped—  
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop  
His bone from the heap of offal in the street—  
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,  
He learns the look of things, and none the less  
For admonition from the hunger-pinch. (Lines 112-126)

As he speaks these one hundred and five words, Lippo no longer appears to be in a state of emotional frustration; rather, he is able to present his argument with a calm, self-assured manner about him. He is in complete control of his subject matter, and as King states:

This sentence is spoken by a mind so pregnant with ideas that subordination follows subordination, every thought suggesting an elaboration, an explanation, an example. Firm intellectual and emotional control shapes what might have been chaotic into an organized, coherent expression. Although lacking syntactical unity, it has emotional and intellectual unity. Conversationally it is right. Lippo has begun at this point . . . his self-defense . . . .

Only toward the end of the poem does Lippo hesitate once again in his control and his momentary frustration and uncertainty about the future are reflected in lines 336-340:

25King, p. 41.
That is—you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!

The syntax in this monologue reveals a genuine movement
from sensuality and impulsiveness to idealism and self-
control to compromise and frustration. This three-part
movement, according to King, gives the poem "genuine
dramatic form . . . summarizing at the same time the
conflict and contradictions which exist within the monk-
painter."26

Transitions, or shifts in thought, reveal the
same uncertainty, the same conflict of interest within
the monk as the sentence structure indicates. For
example, in the following lines the transitions serve to
emphasize the conflicts Lippo is experiencing within
himself:

He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! (Lines 25-27)

And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir,
flesh and blood,
That's all I'm made of! (Lines 60-61)

26 King, p. 32.
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, 
it's not . . .
It's vapor done up like a newborn babe--
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul! (Lines 184-187)

I'm my own master, paint now as I please--
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front--
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still--(Lines 226-233)

You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike!
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
--The beauty and the wonder and the power
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises--and God made it all!
--For what? (Lines 280-286)

King comments on the transitions which occur in this monologue:

The structure of the poem, the shifts in Lippo's mood and temper, and the backward and forward movement of the argument signal the violent nature of his conflicts. [The poem] . . . move[s] from jocularity to seriousness; from sportive ladies to saintly beauty, from artistic integrity to compromise, from moral indignation to complacency, from defiance to deference, from pathos to humor, from emotional effusion to calm logical argument. Particularly effective are the violent transitions from, for example, spring nights and carnival time to the mew and its saints; from light, ribald songs to Saint Jerome knocking at his poor old breast to subdue the flesh.27

27 King, p. 34.
Both syntax and transitions provide clues to the character and attitudes of Lippo. Through these two aspects of thought patterns a pervasive feeling of conflict and frustration is revealed in the monologue. Lippo is a victim of ambivalency between conflicting systems of thought and ways of life; the tone of the poem indicates such feelings. King says:

[Lippo's] increasing sobriety, his obviously sincere argument, and a mass of structural devices gradually rectify the initial impression that Lippo is a sensualist. As the poem develops, he emerges as a complex, sometimes contradictory, person, capable of being understood only in terms of his response to the equally demanding, equally attractive pull of his two worlds, the monastery and the street.28

Style: Diction

Another element of style, diction, reveals the same internal conflict in Lippo which the thought patterns reveal. An examination of Lippo's vocabulary indicates "Lippo speaks a polyglot language picked up primarily from both the streets and monastery . . . . His street diction is earthy and sensuous; his monastery diction is abstract and intellectual. Lippo himself is both."29 Operating on two levels then, the friar's

28 King, p. 43.
29 King, p. 44.
diction, both learned and colloquial, once again emphasizes the humanistic-monastic dichotomy in his personality. Included among the learned words are munificent (line 29), miserable (line 95), renounce (line 98), admonition (line 126), leisure (line 128) passion (line 157), triumph (line 172), homage (line 180), and instigate (line 316). A few examples of colloquial words which the monk uses are zooks (lines 3, 23, 60, 392), take you (line 41), mum (line 79), wink (line 119), crib (line 148), funked (line 172), huff (line 337), and hip to haunch (line 44).

Latin expressions occur only twice in the poem:

We come to brother Lippo for all that,
"Iste perfecit opus!" (Lines 376-377)

Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is "amo," I love! (Lines 110-111)

Honan suggests that "Lippo's avoiding Latin, or merrily denying that he knows any more than 'amo,' helps to suggest his own attitude toward the ceremonial and doctrinal aspects of the Church."^30

An aspect of vocabulary not found in the other two monologues analyzed in this study is the speaker's use of expletives. These appear to be important in

^30Honan, p. 221.
analyzing the character of Lippo. Honan remarks: "No other speaker quite touches Fra Lippo Lippi in his use of expletives . . . ." \(^{31}\) Lippo begins with *zooks* in line 1 ("used nowhere else in Browning," \(^{32}\) says Honan), repeats the term twice early in the poem, and then utters it at his last word. Some expletives occur in doubles, *weke, weke* (line 11) or *well, well* (line 221), or:

Oh, oh
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! (Lines 311-313)

Even terms like *Aha* (line 12), *boh* (line 18), *Lord* (line 27), *ouf* (line 50), *ah* (line 75), *God wot* (line 337) are used as expressive expletives. Some of the speaker's shorter exclamatory sentences have a similar effect: "You be judge!" (line 280), "Hang the fools!" (line 335), and "Bless the nuns!" (line 346), for example. Commenting on this aspect of the monk's diction, Honan states:

Lippo has more life than he can hold; indeed, the "cup runs over" and he does his "wild things" just because his mighty energy must have an outlet. His expletives reveal the intensity of his being; they express directly the super-abundance of spirit that has helped to make him

\(^{31}\) Honan, p. 230.

\(^{32}\) Honan, p. 230.
the magnificent painter, the God-loving monk, and the outright sensualist that he is.33

Lippo's earthy language contains colloquial words, and, in some instances, special slang words: gullet's-gripe (line 20), hangdogs (line 27), stinger (line 89), hunger-pinch (line 126), phiz (line 327), hot cockles (line 381). As King says, "There is physicality in his[Lippo's] speech. His diction, sharp and clear, displays a firm grasp of the exterior world. Much of the language is earthy and sensuous."34

Similarly, Honan writes:

His [Lippo's] use of slang and colloquialisms reflects characteristic informality, unpretentiousness and modesty--traits which Lippo is anxious enough to impress his chief auditor with in order to gain sympathy, but which come to light so strongly and naturally as he speaks that we sense them to be unmistakably his own.35

The friar's individuality and creativeness show also in his numerous uses of words and expressions which, says King, "are found nowhere else in Browning's poetry" and usually emphasize certain important aspects of the friar's personality, such as his mental alertness, his creativeness, or his catholicity.36

33 Honan, p. 231.
34 King, p. 34.
35 Honan, p. 231.
36 King, p. 47.
Among the most suggestive of these words are disem-
burdening (line 144), fag (line 237), fooleries (line 
253), spicy (338), misreport (line 340), bowery (line 
349), kirtle (line 380), harry (line 8), and fiddling 
(line 13). King concludes: "The number of these words 
(forty in all) indicates the care Browning took to make 
Lippo an individual . . . . "37 Thus, Lippo's naturally 
creative mind finds a release in his vocabulary. The 
various word creations and compounds suggest his 
inventiveness. His compoundings of words, in all their 
various forms, appear to demonstrate his intellectual 
vitality and ingenuity. They seem to be the products 
of a synthesizing mind, a mind trying to reconcile two 
areas of experience—the monastery and street—
considered unreconcilable by his fellow monks.

Allusions, too, reveal clues to the character 
of Fra Lippo Lippi. The dichotomy between street and 
monastery is indicated in his choice of references to 
other subjects.38 In line 7 Lippo refers to Carmine, 
the cloister of the Carmelite order, as he does also

37 King, p. 48.

38 Information regarding these allusions has 
been obtained from DeVane, A Browning Handbook, pp. 194-
196; DeVane, Shorter Poems of Robert Browning, pp. 345-
347; Whiting et al., pp. 960-964.
in lines 139-140, when he speaks of the Carmelites, the monastic order to which Lippo belongs. Line 17 contains the reference to Cosimo of the Medici (1389-1464), who was the great banker, statesman, and patron of the arts. In order to frighten the guard, Lippo mentions that Cosimo is his patron. In line 25 Lippo compares the watchman to Judas, the betrayer of Christ. He sees the watchman with a professional eye and would like to paint him as Judas. The reference in line 34, "John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair . . . ," is from Matthew, 14:1-12, and Lippo mentions the prospects of painting a picture of the scene after Herod cut off John the Baptist's head in fulfillment of his rash promise to Salome. Saint Jerome (340-420), one of the most learned of the Fathers of the Church, referred to in line 73, lived in the desert as a penance for his early sins, and Lippo suggests a portrait of this saint, although DeVane feels "the picture suggested is imaginary and is ludicrously unadapted to Lippo's temperament."\(^{39}\) Line 121 refers to "the Eight," who were magistrates of Florence at the time Lippo lived. In lines 139-140 he refers again to the Carmelites, and

he also mentions the Camaldolese, who were of the convent of the Camaldi, near Florence; and the Preaching Friars, who were the Dominicans, named after St. Dominic. Pope Innocent III named them Brothers Preachers in 1215. Line 189 refers to "Giotto," Giotto di Bondone (1276-1337), who was perhaps the most famous of all the early Italian painters. A sculptor and architect as well, he planned the Campanile in Florence. His method conformed to the notions of propriety entertained by Fra Lippo Lippi's critics, and DeVane says, "Browning is here delineating the old monastic ideal of painting against which Lippi revolts."\(^{40}\) Line 196 refers to Herodias, the wife of Philip, King Herod's brother. This again is an allusion to Matthew, 14:1-12. Fra Angelico, Giovanni da Fiesole (1387-1455), mentioned in line 235, was one of the greatest of the old medieval school of religious painters, the school against which Lippo sets himself. In the next line, line 236, Lippo mentions "Brother Lorenzo," who was Lorenzo Monaco (1370-1425), a Camaldolese painter in the same medieval tradition as Fra Angelico. Another painter, Tommaso Guidi (1401-1428) is referred to in line 276. According to most

\(^{40}\)DeVane, p. 346.
critics nowadays, he actually was Fra Lippo Lippi's predecessor, not his successor, as Lippi indicates. Lines 323-328 cite Saint Lawrence, who in the year 258 was martyred by being roasted on a grid-iron. Lippo refers to the man's torture, during which "at one point Lawrence asked his tormentors to turn him over; he was 'done on one side.'" Lippo's sensual nature is again reflected in line 339, when he speaks of "Chianti wine," Chianti being a district to the south of Florence, famous since classical times for its wine. In line 346 Lippo speaks about "Sant' Ambrobro's," referring to Saint Ambrose's Church in Florence where Lippo painted the "Coronation of the Virgin" which he describes in the lines following this reference. Another reference is made to Saint John the Baptist, in line 354, and nothing more needs to be said except that he was the patron saint of Florence. Another Biblical allusion is indicated in line 357, when Lippo speaks of Job, the Old Testament figure, highly regarded for his patience. In line 381 Lippo talks about "hot cockles," an old English game, in which the blindfolded player guesses who strikes him. But,

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41Whiting et al., p. 963.
according to Whiting, "the reference to 'The hothead husband' in line 383 shows that the monk is thinking also of a less innocent game!"\textsuperscript{42}

The numerous allusions which Fra Lippo Lippi uses—both Biblical and artistic—emphasize once more the strong conflict he is experiencing between two ways of life. No sooner does he refer to some Biblical figure or incident than he turns right around and talks about the medieval tradition in art which he is rebelling against. The conflict is strongly a part of Lippo, and as he talks, he reveals this.

Dramatic irony is still another aspect of diction which may reveal clues to character and attitude of the speaker in a monologue. There are instances in this poem where the persona uses words to express himself which are not synonymous with what Browning wants us to know about the friar. In the beginning of the poem Lippo attempts to characterize himself in such a way that the night guard will sense the absurdity of his arrest, feel pity perhaps, and then let Lippo go:

\textsuperscript{42}Whiting \textit{et al}, p. 964.
The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
Do--Harry out, it you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!

(Lines 7-11)

The many-sided sarcasm of these lines, however, empha-
sizes Lippo's shrewdness, quick wit, and self-control--
traits which, probably, Lippo does not care to reveal
about himself. Later in the poem, beginning at line
250, Lippo again reveals more of himself than he
intends:

... my whole soul revolves, the
cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! (Lines 250-254)

In these few lines it appears that Lippo's intention is
to convince the watchman that a monk such as he should
be excused for doing a particular "wild" thing such as
being "Where sportive ladies leave their door ajar."
Yet Browning permits the irony of the situation to come
through to reveal the character of the friar. In the
lines just cited there occurs an ironic inversion of
values in the metaphor which Lippo borrows from the Old
Testament. He says, "And my whole soul revolves, the
cup runs over," referring not to the spiritual fullness
which he should be experiencing, but to his physical
capacities. Lippo's sensuality and earthiness are once again expressed in spiritual terms. Lippo finishes his tale to the watchman with a half-joking promise to paint a beautiful picture of the Madonna by way of atonement for his misconduct. Yet in his description of the prospective painting, Lippo inadvertently indicates something about himself. King remarks on this point:

As penance for his night out he pledges to paint a picture . . . . His motives are mixed: it is conceived as a peace offering, yet, in contemplation of it his imagination kindles and he is swept far beyond his initial objectives. Jocularity gives way to earnestness as he visions a host of pious, pure saints, into whose company he, though unworthy, is drawn . . . . But clay that he is, Lippo cannot long abide the rarified atmosphere. The spread of wings is transformed into a kirtle under which he, until disturbed by the hothead husband, plays hot cockles with the angelic form now become something less . . . . And we know that there will be more paintings which serve as peace offerings to his order, more night escapades, and more internal struggle and intellectual searching.43

Browning's use of dramatic irony, then, in this monologue permits Fra Lippo Lippi to reveal character traits and attitudes about himself other than those he is aware are being revealed.

43King, pp. 51-52.
Two figures of sound, alliteration and cacophony, serve as means of portraying the character of Fra Lippo Lippi. In the following lines, for example, the recurring m's appear to suggest "the monk's mincing piety and empty formalism."\(^{44}\)

Six words there, while I stood munching my first bread that month: "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father, wiping his own mouth, 'twas refectio time—

"To quit this very miserable world?"

"Will you renounce"... "the mouthful of bread?"

By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me.

Park Honan suggests several interesting ideas with regard to the use of m-words in this monologue. He says:

... (m)-word alliterations seem to serve two purposes. The words monk and man ... occur 11 and 12 times respectively throughout the poem; and the terms in context are important enough to function in a key-manner in Lippo's portrait: they epitomize the duality and tension between man and monk, sensuality and piety, in his make-up. But (m)-words as a whole have a structural function in the poem; at every stage of Lippo's argument an (m)-word occurs in a significant phrase, so that, in fact, a simple listing of (m)-words and their phrases actually provides a fair outline of the poem.\(^ {45}\)

Honan then lists the following (m)-words as evidence for his statement:\(^{46}\)

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\(^{44}\)King, p. 38.

\(^{45}\)Honan, p. 261.

\(^{46}\)See Honan, pp. 261-262.
monk
midnight
wee white mouse
Master-a . . . Cosimo of the Medici
munificent house
shut within my mew
moonlight
If I've been merry, what matter who
knows?
Mum's the word
mother died
munching my first bread that month
" . . . you're minded,"
Wiping his own mouth
miserable world
mouthful of bread
men's faces
music-notes
the Mark of painting
any sort of meaning look intense
I'm a grown man
I'm my own master
You keep your mistr. . . manners, and
I'll stick to mine!
The old mill-horse image for Lippo
It makes me mad
the world means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
remember matins
mind you fast
mistake an idle word
To make amends

God in the midst, Madonna and her babe
Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck--
I'm the man!

I, caught up with my monk's-things by
mistake

six months hence!

He concludes:

His [Lippo's] speech is at once unified, through
the (m)alliteration, and the impression of duality
in oneness, of Lippo's being pious monk and sensual
man--and yet the integrated artist, effective,
functioning, intense, complete as he is--is
reinforced by it. 47

Sometimes alliteration heightens satiric
meaning:

But there my triumph's straw fire flared and funkled;
Their betters took their turn to see and say;
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time.  (Lines 173-176)

Mazed, motionless and moonstruck--I'm the man!

(Line 364)

47 Honan, p. 262.
Sometimes the alliteration of key words appears to point up important meanings:

Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three
slim shapes,
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh
and blood,
That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
And after them. I came up with the fun
Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met.
(Lines 58-67)

About the use of alliteration in this passage King says:

The forward pull of the alliteration, the emphasis on key words, the recurring sounds, the numerous explosives and dentals, and the hard gutterals give the whole a staccato rhythm that carries the reader almost without pause through the entire passage. Alliteration serves the dual purpose of achieving conversational cadence and of emphasizing thought.  

Cacophonous—grotesque or harsh—sounds seem to reveal the impulsive, nervous manner which is Lippo's. Zooks, a shortened form of the mild oath "Gadzooks," is an example of such a harsh sound. Lippo is too nervous even to utter the entire word; he must look for the easier way to express himself. The sounds Weke, weke (line 11) are made by Lippo as he tries to imitate the

48 King, p. 37.
squeak of a mouse and are grotesque sounds. In line 237, a consonant cluster in the phrase "Fag on at flesh" is used apparently to convey Lippo's "innate distaste for [his superiors'] piousness."\(^4^9\) The expletive Lippo uses in line 337, "God wot," is another example of the harshness of some of the sounds he uses. Line 351, "As puff on puff of grated orris-root," contains more sounds which are harsh to the ear. These examples of cacophony in the monologue indicate that Browning did employ this sound device to help create attitude.

Alliteration and cacophony, therefore, reveal a great deal about Lippo. Through examination of these two devices of sound, Lippo is seen to be sensuous, pious, earthy, and energetic. The effect of certain sounds in Lippo's language provides a feeling of energy, straightforwardness, and sensuality in the poem.

**Style: Rhythm**

Rhythm of content appears to express the conflict which exists in the persona. The speaker is very aware of the street-monastery dichotomy and his words never permit the poem to become static. The monologue opens

\(^{4^9}\) King, p. 38.
with a situation which immediately presents the scene of conflict (lines 1-39) and acts as an introduction for the poem. Then it moves steadily through a series of minor climaxes toward the highlight of the poem, Lippo's description of the "Coronation of the Virgin" (lines 347-389).

Thought and feeling shift back and forth constantly as Lippo relates to the watchman his tale of conflict and frustration. Logically the monologue moves toward its major climax. Lippo tells why he became a monk in the first place (lines 81-126), how he began to dabble in art while in the monastery (lines 127-162), how his superiors refused to accept his first paintings because his business was "not to catch men with show,/ With homage to the perishable clay" (lines 163-198). So Lippo painted over these first drawings in deference to his superiors' wishes and began all over again. Though very frustrated, Lippo tells the Chief of the guard that he will paint another picture soon, the now-famous "Coronation of the Virgin." This painting is to be an act of atonement for his sinful deeds of the evening. The monologue seems to move from initial sensuality to idealism to compromise in quite logical order.
Emotionally there also is a progression of content. The scene opens with a definite indication of conflict as Lippo is confronted by the guard. Tension immediately is created. As soon as Lippo mentions the name of his patron (line 17), tension momentarily subsides as Lippo tells how he would like some of the men in his audience to become models for his paintings. The poem's tension builds again at line 57 when Lippo relates how the women's voices in the night overwhelmed him and so he followed them into the streets. Another section of passivity occurs starting at line 81 as Lippo tells why he entered the monastery. Yet even this section is interrupted periodically by the sensuous fragments of song which Lippo sings (lines 53-57, 68-69, 110-111, 238-239, 248-249) and once again the conflict is brought out. Finally Lippo reminds the watchman that

... my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterward. (Lines 267-269)

The basic sensuality of the man is again repeated and the conflict is brought to the foreground. From this point on in the poem the tension continues to build steadily until at line 345 high emotional intensity is reached as Lippo begins to describe his great painting
to the Virgin. Yet the poem ends in irresolution and frustration. Lippo himself remarks about the "gray beginning" of the day, in line 392, and this seems to be an appropriate color for him because it is a neutral one, neither white nor black. As he completes his talk with the Chief of the guard, Lippo is rather "gray," rather neutral. He has settled back once again into a state of frustration and compromise. The tensions are relaxed for Lippo, yet his inner conflict between street and monastery continues.

Summary

The preceding discussion has examined the cognitive elements of the situational components as well as certain aspects of style in order to find clues to the character and attitudes of Fra Lippo Lippi. This analysis has revealed that the friar is a sensuous, yet creative man. Lippo is a monk with tremendous enthusiasm and energy; he channels this vitality of character into his painting. But his efforts are not always appreciated and Lippo is frustrated. He is forced to compromise in his ideals of art. This sense of conflict and frustration pervades the feeling of the entire dramatic monologue.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to make a limited analysis of three dramatic monologues by Robert Browning and to relate the analysis to the oral interpreter's performance of them. The focus of each analysis is upon clues to character, attitude, and dramatic situation.

Chapter I, "Introduction," indicates that through the years Robert Browning's skill as a writer of dramatic monologues has been recognized, and that, recently, serious readers and critics have attempted to establish his position as a poet of some esteem. General opinion is that Browning contributed much to the development of the monologue as a separate literary genre and wrote outstanding dramatic poetry. Modern-day theory in interpretation emphasizes the importance of good literature as a starting point for the oral interpreter, and it is not unusual to find Browning's monologues in various interpretation textbooks. This current theory stresses the value of analysis in order for the interpreter to achieve clear understanding of
the literary text prior to oral performance of the literature.

Chapter II, "Robert Browning: Man and Poet," discusses briefly the life of Robert Browning and important literary highlights of his career. While still inexperienced as a writer, Browning wrote several dramas, none of which was successful. But his attempts at writing plays later aided him in writing the subtle dramatic monologues, three of which are examined in this study. Browning's basic philosophy permeates all that he wrote. An optimist by nature, he still was sensitive to evil in the world, and the characters in his monologues indicate this same awareness of good and bad in mankind.

Chapter III, "The Dramatic Monologue," traces the development of the monologue, submits a definition of the form, and formulates a frame of analysis for each of the poems. The dramatic monologue had its beginnings as far back in time as Greek literature, and through the years numerous authors have employed this form of literary expression in their works. But Browning should be recognized as having developed the monologue into a conscious art form. Although definitions of a dramatic monologue are varied, most of them contain references to speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character,
interplay between speaker and audience, and dramatic action of conflict. Awareness of such factors is important for the oral interpreter as he formulates a frame of analysis in which to examine the literary object. In this study, the analysis of each monologue is carried out in two steps: 1) determination of the situational components; and 2) examination of certain aspects of style—thought patterns, diction, and rhythm of content.

With this frame of analysis set up, Chapters IV, V, AND VI analyze the selected monologues, searching for clues to character, attitudes, and dramatic situation in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," and "Fra Lippo Lippi." After the interpreter has analyzed the literary object, he seeks to find the form for oral presentation. According to Grimes and Mattingly, "Control of the literature implies initially that the interpreter understands, appreciates, and responds to his material and that he finds a form of utterance equivalent to the style of writing . . . ."\(^1\) The remainder of this chapter is concerned with relating

\(^1\)Grimes and Mattingly, p. 314.
the analysis of the situational components and of certain aspects of style to the interpreter's presentation of the poems. The scope of this discussion will be limited to three aspects of the interpreter's delivery: 1) visualization of scene, 2) interplay between speaker and listener, and 3) revelation of the speaker's attitude toward his listener(s) and subject matter.

Examination of the situational components reveals three well-delineated speakers in the monologues, namely, a Spanish monk, a Roman Bishop, and a Florentine friar. The setting in which the speaker's particular moment of crisis occurs is specified in each monologue: a garden inside a Spanish monastery, a state chamber adjacent to the nave at St. Praxed's Church in Rome, and a dimly lighted street in the wrong section of Florence. Working with clearly depicted speakers and specified situations, the interpreter's first problem is the visualization of the scene in each poem. The scene in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" seems much more definite than in the other two poems and requires that the interpreter manifest a sense of location of items referred to by the speaker:

Water your damned flowerpots, do! (Line 2)

What? your myrtle bush wants trimming? Oh, that rose has prior claims— (Lines 5-6)
The speaker's remarks are motivated, of course, by Brother Lawrence's walking about the garden, and the interpreter will seem to see Brother Lawrence as the lines are spoken, thus "closing" the situation. Grimes and Mattingly say: "When the situational aspects of a work are so tightly organized that they constitute an environment of their own, one which we as readers observe but do not partake of, the situation is closed." But the monk would like the whole world to know about Brother Lawrence, and so certain stanzas as the monk considers ways to trick his antagonist constitute an open situation and could be addressed to the interpreter's audience: for example, lines 9-16, lines 17-23, lines 25-32, lines 33-40.

Visualization of scene also is important in the other two monologues examined in this study. When the dying Bishop or Fra Lippo Lippi refers to items in the scene or addresses certain persons, the scene will be closed. But in these two poems, because there are

2Grimes and Mattingly, p. 18.
several unspecified or undefined listeners, the interpreter's audience may be addressed as these lines are read. As the Bishop's thoughts become very private, the situation will be closed; for example, lines 10-13, lines 51-52. But other lines may be directed to the interpreter's audience: for example, lines 3-9, lines 31-32, lines 113-115. As Fra Lippo Lippi paints a picture with words he will visualize what he says, and, therefore, the scene should be closed, as in lines 347-377. Lippo often changes direction as he speaks first to the guard, then to the Chief of the guard, and then to himself. Each of these changes needs to be indicated, either by using a closed situation or by directing the lines to the interpreter's audience.

Analysis of certain aspects of style—thought patterns and diction, especially—reveal a definite interplay between the speaker and his listener(s). The oral interpreter needs to be cognizant of this interplay as he re-creates the experiences inherent in the monologues. Unless the interpreter is aware of the inner action taking place in the poems, a sense of progression in his delivery will not be revealed. Yet, the dramatic action of the poems in this study—especially in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church"—is not overt, on the whole, but lies in changes in the speaker's
thoughts and feelings. In "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," for instance, the interplay arises not so much from what Brother Lawrence says but from what he does, certain actions which he performs motivating the responses of the speaker. The dying Bishop addresses all of his sons, though he calls out only Anselm by name. It appears that the listeners in this monologue do less, move around less, and say less than the listener(s) in the other monologues. The interplay between the speaker and his listeners, therefore, is not nearly as overt as in the other two monologues. Fra Lippo Lippi talks to the entire guard before he directly addresses the Chief of the guard (line 21), and frequent interplay is indicated, especially in lines 1-41. Thus, in these monologues there are clear indications to what the listener(s) says or does.

The interpreter's use of pause, "a temporary rest or stop," will aid him in revealing the responses of the persona's listener. About the oral reader's use of pause, Charlotte Lee says:

He [the interpreter] need only be sure that something relevant to the material is going on during the pause, first in his own mind and

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consequently in the minds of his listeners. The pause must stay within the total concept of the selection and supply whatever transition or suspense is needed . . . . Thus the interpreter's full understanding and response, together with his sense of responsibility to his audience, are the final determinants in the use of pauses. 4

And as Curry says, " . . . the interpreter by pausing and using care can make clear . . . a vast number of points which would otherwise be of great difficulty." 5

In the following lines from "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," for example, the appropriate use of pauses can aid the interpreter to indicate to his audience what the persona's listener is saying or doing:

Draw round my bed; [pause] is Anselm keeping back? (Line 2)

Draw close; [pause] that conflagration of my church
--What then? (Lines 34-35)

. . . but I know
Ye mark me not! [pause] What do they whisper thee, Child of my bowels, Anselm? [pause] Ah, ye hope To revel down my villas while I gasp Bricked o'er with beggar's moldy travertine Which Gandolf from his tomb top chuckles at! [pause] Nay, boys, ye love me [pause]--all of jasper, then! (Lines 62-68)


5Curry, p. 81.
"Do I live, [pause] am I dead?" [pause] There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death [pause]—ye wish it [pause]—God, ye wish it! [pause] Stone—
(Lines 113-115)

In "Fra Lippo Lippi" the judicious use of pause can aid the interpreter to reveal the interplay between the persona and his captors: for example,

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave! [pause]
You need not clap your torches to my face. [pause]
Zooks, what's to blame? [pause] you think you see a monk? [pause]
(Lines 1-3)

Aha, you know your betters! [pause] Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat
And please to know me likewise. [pause] Who am I? [pause]
(Lines 12-14)

He's Judas to a tittle, [pause] that man is! [pause]
Just such a face! [pause] Why, sir, you make amends. [pause]
Lord, I'm not angry! [pause] Bid your hangdogs do
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbors me [pause]
And many more besides, lads! [pause] more beside! [pause]
And all's come square again. [pause] I'd like his face [pause]--
His, [pause] elbowing on his comrade in the door
...(Lines 25-32)

You snap me of the sudden. [pause] Ah, I see! [pause] Though your eye twinkle still you shake your head-- [pause] (Lines 75-76)
Your hand, sir, and good-by; [pause] no light, no lights! [pause]
The street's hushed, and I know my own way back, [pause]
Don't fear me! [pause] There's the gray beginning.
Zooks! (Lines 390-392)

Of course, the pauses in the several examples cited will vary in their duration according to many factors. As Grimes and Mattingly state: "Pauses are of many different lengths, depending upon audience conditions, the personal rhythms of the interpreter, and the significance, difficulty, and weight of emotion in what is said."\^6

So far in this discussion, suggestions have been made for the oral interpreter's visualization of scene—namely, the open-closed situation—and also ideas have been noted for the interpreter's re-creation of the interplay between speaker and listener—primarily through the use of pause. Although other matters of delivery of these monologues would be involved in oral performance, only one more aspect relates directly to the analysis in preceding chapters, that is, the interpreter's indication of the speaker's attitude toward his listener(s) and subject matter. The attitudes expressed by the language in the monologues are clear and demand analogous

\^6 Grimes and Mattingly, p. 289.
expressive behavior on the part of the interpreter. The monk in the Spanish monastery appears to be an extremely hate-filled, sensual, and jealous man. He vacillates from intense hatred to rather petty and humorous jealousy. The Bishop, waiting to die in St. Praxed's Church, not only is very jealous of his predecessor, Gandolf, but is seen as a sensual and materialistic individual as he plans the tomb in which he eventually will lie. His attitudes vary from pure lust toward his mistress (lines 5-6) to envy of Gandolf (line 50) to displeasure with his sons (lines 113-115). Fra Lippo Lippi is a friar who appears earthy and sensuous—yet spiritual, too. Of the three speakers, he is the least hateful and bitter about his predicament. If anything, he is more frustrated than angry. His attitudes toward the women, the guard, his superiors, and even art vary from sensuality and impulsiveness to idealism and assurance, and to compromise and frustration.

The oral interpreter can best indicate the various attitudes of the speakers in these monologues by vocal and bodily changes, especially by changes in vocal tone and muscle tension. Geiger feels that an interpreter knows what attitude to take, in its exact measure and intensity, because the interpreter knows
toward what such an attitude is taken. For instance, the hate-filled opening lines uttered by the unnamed monk might be indicated by a feeling of tension in both the interpreter's tone of voice as well as in his bodily response:

Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water your damned flowerpots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
God's blood, would not mine kill you! (Lines 1-4)

The tone in these lines is one of great tension, and so the interpreter might indicate this feeling by using a throaty growl, a spitting out of the words, a narrowing of the eyes, and a contracting body. Body tensions contribute a great deal to the revelation of attitudes in these poems. Grimes and Mattingly say: "Expansion and contraction are revealed primarily in the torso--the lift of the chest and the degree of tension in the back muscle." A tense, contracting body would seem appropriate in these opening lines, and then, as the speaker begins to mimic Brother Lawrence, a more relaxed posture could be assumed along with a hastening of the speaker's words.

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7Geiger, p. 97.
8Grimes and Mattingly, p. 251.
Grimes and Mattingly say that "transitions in thought can be indicated by movement in space." Curry comments on the transitions in the monologues, saying, "In studying the argument the reader should note the many sudden changes in almost every phrase . . . ." Several transitions occur in "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" which reveal the speaker's attitude toward his antagonist and these necessitate changes in the body tension of the interpreter. For example:

What's the Latin name for "parsley"? What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout? (Lines 15-16)

Marked with L for our initial! (He-he! There his lily snaps!) (Lines 23-24)

Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's? (That is, if he'd let it show!) (Lines 31-32)

Lines heavy in alliteration also reveal the speaker's attitude in the other monologues examined in this study. For example, the Bishop, as he lies dying, describes in lines 81-84 the ritual of the Mass in a very sensual manner. The interpreter ought to slow down his rate of speaking and emphasize the m, g, s, and f

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9 Grimes and Mattingly, p. 252.

10 Curry, p. 92.
sounds in these lines and, thereby, emphasize this attitude in the persona. Fra Lippo Lippi, in lines 173 and 346, uses alliteration to heighten satiric meaning, and the interpreter—through retardation of sounds—can indicate this attitude.

Transitions occur in "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church" and "Fra Lippo Lippi" which require body shifts in order for the interpreter to convey the proper meaning to the audience. In "The Bishop Orders His Tomb At St. Praxed's Church," a sudden shift of thought occurs in lines 3-4 which reveals the speaker's attitude:

Nephews—sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well—
She, men would have to be your mother once . . . .

Another example occurs in lines 14-15:

St. Praxed ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine.

In these lines the sudden transitions show that the main point the Bishop has on his mind is the matter of the construction of the tomb, and this idea is always present in his mind. This monologue is full of such sudden transitions and they will require corresponding changes in the interpreter's delivery. Whenever the interpreter comes to these transitions, he ought to change his bodily tension. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," the sensual-spiritual dichotomy inherent in the friar ought to be
indicated by vocal emphasis on certain words and lines and by the interpreter's shifts in bodily expansion and contraction indicative of struggle behavior. For example, in line 17, Lippo mentions his patron, Cosimo de Medici, and the mention of these words serves to awaken the guard as to the importance of their prisoner. Therefore, by stressing these words, the interpreter immediately can emphasize their importance as they are spoken. The songs Lippo sings accentuate his sensuality and ought in some way to be set apart from the context as they are read. Bodily tension shifts from the beginning of the poem when Lippo is first apprehended to a more relaxed atmosphere as the friar begins to tell the Chief of the guard his life story.

Suggestions have been offered in this discussion which relate the situational components and certain aspects of style to an interpreter's delivery of the selected monologues. Three major aspects for performance have been discussed. These three aspects seem appropriate in a discussion about the oral presentation of monologues which have a clearly defined speaker and definite scene, show interplay between speaker and listener, and reveal changing attitudes on the part of the persona. Comments offered in this chapter are not, however, prescriptive. This writer agrees with Charlotte
Lee when she says:

[These] brief suggestions . . . are not . . . to be taken as rules. They are intended simply as practical suggestions which have been found effective. The only unbreakable rule is that there must be communication of the total achievement of the [poet]... ."11

Summary

The selected dramatic monologues of Robert Browning lend themselves well to oral interpretation. Examination of the situational components and of certain aspects of style indicates that there needs to be visualization of scene, interplay between speaker and listener, and revelation of the speaker's attitude toward his listener(s) and subject matter. Certain techniques will help the interpreter achieve the desired form for the delivery of the monologues: "The interpreter . . . will know for what effect he is working and will make use of all the devices, in fact, which the writer before him has employed . . . . Then the form will remain latent until the end of the performance, but, bit by bit, it will take shape, yielding clarity of meaning and vividness of feeling."12

11Lee, p. 311.
12Grimes and Mattingly, p. 316.
Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!
   Water your damned flowerpots, do!
If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,
   God's blood, would not mine kill you!
What? your myrtle bush wants trimming?
   Oh, that rose has prior claims--
Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?
   Hell dry you up with its flames!

At the meal we sit together:
   Salve tibi! I must hear
Wise talk of the kind of weather,
   Sort of season, time of year:
Not a plenteous cork crop; scarcely
   Dare we hope oak galls, I doubt;
What's the Latin name for "parsley"?
   What's the Greek name for "Swine's Snout"?
Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,
   Laid with care on our own shelf!
With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,
   And a goblet for ourself,
Rinsed like something sacrificial
   Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps--
Marked with L for our initial!
   (He-he! There his lily snaps!)

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores
   Squats outside the Convent bank
With Sanchicha, telling stories,
   Steeping tresses in the tank,
Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs
   --Can't I see his dead eye glow,
Bright as 'twere a Barbary corsair's?
   (That is, if he'd let it show!)
When he finishes refectio[n,  
Knife and fork he never lays  
Crosswise, to my recollection,  
As do I, in Jesu's praise.  
I the Trinity illustrate,  
Drinking watered orange pulp—  
In three sips the Arian frustrate;  
While he drains his at one gulp.  

Oh, those melons! If he's able  
We're to have a feast! so nice!  
One goes to the Abbot's table,  
All of us get each a slice.  
How go on your flowers? None double?  
Not one fruit-sort can you spy?  
Strange!—And I, too, at such trouble  
Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

There's a great text in Galatians,  
Once you trip on it, entails  
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?

Or, my scrofulous French novel  
On gray paper with blunt type!  
Simply glance at it, you grovel  
Hand and foot in Belial's gripe;  
If I double down its pages  
At the woeful sixteenth print,  
When he gathers his greengages,  
Ope a sieve and slip in 't?

Or, there's Satan!—one might venture  
Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave  
Such a flaw in the indenture  
As he'd miss till, past retrieve,  
Blasted lay that rose acacia  
We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine  
'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia,  
Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r--you swine!
THE BISHOP ORDERS HIS TOMB

AT ST. PRAXED'S CHURCH

Rome, 15--

Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
Draw round my bed; is Anselm keeping back?
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!
What's done is done; and she is dead beside,
Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
And as she died so must we die ourselves,
And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
In this state chamber, dying by degrees,
Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask,
"Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
St. Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know--
Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner south
He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
One sees the pulpit o' the epistle side,
And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
And up into the aery dome where live
The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk;
And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
With those nine columns round me, two and two,
The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
--Old Gandolf with his paltry onion stone,
Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
Rosy and flawless; how I earned the prize!
Draw close; that conflagration of my church
--What then? So much was saved if aught were
missed!
My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
The white-grape vineyard where the oil press
stood,
Drop water gently till the surface sink,
And if he find . . . Ah, God, I know not, I! . . .
Bedded in store of rotten fig leaves soft,
And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
Some lump, ah, God, of lapis lazuli,
Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast . . .
Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
The brave Frascati villa with its bath,
So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
Like God the Father's globe on both his hands
Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay.
For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years;
Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--
'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
The Savior at his sermon on the mount,
St. Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
To revel down my villas while I gasp
Bricked o'er with beggar's moldy travertine
Which Gandolf from his tomb top chuckles at!
Nay, boys, ye love me--all of jasper, then!
'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve
My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
One block, pure green as a pistachio nut,
There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--
And have I not St. Praxed's ear to pray
Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,
And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
--That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line--
Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
And then how I shall lie through centuries,
And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
And see God made and eaten all day long,
And feel the steady candle flame, and taste
Good strong th'ick stupefying incense smoke!
For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
Into great laps and folds of sculptor's work:
And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
About the life before I lived this life,
And this life too, popes, cardinals, and priests,
St. Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
And new-found agate urns as fresh as day.
And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
—Aha, Elucescebat quoth our friend?
No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
All lapis, all sons! Else I give the Pope
My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
They glitter like your mother's for t'o y soul,
Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze.
Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
With grapes, and add a visor and a term,
And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
To comfort me on my entablature
Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
"Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death—ye wish it—God, ye wish it! Stone—
Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
As if the corpse they keep were oozing through—
And no more lapis to delight the world!
Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row; and, going, turn your backs
—Aye, like departing altar ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace
That I may watch at leisure if he leers—
Old Gandolf—at me, from his onion stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!
FRA LIPPO LIPPI

I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
You need not clap your torches to my face.
Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
And here you catch me at an alley's end
Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
The Carmine's my cloister; hunt it up,
Do—harry out, if you must show your zeal,
Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!
Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off—he's a certain . . . how d' ye call?
Master—a . . . Cosimo of the Medici,
I! the house that caps the corner, Boh! you were best!
Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
How you affected such a gullet's gripe!
But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you;
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbors me
(And many more beside, lads! more bedise!)
And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!  
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,  
A wood coal or the like? or you should see!  
Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.  
What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,  
You know them and they take you? like enough!  
I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—  
'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.  
Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.  
Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands  
To roam the town and sing out carnival,  
And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,  
A-painting for the great man, saints and saints  
And saints again. I could not paint all night—  
Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.  
There came a hurry of feet and little feet,  
A sweep of lute strings, laughs, and whiffs of song—  
Flower o' the broom,  
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!  
Flower o' the quince,  
I let Lisa go and what good in life since?  
Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.  
Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter  
Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight—three slim shapes,  
And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,  
That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,  
Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,  
All the bed furniture—a dozen knots,  
There was a ladder! Down I let myself,  
Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,  
And after them, I came up with the fun  
Hard by St. Laurence, hail fellow, well met—  
Flower of the rose,  
If I've been merry, what matter who knows?  
And so as I was stealing back again  
To get to bed and have a bit of sleep  
Ere I rise up tomorrow and go work  
On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast  
With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,  
You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!  
Though your eye twinkle still, you shake your head—
Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting's in
that!
If Master Cosimo announced himself,
Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
I was a baby when my mother died
And father died and left me in the street.
I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
On fig skins, melon parings, rinds and shucks,
Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
My stomach being empty as your hat,
The wind doubled me up and down I went.
Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
(Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
And so along the wall, over the bridge,
By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
While I stood munching my first bread that month:
"So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father,
Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection time—
"To quit this very miserable world?
Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of
bread?" thought I;
By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking house,
Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside!
"Let's see what the urchin's fit for"—that came
next.
Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
Such a to-do! They tried me with their books;
Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is "amo," I love!
But mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
Eight years together, as my fortune was,
Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
The bit of half-stripped grape bunch he desires,
And who will curse or kick him for his pains—
Which gentleman processional and fine,
Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
The droppings of the wax to sell again,
Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped—
How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which let drop
His bone from the heap of offal in the street—
Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
He learns the look of things, and none the less
For admonition from the hunger pinch.
I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
I drew men's faces on my copy books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge,
Joined legs and arms to the long music notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world
Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks
looked black.
"Nay," quoth the Prior,—"turn him out, d' ye say?
In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
What if at last we get our man of parts,
We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
And put the front on it that ought to be!"
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a
blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean; then, folk at church,
From good old gossips waiting to confess
Their cribs of barrel droppings, candle ends—
To the breathless fellow at the altar foot,
Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
With the little children round him in a row
Of admiration, half for his beard and half
For that white anger of his victim's son
Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
Signing himself with the other because of Christ
(Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
After the passion of a thousand years)
Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
(Which the intense eyes looked through) came at
eve
On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
(The brute took growling), prayed, and so was
gone.
I painted all, then cried, "'Tis ask and have;
Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies—"That's the very man!
Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
To care about his asthma; it's the life!"
But there my triumph's straw fire flared and funk'd;
Their betters took their turn to see and say;
The Prior and the learned pulled a face
And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
As much as pea and pea! it's devil's game!
Your business is not to catch men with show,
With homage to the perishable clay,
But lift them over it, ignore it all,
Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
Your business is to paint the souls of men--
Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
Its vapor done up like a newborn babe--
(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
Gives us no more of body than shows soul!
Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
That sets us praising—why not stop with him?
Why pull all thoughts of praise out of our head
With wonder at lines, colors, and what not?
Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
Rub all out, try at it a second time.
Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say--
Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further 200
And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
When what you put for yellow's simply black,
And any sort of meaning looks intense
When all beside itself means and looks naught.
Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
The Prior's niece . . . patron saint—is it so pretty
You can't discover if it means hope, fear, sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold?
Or say there's beauty with no soul at all--
(I never saw it--put the case the same--)
If you get simple beauty and naught else,
You get about the best thing God invents:
That's somewhat; and you'll find the soul you have missed,
Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
"Rub all out!" Well, well, there's my life, in short,
And so the thing has gone on ever since.
I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds;
You should not take a fellow eight years old
And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
I'm my own master, paint now as I please--
Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front--
Those great rings serve more purposes than just
To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
The heads shake still--"It's art's decline, my son!
You're not of the true painters, great and old;
Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;
Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer;
Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
Flower o' the pine,
You keep your mistr... manners, and I'll stick to
mine!
I'm not the third, then; bless us, they must know!
Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them--sometimes do and sometimes don't;
For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints--
A laugh, a cry, the business of the world--
(Flower o' the peach,
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
And play the fooleries you catch me at,
In pure rage! The old mill horse, out at grass
After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
Although the miller does not preach to him
The only good of grass is to make chaff.
What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
Settled forever one way. As it is,
You tell too many lies and hurt yourself;
You don't like what you only like too much,
You do like what, if given you at your word,
You find abundantly destable.
For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
I always see the garden and God there
A-making man's wife; and, my lesson learned,
The value and significance of flesh,
I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me; I'm a beast, I know.
But see, now—why, I see as certainly
As that the morning star's about to shine,
What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop.
His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace,
I hope so—though I never live so long,
I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
However, you're my man, you've seen the world
—The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises—and God made it all!
—For what? Do you feel thankful, aye or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What's it all about?
To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
But why not do as well as say—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are here already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have
passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
And trust me but you should, though! How much
more,
If I drew higher things with the same truth!
That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
It makes me mad to see what men shall do
And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
"Aye, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
Strikes in the Prior; "when your meaning's plain
It does not say to folk—remember matins,
Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's
best,
A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
I painted a St. Laurence six months since
At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style;
"How looks my painting, now the scaffold's
down?"
I ask a brother. "Hugely," he returns—
"Already not one phiz of your three slaves
Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
The pious people have so eased their own
With coming to say prayers there in a rage;
We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
Expect another job this time next year,
For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

--That is—you'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
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;
And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
. . . There's for you! Give me six months, then go

Something in Saint! Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel brood,
Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
As puff on puff of grated orris root
When ladies crowd to church at midsummer.
And then i' the front, of course a saint or two--
St. John, because he saves the Florentines,
St. Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
Secured at their devotion, up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,
As one by a dark stair into a great light,
Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!--
Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck--I'm the man!
Back I shrink--what is this I see and hear?
I, caught up with my monk's things by mistake,
My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
I, in this presence, this pure company!
Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
Forward, puts out a soft palm--"not so fast!"
--Addresses the celestial presence, "nay--
He made you and devised you, after all,
Though he's none of you! Could St. John there
draw--

His camel hair make up a painting brush?
We come to brother Lippo for all that,
Iste perfecit opus!" So, all smile--
I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
Under the cover of a hundred wings
Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
To some safe bench behind, not letting go
The palm of her, the little lily thing
That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
Like the Prior's niece . . . St. Lucy, I would say.
And so all's saved for me, and for the church
A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
Your hand, sir, and good-by; no lights, no lights!

The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
Don't fear me! There's the gray beginning. Zooks!
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