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The Speaker in and Analyses of Robert Browning's Dramatic
Monologues *My Last Duchess*, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Porphyria's Lover*, *The
Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, *A Toccata of
Galuppi's* and *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*

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1. Introduction

This dissertation will be organised in a metaphorical funnel form by which I mean that I will start working from a general perspective to a more specific angle of incidence. It will start by giving a theoretical introduction to the concept of the dramatic monologue. Since it is almost impossible to find one comprehensive definition, some possible definitions will be rendered and will be drawn upon throughout the dissertation. It will become clear that the distinction between the speaker and the poet, established in the dramatic monologue, is an important feature of this genre. Therefore, this and the techniques to realize this will be further examined throughout the text. To apply this on Browning's poetry, six of his dramatic monologues¹ will be looked at in detail and analysed almost line per line in terms of content, imagery and the distinction between speaker and Browning himself. These analyses are important to build up towards my conclusion and to make sure that I find myself on a par with my reader. By means of conclusion, the way in which Browning creates this distance between the speaker and himself as a poet in each of the analysed poems will be rendered.

¹ *My Last Duchess, Fra Lippo Lippi, Porphyria's Lover, The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church, A Toccata of Galuppi's*, and *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*.

2. Dramatic Monologue

To give a proper and uniform definition of the concept of the dramatic monologue is very difficult, if not impossible. Glennis Byron (2003) quotes Herbert Tucker in her *Dramatic Monologue*² when she argues that the genre of the dramatic monologue is one of those 'whose practical usefulness does not seem to have been impaired by the failure of literary historians and taxonomists to achieve consensus in its definition (Tucker 1984; 121-2)' (2). Another problem lies in the fact that:

Generic grouping is a matter of historical process, not of fixed categories, and any system of classification serves the particular purposes of a group of critics or readers. The traditional canon of dramatic monologues was formed in retrospect by twentieth-century critics, based upon a selective group of texts, and colluded in the establishment of Browning and Tennyson as the canonical Victorian poets (28).

Nevertheless, according to this quote, Robert Browning's dramatic monologues may be regarded as prototypical. Alan Sinfield (1977) takes up this idea in his *Dramatic Monologue*³ in which he points out the broader definition of a dramatic monologue when he defines it as 'a poem in the first person spoken by, or almost entirely by, someone who is indicated not to be the poet' (8). Sinfield (1977) narrows this definition down based on two of Browning's poems: *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *My Last Duchess*. He argues that:

A definition of dramatic monologue constructed from these two poems, then, should include a first-person speaker who is not the poet and whose character is unwittingly revealed, an auditor whose influence is felt in the poem, a specific time and place, colloquial language, some sympathetic involvement with the speaker, and an ironic discrepancy between the speaker's view of himself and a larger judgment which the poet implies and the reader must develop' (7).

² Byron, G. *Dramatic Monologue*. London: Routledge, 2003.

³ Sinfield, Alan. *Dramatic monologue*. London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977.

Byron (2003) also links the dramatic monologues with history when she argues that '[t]he dramatic monologue is exploited not simply to animate the past but also to interrogate history and the historical subject, to demonstrate that any attempt to reconstruct history will always be partial and interested' (5). Because of the fact that Robert Browning often chose a historical subject, this theory can easily be applied to his dramatic monologues. This becomes clear when Byron (2003) argues in her work that:

Browning's mimetic particularity, his prosodic and colloquial language and his concern to construct a particular sense of time and place are all part of his wider interest in the specifics of the historical moment. [...] And it is Browning who is the poet most closely identified with the project of bringing the past to life, of interrogating both history and the historical subject (85).

To give an example, in *My Last Duchess* (1842), Browning described how the Duke of Ferrara is touring a council through his house. When they arrive at a certain painting, the Duke starts describing it and it turns out to be a portrait representing his last Duchess, Lucrezia, a daughter of the Cosimo I de' Medici, who died in suspicious circumstances. Browning placed words in the mouth of this historical character, i.e. the Duke of Ferrara and through the poem suggested that the Duke himself had Lucrezia killed. This means that Browning, by writing *My Last Duchess*, created his own history. Nevertheless, the poet never claimed that his monologue is historically correct. To align this with the quote of Byron one could say that Browning interrogated history and showed his readers that it will always be partial and interested. He questioned history by suggesting that the Duke had his own wife killed, although this has never been fully proven. And he showed that history is partial because of this same suggestion. The mere possibility that the Duke had his wife killed was enough for Browning to write this semi-historical poem.

The beginning of a dramatic monologue also forms an important feature. Robert Browning often started off his monologues in *medias res*⁴. This is supported by Glennis Byron (2003) who points out that:

⁴ According to the *Oxford Dictionary*, in *medias res* can be defined as 'into the middle of things; without preamble'.

The very fact that the dramatic monologue is by nature a temporal fragment, focusing upon a particular occasion, emphasises that what we observe is only part of a larger process; something has gone before and something will follow. Frequently, this point is emphasised by the openings and endings of monologues, which either directly or indirectly indicate events already in progress (25-26).

To provide some examples, it is useful to point at *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *My Last Duchess*. The former starts off in the middle of conversation and therefore the in medias res beginning is not as clear-cut as in the latter.⁵ In *My Last Duchess*, Browning started off in the middle of the tour the Duke is giving to the council. When they arrive at a certain work of art, they stop and the Duke speaks out the first line of the poem: 'That's my last Duchess painted on the wall' (line 1)⁶. In other words, the guided tour has been going on for several time before this first line of the poem is uttered.

Alan Sinfield (1977) contributes to the list of features of the dramatic monologue when he states in his work, *Dramatic monologue*, that 'the poet does not take a direct role and that the revelation of character is to some extent unwitting. We understand more about the speaker than he intends to reveal to his auditor and than the poet actually states' (4). This is made clear by the comparison between *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *My Last Duchess* where Fra Lippo Lippi comes across to the reader as a friendly and nice monk whereas the Duke in *My Last Duchess* appears to be arrogant and aggressive. Nevertheless, none of these characteristics are stated explicitly, the reader becomes aware of them by reading the poem. This is what Thomas Blackburn (1967) describes in his *Robert Browning, A Study of His Poetry*⁷, even though he only is talking with regards to the Duke in *My Last Duchess*. He argues that '[t]he Duke of this poem does not come alive by direct description. [...] The essence of the Duke's personality is in the texture of the language' (173-174). With regards to other characters in the poems, he points out that they 'grow out of the developing moods not so much by description – the protagonist is too close to them for that – as

⁵ This will become clear in the analysis of *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

⁶ Browning, Robert. *My Last Duchess and Other Poems*. Courier Dover Publications, 1993.

⁷ Blackburn, Thomas. "Robert Browning: A Study of his Poetry." London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967.

incantation' (174). According to him, Browning's monologues are of higher quality according as he puts something of himself in them:

In few of the monologues is there this closeness between Browning and his protagonist. But if the monologue is successful then one may assume that a marriage has occurred, that the poet has infused some element of himself into his creation, whether it is a bishop or a painter, an irascible monk or a Renaissance nobleman. The monologues fail when no particular conflict or problem of the essential Browning is involved and he writes merely from a sense of duty and his intelligence (173).

Another important feature of the dramatic monologue is the fact that the poet dramatises a historical character. Barbara Melchiori (1968) states in her *Browning's Poetry of Reticence*⁸ that 'the historical framework round the characters he [Browning] builds up was undoubtedly of immense artistic value. Besides lending verisimilitude to his characters and to their actions, it gave his poems structure and form' (2). Thomas Blackburn (1967) also points out this tendency of Browning to speak through a persona in his *Robert Browning, A Study of His Poetry*. He argues that '[i]t is true that unlike Yeats he [Browning] rarely writes a poem which is a direct expression of his own passionate feeling unalloyed with speculation' (165). This is the main characteristic of the genre, but it also brings about the need for a distinction between the poet and the protagonist of the poem.

⁸ Melchiori, Barbara. *Brownings Poetry of Reticence*. Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968.

3. The Distinction Between the Speaker and the Poet

In the dramatic monologue, it is important to make the distinction between the speaker and the writer of the poem. Browning tends to make this distinction very clear. Barbara Melchiori (1968) writes on the subject that:

Some of the tension which lends strength to his [Browning's] work arises from the conflict between his wish to guard jealously his own thoughts and feelings, and the pressing necessity he was under to reveal them. His first step towards a solution of this problem was to write very little indeed in his own person, the wide variety of characters he employed serving, he trusted, to screen their author (1).

The distance between the poet and the persona seems rather obvious but the fact that a dramatic monologue is normally written in the first person sometimes tends to blur this distinction. This is pointed out in Sinfield's (1977) *Dramatic Monologue* where he states that '[d]ramatic monologue feigns because it pretends to be something other than what it is: an invented speaker masquerades in the first person which customarily signifies the poet's voice' (25). Additionally, Byron (2003) also points out that '[t]here are signals that the speaker is not the poet, pushing towards fiction; the use of the first-person mode, however, pushes towards the lyric 'I' and suggests a real-life existence for that speaker' (14). Elaborating this, she clearly argues in her work that:

[T]here are, to varying degrees, always signals that we should not conflate poet with speaker. In some poems, these signals are unmistakable. The distinct world of the speaker may be established through a wide variety of means, some, although not all, of which may be immediately indicated in the title; these include distancing the speaker temporally and culturally [...], appropriating a known historical, literary or mythical figure [...], and the provision of a language recognisably specific to a speaker, as in Robert Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi' (1885)' (13).

Robert Browning used all three of these techniques to signal the distance between the speaker and himself. Although this will become clear through the analyses of the poems and in the conclusion attached to these, some examples will be provided here: in the earlier mentioned *My Last Duchess* (1842), Robert Browning created a temporal boundary between him and the Duke of Ferrara, who lived in the 16th century.⁹ In this poem, the cultural boundary is also present because the daily world of Browning contrasts with that of a Duke. In *Fra Lippo Lippi* (1855), Browning dramatised a 15th century painter and therefore, the cultural boundary was not that big considering the fact that both Browning and Fra Lippo Lippi were artists but this is compensated by the language recognisably specific of the painter (cfr. quote by Byron). Nevertheless, there are also poems dealing with unhistorical and a-temporal characters, e.g. *Porphyria's Lover*. Nevertheless, the mere fact that Browning changed the original title (*Porphyria*) in the present one, points out that Browning deliberately chose to let the speaker and the title of the poem coincide because he did not want to be identified with the speaker of the poem¹⁰. The same goes for *Fra Lippo Lippi*. Titling his poems this way might be a means of Browning to distance himself from the utterances and the ideologies of his poetic characters.

In other words, Browning drew upon a lot of different means to establish this distinction between himself as a poet and the persona he created in his monologues. The analyses of the poems will clarify a lot of these techniques that will be focussed on by means of conclusion.

⁹ Browning himself was born on 7 May 1812 and died in 1889.

¹⁰ This will be further examined in the analysis of *Porphyria's Lover*.

4. Analyses of Six of Browning's Dramatic Monologues

It is useful and even necessary to analyse these poems individually to get a better idea of what Browning was trying to get across and how he presented his persona in these dramatic monologues. Therefore, the following analyses will provide a deeper look into the content of the monologues which is essential to fully grasp Browning's intentions. The poems will be analysed almost line per line with an eye to the content and imagery.

4.1. My Last Duchess¹¹

In this poem, originally published in 1842 in *Dramatic Lyrics*,¹² the character created by Browning never identifies himself in the poem. However, research has shown that it probably concerns the fifth Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso II and, in that case, his last Duchess is Lucrezia de Medici. Alfonso II married her but as we can deduce from the poem, the wealthy dowry was the only incentive in the marriage. That he thought of her as a shallow, near-sighted girl is clearly expressed in the poem: 'Too soon made glad, Too easily impressed' (lines 22 and 23). It even suggests that he killed her when she started to annoy him too much: 'I gave commands; Then all smiles stopped together' (lines 45 and 46). Given the historical fact that Lucrezia died three years after she married him, Browning is not guessing without any justness.¹³ Nevertheless, he never reveals the truth.

¹¹ Cfr. Appendix A

¹² The name of this bundle brings about a genre polemic. In her *Dramatic Monologue*, Glennis Byron argues that 'Ralph Radar makes a similar point when he distinguishes dramatic monologues, such as 'My Last Duchess', from dramatic lyrics, such as Keat's 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1820), by suggesting that, in the former,

the reader must imagine the speaker as an outward presence, as we in our bodies register others in their bodies, from the outside in, whereas in the dramatic lyric we are imaginatively conflated with the speaker, understanding him from the inside out, seeing with his eyes and speaking with his voice as if on our own behalf.

(Radar 1984: 104)

¹³ Ian Lancashire claims that '[t]hree days after the wedding, Alfonso left her -- for two years. She died barely 17 years old, and people talked, and four years later in Innsbruck, Alfonso began negotiating for a new wife with a servant of the then count of Tyrol, one Nikolaus Mardruz.'

The monologue taking place is one of Alfonso II addressing an envoy from the Duke of Tirol, whose niece he wanted to marry. This historical context provides an extra argument to define this poem as a dramatic monologue. In her *Dramatic Monologue*, Glennis Byron (2003) points out that Browning establishes in *My Last Duchess* 'a world that is clearly not the poet's' (14). And this is one of the earlier mentioned strategies to maintain the distance between the speaker and the poet.

What is most striking about this poem, besides its content, is its form because Browning chose a very strict rhyme scheme. Nevertheless, this rhyme scheme does not occur as an obstacle, it is even hardly noticed by the reader. Barbara Melchiori (1968) points at this poem in her *Browning's Poetry of Reticence* when she states that "'My Last Duchess", where the rhymes are present but scarcely heard, absorbed in the tone of the spoken word as in more modern poetry' (8). The poem consists of 28 'heroic couplets', this means it is constructed from a sequence of rhyming pairs of iambic pentameter lines.¹⁴ This duality between content and form shows that Browning was a great poet because he was able to get his message across even though he is restricted in the way of form. Nevertheless, this restricted form might be an attribution to the content. My opinion is that Browning wanted to reflect the personality of the speaker through the use of a restricted form since this speaker appears to be a greedy, jealous and cold person. However, Browning did not describe this in a direct way. As I already touched upon, Thomas Blackburn points out that '[t]he Duke of this poem does not come alive by direct description. [...] The essence of the Duke's personality is in the texture of the language' (173-174). Browning alluded to these personality characteristics by using a less frivolous form. On the other hand, the form may also be an extension of the insult towards the Duchess. The Duke thinks of her as artificial and when you look at it from this angle, this poem is a nice example of how form can contribute to meaning. Additionally, there is something ironic about the use of heroic couplets. The lines are divided two by two, so they form some sort of couple. The Duke and his Duchess also formed a couple, but in contrast with the lines of the poem, they were not able to make their lives rhyme. Going further into the formal aspect of the poem, Glennis Byron (2003) argues in her *Dramatic monologue* that:

¹⁴ http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Last_Duchess

[T]he poem's form, which repeatedly draws attention to its condition as text. The speech of Browning's duke, with its hesitations, interjections, questions and disclaimers, may show various signs of oral discourse; [...] Nevertheless, with [...] the duke [...], we remain aware [that he is] speaking in rhyming couplets, a clear signal of the artificiality of the speech act (14).

Thomas Blackburn (1967) does not fully agree with Byron in his *Robert Browning, A Study of His Poetry* when he argues that:

A quality of Browning's poetry and one which has had a profound if unacknowledged influence on the work of his decade is its conversational intimacy. Whether he is talking directly as himself or, as in *My Last Duchess* and *Andrea del Sarto*, through some persona he makes us feel that in a finite moment of infinite significance, we are listening to a living person and catching – such is his technical skill – not only a tone of voice but the changing movement of hand and face and some indefinable human essence which can never be heard nor seen (166).

Even though enjambment normally does not occur within heroic couplets, this poem clearly chose to have a narrow escape. This might have something to do with the fact that it is a dramatic monologue. So, by splitting up his lines, it becomes less fluent and the poet gives the reader the illusion of spoken discourse. Another advantage of the enjambment is that it provides the poet with more freedom in his choice for rhyming words.

Browning chose to draw his reader immediately in the story. This figure of speech is called *in medias res* (in the middle of things)¹⁵. Alfonso II is guiding his guest through his collection of art works. Suddenly, they come across the painting of Lucrezia. The moment when Alfonso II starts describing what his guest is about to behold, is when the poem starts: 'That's my last Duchess painted on the wall' (line 1). The consequence of this *in medias res* is that it takes us, readers, some time to catch up with the events. On the other hand, a start in the middle of things immediately captures our attention and makes us curious as to what is going on.

¹⁵ According to the Oxford Dictionary, *in medias res* can be defined as 'into the middle of things; without preamble'.

According to me, a pleonasm¹⁶ occurs in this poem in line 14: 'Her husband's presence only'. Even though it is a far from typical one, the presence of the word 'presence' appears to be superfluous. Browning might have used it because of metrical reasons. Nevertheless, I think he wanted to point out something with this pleonasm, namely the fact that the Duke openly chooses to be with his Duchess. His presence should be a reward for her, she should be grateful for the gift of his presence and his name. By using the word 'presence', the Duke wants to contrast his good will and loyalty with her flirty attitude.

Alan Sinfield (1977) elaborates the idea that the speaker reveals more than he wishes to throughout the poem in his *Dramatic monologue*. He provides his readers with an example and draws upon lines 25 until 31 of *My Last Duchess*¹⁷. Sinfield argues that 'the evocative natural imagery allows the reader to infer the pleasant nature of the Duchess. It is communicated through the Duke's words, but he is quite unable to appreciate it' (5). The Duke is unaware of the fact that he, through this description of the Duchess, actually makes her look great. He provides the reader with information he does not want to give by glorifying her in this unintended way.

The poem also contains some comparisons introduced by 'as if'. ('As if she were alive.' (line 2); 'as if alive' (line 47); 'as if she ranked My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name With anybody's gift.' (lines 32, 33 and 34)) The first two are used to describe the painting on the wall and both say that even though it is a painting, it seems as if the Duchess is alive. This is very important, especially to the Duke since he wants to control her even though she is dead. He depreciated her attitude when she was alive but there was nothing he could do about it, now, by looking at the painting and imagining her as if she were alive, he gives himself the illusion of being able to control her life/death. At this point, it is him, and only him, who decides whom she blushes for. He expresses this clearly in the poem: 'Since none puts by The curtain I have drawn for you, but I' (lines 9 and 10). As for the third comparison, this

¹⁶ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'the use of more words than are necessary to convey meaning (e.g. *see with one's eyes*)'.

(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/pleonasm?view=uk)

¹⁷ 25 Sir, 't was all one! My favour at her breast,
26 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
27 The bough of cherries some officious fool
28 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
29 She rode with round the terrace--all and each
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
31 Or blush, at least.

is merely an expression of his disappointment because of her indifference towards the fact that she is offered his prestigious name.

Next to the comparisons, some rhetoric questions are inserted in the poem. But because probably every question is rhetoric in a monologue, I will make a distinction between prototypical and less obvious rhetoric questions. Focussing on the first, I will start by giving an example of the latter category: 'Will't please you to sit and look at her?' (line 5). When he asks this question, he actually might expect an answer. However, since it is a monologue, his 'interlocutor' will not make it a dialogue by intervening. This is why I categorized this as a less obvious rhetoric question, all questions in a monologue being rhetoric. Additionally, the poem contains some prototypical rhetoric questions: 'Who'd stoop to blame this sort of trifling?' (lines 34 and 35) and 'but who passed without Much the same smile?' (lines 44 and 45). These questions both don't expect an answer, they both presume that the speaker knows that the answer is 'nobody'. By asking this rhetoric questions, the Duke is indirectly placing words in the envoy's mouth. He wants the envoy to unconsciously think with him and this way convince him of his appropriate character. This intention is important since the Duke wants to convince the council to choose for him and at the same time he wants to show that nobody messes with him. This can be aligned with what Cornelia Pearsall (2008) means in her *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue*¹⁸ when she states that '[s]peakers are highly intentional: they desire to achieve some purpose, looking toward goals that they not only describe in the course of their monologues, but also labor steadily to achieve through the medium of their monologues' (23).

The painter who painted the portrait of his last Duchess for the Duke praises her beauty. He does this by means of a double pathetic fallacy¹⁹ combined with a hyperbole²⁰: 'Paint must never hope to reproduce the faint Half-flush that dies along her throat' (lines 17, 18 and 19). Paint is not an entity with the ability to hope. And a

¹⁸ Pearsall, Cornelia D.J. *Tennyson's Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue*. Oxford University Press US, 2008.

¹⁹ Definition according to the Free Dictionary: The attribution of human emotions or characteristics to inanimate objects or to nature; for example, *angry clouds; a cruel wind*. (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pathetic+fallacy>)

²⁰ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'deliberate exaggeration, not meant to be taken literally'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/hyperbole?view=uk)

half-flush is not assumed to be able to die. By using this double pathetic fallacy, the painter speaking expresses the impossibility of his own art to capture reality on a canvas. And at the same time he is praising the beauty of the Duchess. This is why I call this a hyperbole, it seems to me that he is exaggerating.

To refer to this painter, the Duke is again displaying his arrogance through his own words. This occurs through a metonymy²¹ in lines 3 and 4: 'Frà Pandolf's hands Worked busily a day'. Browning used a part (Frà Pandolf's hands) to express the whole (Frà Pandolf). Frà Pandolf painted this portrait in a day. By focussing on his hands, the Duke is actually downgrading the talent of the painter. This is why this is in my opinion also some kind of meiosis.²²

Later on in the poem, the Duke intimates that he had Lucrezia killed. Instead of merely stating that she is dead, he uses a euphemism²³: 'Then all smiles stopped' (line 46). This alludes to his aversion from her smiling at everyone. Now she will never smile at anyone again.

The Duke goes on to downgrade his former Duchess and draws upon a metaphor²⁴: 'Or there exceed the mark' (line 39) He uses some terms of archery. Literally, this means that the shooter missed the target. When used as a metaphor in this context, I think that it can be interpreted in terms of a soldier who is not serving his leader as it should. In that case, the Duchess is the Duke's soldier. She lacks loyalty and is not prepared to fight for him. Just as a shooter missing the target, Lucrezia is not serving Alfonso II properly.

Through this poem, Browning showed us the disapproval and hate of Alfonso II towards his last Duchess. In an indirect way, he rewrote history. Jean-Charles Perquin argues in his *The maze and pilgrimage of poetic creation in Browning's*

²¹ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'a word or expression used as a substitute for something with which it is closely associated, e.g. *Washington* for the US government'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/metonym?view=uk)

²² <http://www.poetry-online.org/poetry-terms.htm>

²³ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'a mild or less direct word substituted for one that is harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/euphemism?view=uk)

²⁴ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: '1 a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable (e.g. *food for thought*). 2 a thing symbolic of something else.' (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/metaphor?view=uk)

"*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came*"²⁵ that "[a]s a poet, Browning simply answered that all he wrote and meant was inside the poem and nowhere else, a clear, if not terribly frustrating, answer, which limited the text to itself". Therefore, the question whether he actually killed her or not remains unanswered.

4.2. Fra Lippo Lippi²⁶

Browning's poem *Fra Lippo Lippi* was published in 1855 in his collection *Men and Women*. The poem is written in the first person and is again a classical example of a dramatic monologue. To grasp Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi* completely it is useful to have a look at the historical background of the poem. Browning dramatised an existing historical character: Fra Filippo di Tommaso Lippi (1412-1469), who was born in Florence and died in Spoleto. At the age of two, di Tommaso Lippi became an orphan and he was raised by his aunt. When he reached the age of eight, his aunt placed him in the convent of the Carmine. Filippo was obsessed with the art of drawing and painting. He was extremely inspired by Masaccio²⁷, who painted the chapel of the Carmine. Because of his extraordinary talent, Cosimo de' Medici wanted him to paint his palace but Fra Filippo's reputation of 'pleasure-hunter' convinced Cosimo de' Medici to have him shut up during the time of this task. Nevertheless, making a rope with sheets of his bed, Fra Filippo was able to escape and wandered through the city.²⁸ It is during this excursion that Browning's monologue takes place.

²⁵ Perquin, Jean-Charles. "The maze and pilgrimage of poetic creation in Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came"." Available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/roland/perquin.html>. Last updated 10 September 2004.

²⁶ Cfr. Appendix B

²⁷ Masaccio occurs in the poem. In line 276, Browning refers to 'Guidi'. Hiram Corson elucidates this character in his *An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry* (2007). He is talking about 'Tomasso Guidi (1401-1428), better known as Masaccio, i.e., Tommasaccio, Slovenly or Hulking Tom. "From his time, and forward," says Mr. Ernest Radford (B.S. Illustrations), "religious painting in the old sense was at an end. Painters no longer attempted to transcend nature, but to copy her, and to copy her in her loveliest aspects. The breach between the old order and the new was complete." The poet [Browning] makes him [Masaccio] of Lippi, not, as Vasari states, Lippi of him [Masaccio]" (278). The opposition between this new order and the old order is an important theme in *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

²⁸ http://www.artist-biography.info/artist/fra_filippo_lippi/

The distance between speaker and listener that is quintessential to speak of a dramatic monologue is created by this use of a historical figure. Browning's reader would never mix up the poet and the speaker of this poem because of the fact that the poet created a historical figure with its own identity that clearly differs from Robert Browning as an individual. In *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the distinction between the speaker and the poet especially lies in the fact that Fra Lippo Lippi did really exist as a 14th century individual. This makes it impossible for the reader to misunderstand the distance between Browning and the speaker.

As in most of his dramatic monologues, Browning starts off in medias res in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. As has been described earlier, this also is a prototypical feature of the dramatic monologue. However, in this poem it might be considered ambiguous to talk about an in medias res. The first five words of the poem give the reader a false impression of some sort of autobiographical letter ('I am poor brother Lippo'). However, what follows is a request for permission ('by your leave') and may be considered to be an expression used in spoken interaction. This immediately shows the reader that the poem pretends to be the transcription of a spoken conversation.²⁹ Though, as mentioned earlier, this in medias res is ambiguous in a way. I would like to make the distinction between starting in the middle of things and starting in the middle of conversation since this distinction is not at all clear-cut in this poem. There has been something going on before the first line of the poem, to the extent that this may even be considered to be an ellipsis. Through the first lines, the reader can get an idea of the setting and scene. Brother Lippi is wandering through the streets at night and suddenly the light of some torches illuminates his face. Now two possible situations come up and both of these have to do with the ambiguous character of the in medias res device as used in this poem. It could be that the first line of the poem is actually the second turn in the conversation between the monk and his interlocutor(s)³⁰. This interlocutor might first have asked Fra Lippo Lippi to identify himself and thus, the first line of the poem, in which the monk answers this request, would then be the second turn in the conversation. This is what I previously termed the starting in the middle of conversation. The second possibility is that Fra Lippo Lippi spontaneously identifies himself when these torches shine upon his face. This can be considered as starting in the middle of things and in this respect, the monk's

²⁹ However, during the poem this conversation will take the form of a monologue.

³⁰ At this point nothing is clear about this second person.

wandering through town is then the story in the middle of which this monologue takes place and his previous acts during this wandering are likely to be considered elliptic.

Another interesting element of the poem is the presence of the interlocutor of Fra Lippo Lippi. In fact, it may be confusing to talk about an 'interlocutor' since it is a monologue. Therefore, it would be more appropriate if we think of those present as listeners. The reader only gets to form an image of the other people present through the words of the monk. Alan Sinfield (1977) points out in his *Dramatic monologue* that '[h]e [Fra Lippo Lippi] is set in a specific situation on a particular occasion; he alone speaks, but partly in response to a silent auditor' (1). This silent auditor turns out to be a group of city guards. This becomes clear through the use of the words 'rounds' (line 4) and 'catch' (line 5). The guards are surveying the city and catch Fra Lippo Lippi in an alley. This alley may be considered obscure in a figurative way because of what the monk expresses by using a double euphemism³¹: 'Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar' (line 6). Fra Lippo Lippi is wandering through questionable streets where prostitutes receive their clients and being a monk, he feels caught and wants to minimize his presence. Whereas Don Quijote, in his mind, turned prostitutes into princesses, Fra Lippo Lippi turns them into sportive ladies. This way he does not denominate them in a negative tone. However, he only does this to make himself look better. By defining those prostitutes in a dignified way, he tries to make the fact that he visits them less scandalous. The second euphemism can be found in the activity of the prostitutes. Browning calls it 'leaving your door ajar'. Since it is generally known how a prostitute makes money, this may be considered a euphemism. This whole interpretation should be questioned in a way because assuming that the monk feels caught and wants to justify his presence in that particular alley may be an anachronism. Looking at the situation from a 20th century point of view might be wrong and this should be taken into account throughout the reading of this analyses of the poem. In *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the reader must be aware of the fact that he/she is dealing with three different time elements. The poem is situated in the 15th century, Browning wrote his poem in the 18th century and I am a contemporary 21st century reader. Therefore, the reader should be aware of time-traps. In the article *Numerous attempts to eradicate prostitution ended invariably in*

³¹ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'a mild or less direct word substituted for one that is harsh or blunt when referring to something unpleasant or embarrassing'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/euphemism?view=uk)

*failure*³², prostitution in the 15th century is described and it is stated that '[m]arried men along with monks and Jews were banned from visiting brothels'. Nevertheless, this says nothing about the social view towards monks who did actually visit brothels.

Possibly because of this feeling of being caught, the monk acts very humbly in the beginning of the encounter with the city guards. This becomes clear in the very first line: Fra Lippo Lippi minimizes himself by presenting himself as 'poor brother Lippo'. Immediately following this he uses the earlier mentioned request for permission ('by your leave!'). This clearly shows his awareness of the fact that he occupies a lower social position. However, the fact that Browning placed an exclamation mark after this request might be an anticipation of the fact that the monk's social position will change throughout the poem. Fra Lippo Lippi uses the fact that he works for Cosimo of the Medici, the real ruler of Florence, to attribute a larger social power to himself in an ironic and arrogant way³³. When his interlocutors ask for his identity again he starts describing himself in a very indirect way. He wants to identify himself by means of the friend he is staying with. At first this confuses the reader and probably the monk's interlocutor as well. But his identification reaches a climax in line 17: 'Master—a...Cosimo of the Medici'. It is possible to talk about a climax because of the fact that Cosimo of the Medici comes with a great social prestige. Fra Lippo Lippi gets the upper hand in the conversation through his acquaintance and the social power attributed to this.

In his attempt to justify his behaviour, Fra Lippo Lippi uses a beautiful expanded metaphor³⁴: 'Do,--harry out, if you must show your zeal, Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole' (lines 8 and 9). Fra Lippo Lippi refers to the conduct of his superiors in the cloister to compare their behaviour with his own. His superior is the metaphorical 'rat', whereas he compares himself to a 'wee white mouse'. He is trying to get across that his superiors behave in a worse way and that it is disgraceful of the guards to want to take away each small pleasure of the social inferiors. To

³² Unknown. "Numerous attempts to eradicate prostitution ended invariably in failure." Available at <http://www.inteldaily.com/?c=136&a=2354>. Last updated June 13th, 2007.

³³ 15 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend

16 Three streets off—he's a certain... How d'ye call?

17 Master—a... Cosimo of the Medici,

³⁴ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: '1 a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable (e.g. *food for thought*). 2 a thing symbolic of something else.' (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/metaphor?view=uk)

emphasize the unacceptable behaviour of his superiors, the monk uses an onomatopoeia³⁵ at the beginning of line 11 ('*Weke, weke*'). This resembles the sound of two persons making love in a squeaking bed. Fra Lippo Lippi is taking on the role of the victim here and emphasizes this through referring to himself with the adjective 'wee'. Through this argument he is able to get some sort of compassion from the guards.

Alan Sinfield (1977) points out in his *Dramatic monologue* that Fra Lippo Lippi speaks 'partly in response to a silent auditor' (1). This becomes clear in line 12 where the monk is replying to an omitted turn of a city guard: 'Aha, you know your betters!'. The reader may assume that the city guards agreed with Fra Lippo Lippi with regards to his superiors because they also feel unjustly treated by theirs. Subsequently, the monk asks the policeman to take his hands off his throat. However, the fact that he does not formulate this request in the form of a question but as a command already anticipates the shift in the social positioning between the interlocutors.

As stated earlier, the mentioning of Cosimo of the Medici provides Fra Lippo Lippi with the upper hand in the conversation. Because he is fully aware of the fact that this will give him a greater social prestige, he builds up towards the already mentioned climax. The monk uses another trope which shows his awareness of the shift in social position between the interlocutors that is about to take place: 'Three streets off—he's a certain...how d'ye call?' (line 16) Since he is talking about this important man in terms of 'a certain', this clearly is an understatement³⁶. The monk is enjoying the fact that he knows that by merely mentioning his host, the situation will reach a turning point and therefore puts it off as long as possible. Another factor that clarifies this is the fact that brother Lippo Lippi wants to avoid the question starting off his answer with 'why' when the city guards ask for his identity: 'Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend' (line 15).

³⁵ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: '1 the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g. *cuckoo*, *sizzle*). 2 the use of such words for rhetorical effect'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/onomatopoeia?view=uk)

³⁶ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'describe or represent (something) as being smaller or less significant than it really is'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/understate?view=uk)

The monk is threatening the guards with the fact that they will be punished for grabbing his throat. Browning stressed this threat by using a hyperbaton³⁷ and thus changing the word order. 'How such a gullet's-gripe affected you' is turned into 'How you affected such a gullet's gripe!' (line 20). Through this hyperbaton, Browning was able to mention the punished ones before the reason of the punishment in the sentence and this strengthens the monk's threat.

A rhetorical question in a monologue is always something ambiguous. Since it is a monologue, the speaker does not really expect an answer. Therefore, every question in a monologue is rhetorical. Fra Lippo Lippi asks a rhetorical question containing a metaphor: 'Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets And count fair price what comes into their net?' (lines 23 and 24). In this case, we can categorise it as a prototypical rhetorical question. The assumed answer here being 'no, we are no pilchards'. In these same lines, the monk compares the group with pilchards which can obviously be seen as an insult. Nevertheless, he makes it less direct by using the first person plural and thus counting himself in.

Fra Lippo Lippi wants to give the guards some money to have a drink: 'Drink out this quarter-florin to the health Of the munificent House that harbours me' (lines 28 and 29). In these lines, a metonymy³⁸ occurs combined with a personification³⁹. The personification is double. Browning turned the house into a vivid creature and provided this lifeless entity with a human characteristic: health. On top of that, the monk claims that the house 'harbours' him. This is where the personification is mixed with the metonymy. By 'House', Fra Lippo Lippi actually wants to point at the residents of the house, Cosimo de' Medici in particular. This kind of metonymy is called *abstractum pro concreto*.

From line 31 onwards it becomes obvious that Fra Lippo Lippi is a passionate painter. This clarifies his utterance in line 3: 'you think you see a monk!'. He does not

³⁷ Definition according to Dictionary.com: 'the use, esp. for emphasis, of a word order other than the expected or usual one, as in "Bird thou never wert."'

(<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/hyperbaton>)

³⁸ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'a word or expression used as a substitute for something with which it is closely associated, e.g. *Washington* for the US government'.

(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/metonym?view=uk)

³⁹ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: '**1** represent (a quality or concept) by a figure in human form. **2** attribute a personal nature or human characteristics to (something non-human). **3** represent or embody (a quality or concept) in a physical form'.

(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/personify?view=uk)

think of himself as a monk, but sees himself as a painter. This identification as a painter brings about a trace of arrogance. Namely, his referring to himself in the third person: 'What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down' (line 40). Nevertheless, this could also be seen as a form of modesty. This paradox may be linked to the contradiction in lines 43 and 44. Here again, both attitudes towards the guards occur. Fra Lippo Lippi is flattering his interlocutor first: "Tell you, I liked your looks at very first' (line 43). In the next line, though, he indirectly calls his interactant an animal: 'Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch' (line 44). When the monk is talking about 'hip to haunch', this may at first be seen as a pleonasm⁴⁰. However, haunch is associated with animals. Therefore, this is an indirect insult from the part of Fra Lippo Lippi addressed to the city guards. The implicit meaning being that he is the only dignified participant in this conversation.

In what follows, the monk is describing how he was locked up and how the street tempted him but he had to stay inside and finish a painting. Later in the poem, it will become clear that his paintings are controversial. This controversy has to do with the representation of saints. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Browning repeated the word 'saints' three times in lines 48 and 49. Fra Lippo Lippi explains how the streets tempted him. He describes to his listeners and the reader what he is seeing while he is leaning out of his window through another metonymy: 'There came a hurry of feet and little feet' (line 51). When Fra Lippo Lippi is talking about 'feet', he actually means 'persons'. This is a so-called *pars pro toto*. Browning reduced individuals to feet because of the visual effect. He really described to the reader what the monk is seeing. He is hanging out of his window and is looking down at the people who pass underneath the window. All he sees are feet going back and forth.

An interesting and original feature of this monologue lies in the use of stornelli. Stornelli are species of Italian folk-songs⁴¹ and Browning used them here as a kind of intertext. The first one occurs on line 53⁴². Prototypically, the first line contains the

⁴⁰ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'the use of more words than are necessary to convey meaning (e.g. *see with one's eyes*)'.

(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/pleonasm?view=uk)

⁴¹ Keller, Marcello Sorce. "Reflections of Continental and Mediterranean tradition in Italian Folk Music." Available at <http://www.rodioni.ch/marcellosorcekeller/musiccultures.html>.

⁴² 53 *Flower o' the broom,*

54 *Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!*

55 *Flower o' the quince,*

name of a flower. These stornelli do have a fixed rhyme scheme, in contrast with the poem. The content, love for a woman, can be seen as contradictory with the celibate life a monk is supposed to lead. This earthly thought is metaphorically described in the use of the rabbits: 'Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight' (line 59). Rabbits are associated with uncontrolled propagation. Nevertheless, he formulates it in a euphemistic way by referring to their skipping activities. Through the use of the rabbits as a metaphor for his own human desires, he is able to make his inappropriate thoughts and temptations look less bad. He cannot resist the street and, therefore, he escapes through the window by tearing his sheets apart and tying them up. To describe all the material the monk used to make his improvised ladder, an alliteration⁴³ is used: 'Curtain and counterpane and coverlet' (line 62). Additionally, this can be seen as an onomatopoeia. The glottal sounds at the beginning of the words represent the tearing to pieces of the objects these words represent. The improvised ladder allows him to let himself down: 'Down I let myself' (line 64). This aligns Fra Lippo Lippo with Prometheus, who ignored the divine will of Zeus and brought the fire down to the Earth. The monk also ignored the will of his superior when he escaped.

It is no coincidence that Fra Lippo Lippi mentions the Christian father Saint Jerome: 'On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast' (line 73). It is striking that he leaves out the form of address 'Saint'. This creates the illusion of similarity between the monk and the saint and thus can be perfectly aligned with Fra Lippo Lippi's thoughts on the representation of saints as humans. Saint Jerome is known for his life of asceticism which clearly contrasts with the earthly life of the protagonist of the poem. The mentioning of a 'round stone' in line 74 is related to a passage in Saint Jerome's *The Scoble Master* (1906) in which he assures his readers that there 'is no such whetstone to sharpen a good wit and encourage a will to learning, as praise'⁴⁴. Because of this, Saint Jerome is often associated with a stone and, therefore, Fra Lippo Lippi paints him with a stone.

56 *I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?*

57 *Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.*

⁴³ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words'.

(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/alliteration?view=uk)

⁴⁴ <http://www.oldandsold.com/articles28/christian-education-8.shtml>

Toghether with justifying his actions again, Fra Lippo Lippi accuses the city guards of prejudices towards monks.⁴⁵ According to him, it is merely his being a monk that got him in this embarrassing situation. He questions whether the city guards would react as consequently as they do now if they encountered his master, Cosimo of the Medici, in the same situation. Fra Lippo Lippi is convinced of the fact that his master could get off much easier than he can. He wants to bond in one way or another with the guards and tries this by singling out one of them: 'Come, what am I a beast for? tell us now!' (line 80). When he invites one of them to answer his question, he adds 'tell us, now' to his request. This is a subtle way to single out one of his interlocutors and make it seem as if the others are on the monk's side and disagree with their colleague.

From then onwards, the monk starts justifying his actions drawing upon his irregular childhood: 'I was a baby when my mother died And father died and left me in the street' (lines 81 and 82). To describe this horrible situation, he uses a paradox: 'I starved there, God knows how, a year or two On fig-skins, melon parings, rinds and shucks' (lines 83 and 84). In line 83, Fra Lippo Lippi expresses his own vapidty as to how he survived those years and introduces the divine authority ('God knows how'). Nevertheless, in the next line he does explain how he survived. By introducing God he may add force to his monologue and make his previous social position look even worse while he is wallowing in the role of victim. Additionally, Fra Lippo Lippi provides the reader and the pretended interlocutors with two more images that are used to emerge compassion: 'Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day' (line 85). 'Refuse and rubbish' can be analysed as a pleonasm, pointing out one and the same thing. On top of that, it forms the first alliteration of two in this line, 'fine frosty' being the second. Both are used to express the feeling of the young monk on the street. It is cold and he is wandering through the streets. The repetition of both the r-sound as the f-sound expresses the human lips rattling because of the cold. To describe his nutritious situation, he uses a comparison that is in contrast with his intention to conciliate the city guards: 'My stomach being empty as your hat' (line 86). Saying that one's hat is empty, is the same as calling that person stupid.

⁴⁵ 77 Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting's in that!
78 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
79 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
80 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!

In what follows, Fra Lippo Lippi describes how he ended up living with the monks. His situation can be compared with that of child oblates in the Middle Ages. Mayke De Jong (1996) points out in her *In Samuel's image: child oblation in the early medieval West*⁴⁶ that 'the child was to be offered 'to God in the monastery', committed for life to the vows his parents made for him' (1). This all adds up to his justification of his presence in such a mendacious quarter. He is talking about how he had to renounce the world at eight years old. The implicit meaning contributes to his justification. Because he had to renounce the world at eight years old, he now turns to earthly pleasures. He is trying to put the situation into perspective. It seems as if he is playing his own advocate in a law case and his plead draws upon his hard and destructive youth.

The monk is referring to his current master in a negative way: 'Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici' (line 100). Obviously, considering the wealth of the Medici, 'poor' is to be understood metaphorically. Denominating his family with 'devils', the monk is quite harsh for his maecenas. Nevertheless, the choice of words is not necessarily arbitrary since Lorenzo de' Medici (1 January 1449 – 9 April 1492⁴⁷), Cosimo's grandson, was often associated with the devil. In *Discover the Devil in the detail*⁴⁸, Timothy Mowl (2006) refers to a painting of Lorenzo de' Medici by Michelangelo stating that 'it may look broodingly handsome, but Lorenzo represents, by subtle details, melancholy and parsimony; apparently he was contemplative and mean'. Browning may have based this reference to the devil on this evil reputation of Cosimo de' Medici's grandson which, without a doubt, was known in Browning's time.

Fra Lippo Lippi is talking about the advantages of the monastery and in doing so the monk uses a litotes or a double negation: "Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful' (line 103). He mentions the food, the clothing and the idleness. This is something that he was not used to and therefore appreciated even more. Hence, he describes it using a litotes to stress the positive sides by a double negation.

⁴⁶ De Jong, Mayke. *In Samuel's image: child oblation in the early medieval West*. Brill, 1996.

⁴⁷ He may be considered contemporary with Fra Lippo Lippi.

⁴⁸ Mowl, Timothy. "Discover the Devil in the Detail." Available at <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=200654§ioncode=20>. Last updated 6 January 2006.

During the description of his youth and how he ended up in the monastery, Fra Lippo Lippi does not use a lot of images. There may be a good reason to use this clean-cut language, namely that he wants his interlocutor to understand him completely. He is very carefully choosing his words to make sure that his interlocutor grasps every aspect of what he is saying. He wants to clarify his situation and thus excuse himself. He is talking about how the monks tried to teach him things in vain. Because of his cruel experiences in the streets, he learned to read people's faces and to distinguish helpful people from those who judged him because of his situation. From line 114 to 123, he brings this across through some vivid oppositions. This all fits into his description of the young Fra Lippo Lippi who, in stead of what the monks tried to teach him, wanted to draw and paint. This is presented in a very symbolical way: 'I drew men's faces on my copy-books, Scrawled them within the antiphonary's marge' (lines 129 and 130). The antiphonary is the so-called service book. Therefore, this opposes beautifully Fra Lippo Lippi's passion for painting with that of the monks for learning and books. He wants to draw, whereas the monks are preoccupied with their services and education. The library of the University of Ghent digitalized an antiphonary.⁴⁹ It was ordered in 1552 by Antonius Tsgrooten and written by Franciscus Van Weert. The antiphonary contains a lot of illustrations. Most of these represent religious activities. Nevertheless, there are some more daring and naughty illustrations, e.g. two guards who are sleeping, a man picking his nose, etc.

What follows is a description of how he introduces his own interests in the world of the monks. Fra Lippo Lippi accounts for the reaction of the monks towards his passion with a metaphor: 'The monks looked black' (line 135). Obviously, he is not literally referring to the colour. What he is trying to say is that the monks did not appreciate his artistic digressions and therefore he uses 'black' because of its connotation. Namely, its allusion to being evil, bad and angry. Nevertheless, the Prior gave him permission to practice his passion and Fra Lippo Lippi renders this in his monologue by means of an ellipsis⁵⁰: 'And hereupon he bade me (to) daub away' (line 142). In a spoken conversation there would be no question of ellipsis because, then, it could be interpreted as the literal rendering of the order given by the Prior.

⁴⁹ <http://www.antifonarium-tsgrooten.be/index.htm>

⁵⁰ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: '1 the omission of words from speech or writing. 2 a set of dots indicating such an omission'.
(http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/ellipsis?view=uk)

However, this is a dramatic monologue and thus a written version of spoken interaction. On top of that, if Browning used a quote in his monologue, this is normally characterized by quotation marks. The fact that this is not the case in line 142 makes it plausible to talk about an ellipsis here. Browning did this to mark how Fra Lippo Lippi, in all his enthusiasm towards his artistic assignment leaves out words. By inserting his answer to the Prior's proposition, namely 'Thank you!' (line 143), the conversation with the Prior that took place some time ago becomes vivid.

The word 'black' is mentioned again to refer to the monks: 'First, every sort of monk, the black and white' (line 145). This may be interpreted both in a literal and in a figurative way. As for the figurative interpretation, it can be seen as an expansion of the metaphor in line 135 where Fra Lippo Lippi points out that the 'monks looked black'. He is then making a distinction between the monks who supported his talent (white) and those who did not (black). Nevertheless, his description of the monks goes further and he describes them as 'fat and lean' (line 146). Since this accounts for a physical description of the monks, this makes us favour the literal interpretation of 'black' and 'white'. This way, the monk would also refer to the physical appearance of the monks in the former line.

His description of the people he painted goes on and he mentions gossips, a murderer, his victim's son, children and a poor girl. Browning inserted a synaesthesia⁵¹ to describe one of Fra Lippo Lippi's painted characters: 'For that white anger of his victim's son' (line 153). Here, an emotional feeling (anger) is mingled with a stimulus related to the sight (white). It is easy to explain the use of anger here. Obviously, the son of a murdered man is angry with the murderer. Relating anger to whiteness is another typical association because this refers to his pale skin when he is in this state of furiousness. On the other hand, it may refer to the fact that the boy is rather young. Being in a church, the whiteness may allude to virginity and youth.

When Fra Lippo Lippi is ready, he reveals his 'covered bit of cloister-wall' (line 165). This expression is an understatement since he did more than just covering up the wall. He decorated it with a beautiful painting and thus, this may be seen as a form of false modesty on the part of the monk. At first, the other monks praise his work. Nevertheless, after taking a closer look, they do not really like what he painted.

⁵¹ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'the production of a sense impression relating to one sense or part of the body by stimulation of another sense or part of the body'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/synaesthesia?view=uk)

They are shocked that Fra Lippo Lippi painted normal human beings in stead of saints: 'Being simple bodies,--"That's the very man!' (line 168). They think of his painting as too earthly. Fra Lippo Lippi's reaction to the sudden shift in their opinion is described a little further: 'But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funked' (line 172). His triumph was big at first, but it did not last very long. That is why he compares it to a straw-fire. Straw can burst into flames but it extinguishes as quickly as it started. The triple use of the sound 'f' may point at the sound of a funking flame. The Prior watches the painting and calls it 'from the mark of painting' (line 176).⁵² The mark being the target in the art of archery. The Prior is indirectly telling Fra Lippo Lippi that this painting cannot be considered a real artistic work. What follows is a lecture about what real paintings should express and transmit in the Prior's eyes. He mentions the 'perishable clay' (line 180). This is a reference to the story of Adam and Eve. According to one version of the Bible, they were made out of clay.⁵³ This lecture quickly reaches its climax: 'Your business is to paint the souls of men' (line 183). The monks align themselves with Plato's dualism. They want the body and the soul to be separated. In this separation, the soul is the most important part. The painter should paint the souls of men and not be preoccupied with the physical appearance. The Prior elaborates this thought and even points at the uselessness of arms and legs of characters in a painting.⁵⁴

Fra Lippo Lippi's thoughts about this artistic ideology start off with a rhetorical question: 'Now, is this sense, I ask?' (line 191). The 'now' clearly shows his interlocutors that, at this point, he wants to start his own lecture about the topic. The last section of his sentence ('I ask') can be seen as superfluous since it is a rhetorical question and the only plausible answer for him is 'no, this is no sense'. Fra Lippo Lippi thinks that it is possible to show the soul through the painting of human bodies. According to him, the body is the extension of the soul. Through the body, the soul is portrayed and beauty does not stand in the way of the soul. On the other hand, if beauty is all there is, the soul is to be found in the viewer and his pondering about this divine beauty.

⁵² Cfr. line 39 in *My Last Duchess*.

⁵³ Charles, R.H. "The Life of Adam and Eve." Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913.

⁵⁴ Within this ideology, lines 27 to 37 make sense. Fra Lippo Lippi really associates Judas with a specific face. The other monks, on the contrary, associate Judas with betrayal. The difference in thinking that becomes very clear later in the poem is already announced by this passage about the man with a face that resembles Judas' according to Fra Lippo Lippi.

The climax of Fra Lippo Lippi's reason for his behaviour and actions takes place in lines 224 and 225: 'You should not take a fellow eight years old and make him swear to never kiss the girls'. He is trying to say that he does not completely live the life a monk is supposed to live because of the fact that it was forced upon him when he was very young. This can be easily aligned with the criticism against child oblation from the eleventh century onwards. Mayke De Jong (1996) states in her *In Samuel's image: child oblation in the early medieval West* that '[c]hild oblation was to remain virtually unchallenged until the late eleventh century, when monastic leaders tentatively began to express their dismay about the involuntary aspect of the proceedings, questioning the suitability of monks and nuns who might have been forced into the monastery against their wishes' (1). Fra Lippo Lippi contrasts the free way of painting for Cosimo de' Medici with the conformist one of the monks. According to him, he can paint freely because of the fact that he has a friend in the Corner-house, namely Cosimo de' Medici: 'I'm my own master, paint now as I please – Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house' (lines 226 and 227). However, if Fra Lippo Lippi talks about his master in terms of his 'friend', this might be seen as a hyperbole⁵⁵. He thinks of the monks as old-fashioned and narrow-minded and stresses this by repetitively using the word 'old'. Fra Lippo Lippi is ironically attributing artistic authority to the monks: 'Don't you think they're the likeliest to know, They with their Latin?' (lines 241 and 242). Considering the earlier description of his aversion to Latin, this question is asked in an extremely ironic way. The underlying thought being that the monks do not know anything about the art of painting. However, Barbara Melchiori points at the fact that it is rather strange that Browning is negative about learning considering his background and she argues in her *Browning's Poetry of Reticence* that 'Browning's constant satire on learning and pedantry is more surprising. Considering the wide range of his own reading and love of out-of-the-way knowledge it is difficult to grasp why he should have felt so strongly on the subject' (13).

Browning masterfully created the illusion of spoken interaction in this poem. One beautiful example of this occurs in line 239 where Browning inserts a slip of the tongue of Fra Lippo Lippi: 'You keep your mistr... manners, and I'll stick to mine!' He

⁵⁵ Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'deliberate exaggeration, not meant to be taken literally'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/hyperbole?view=uk)

starts off with mistress but then quickly corrects himself. What the heart thinks, the mouth speaks.

To describe his reaction towards the disapproval of his work by the other monks, brother Lippo Lippi is talking about how he 'swallowed his rage' (line 242). He is trying to get across the fact that he obeys the will of the monks. He swallows it and does not let it come out again. Nevertheless, in the following lines it becomes clear that his rage could only be swallowed temporarily. He describes how he is working on his painting in the evening: 'some warm eve finds me at my saints' (line 246). Browning inserted a metonymy in a rather ironic way. Fra Lippo Lippi is talking about 'my saints' and thus uses part of the painting to point at the whole (pars pro toto). This is ironic because he already clarified his dislike of this overlaid theme of his painting. Therefore, his rage comes back out and it does so in the form of the guilty pleasures the policemen find him at: 'And play the fooleries you catch me at, In pure rage!' (lines 253 and 254).

In lines 266 to 269, another biblical image occurs⁵⁶. He refers to the Garden of Eden and the creation of mankind there.⁵⁷ He tries to get across that God gave us a body and that it is unnatural to try to conceal this. This all contributes to his plea for earthly and mimetic representations in art.

Next, Fra Lippo Lippi starts describing the landscape that surrounds them. After this he asks his interlocutors what they think that the purpose of this beautiful scenery is. In a way he is placing the answer in their mouths before they have even said anything. Browning introduced the answer of the guards in the monologue: 'Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say' (line 292). This creates the impression that brother Lippo Lippi is repeating the words of the city guards. Glenn Everett (2003) points out in his *The Silent Listener in Browning's Dramatic Monologues*⁵⁸ that 'the other side of the conversation must, if the poet wishes to employ the dynamics of the dramatic monologue, be relayed to us by the speaker's restatement of what the auditor has said or might say'. In this case, Browning added

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

⁵⁷ He does this in a very patriarchal way. He refers to women as 'man's wife'.

⁵⁸ Everett, Glenn. "The Silent Listener in Browning's Dramatic Monologues". Available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/dm3.html>. Last updated at 18 December 2003.

a sense of obviousness to the answer by using 'of course'. The overall conclusion is that the landscape should be admired. Fra Lippo Lippi expands this logically and states that something that is worth admiring is worth being painted in a realistic way. Why should you deform beautiful things if you base artistic works upon them?⁵⁹ Brother Lippo Lippi is formulating the opinion of the other monks and states that, according to them, it is useless to represent nature because she is already complete⁶⁰. This, in a way, aligns the monks again with Plato's ideas. Plato thinks of art as a representation of a representation and therefore as useless. The brother responds with his vision on art. He thinks that art is supposed to make us really see what we have passed a hundred times without noticing.

The Prior's thoughts are rendered further on⁶¹. According to him, painting earthly things does not provide your audience with a moral, religious lesson. Fra Lippo Lippi responds to this point of view by stating that if art is only to be used to give such kind of lessons, then it may as well be considered to be useless. In his eyes, 'a skull and bones, Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, [...] a bell to chime the hour with' (lines 321 and 322) serve this purpose just as well. He is now really downgrading the catholic faith. The cross, the stereotypical catholic symbol, is described in terms of two simple bits of stick nailed crosswise. Additionally, the bell in the church is a simple bell that indicates the hour for Fra Lippo Lippi. In my opinion, he does not really mean this but is trying to attack the catholic church in the same way they attacked his art, namely by downgrading it and reducing it to its simplest purpose.

Although Browning never claims to be historically correct, he makes a historical error: 'I painted a Saint Laurence six months since' (line 323). Filippo di Tommaso Lippi did paint at the Prato but he never painted a Saint Laurence. In line 324, the monk is talking about his own paintings in terms of 'fine'. This again points at Fra Lippo Lippi's tendency towards arrogance.

⁵⁹ Cfr. footnote 27.

⁶⁰ 296 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
297 Are here already; nature is complete:
298 Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
299 There's no advantage! You must beat her, then."

⁶¹ 316 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
317 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
318 It does not say to folk—remember matins,
319 Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this

When brother Lippo Lippi is talking about another monk who got drunk by tasting the air, a simile⁶² occurs. The air turned his 'unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!' (line 339). Chianti wine is the common red wine of Tuscany. Fra Lippo Lippi is comparing the mental state of this particular monk with the mental state after drinking too much of this wine. He does this to show the guards that this monk's artistic meaning is as firm and reliable of that of a drunk and thus is worthless.

When Fra Lippo Lippi is afraid that the guards will misreport him, he starts acting politely. The moment he feels threatened he starts being extremely formal and tries to make amends: 'And hearken how I plot to make amends' (line 343). In the form of 'hearken' he uses a very formal word to allude to the fact that he is aware of the embarrassing situation he finds himself in. This goes even further: 'There's for you...' (line 345). He wants to save himself by trying to bribe the city guards.

The reference to Sant' Ambrogio and its sisters is not arbitrary. Filippo di Tommaso Lippi did paint his masterpiece, a Coronation of the Virgin, for the nuns of Sant' Ambrogio. Browning described this work of art in the poem. He uses both contrasts and similarities in this description. A special similarity occurs in line 349: 'bowery, flowery'. Obviously, both words rhyme. On top of that, they come with the same connotation since they both remind the reader of colours. There is also a reference to Job and his land of Uz. Browning used a wordplay by changing one letter in this land of Uz and thus referring to 'Us'. With 'us' he means all the painters, who need the same kind of patience as Job to finish their work of art. In line 362, a contrast between black and white occurs in addition to a comparison: 'As one by a dark stair into a great light'. Browning contrasted the darkness with light.

The talking about his own masterpiece has triggered off the arrogance in the monk again. This becomes clear through a long alliteration: 'Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck--I'm the man!' (line 364). The [m]-sound is used five times in this single line. According to my interpretation this points again at the arrogance of brother Lippo Lippi because the repetition of all these sounds remind the reader in one way or another of the word 'me'. The hearers seem to be listening to the repetition of this, in this case self-centred, word. Browning referred here to the representation of the painter himself in the corner of his masterpiece. Nevertheless, according to Ian

⁶² Definition according to the Oxford Dictionary: 'a figure of speech involving the comparison of one thing with another thing of a different kind (e.g. *as solid as a rock*)'. (http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/simile?view=uk)

Lancashire, recent research has shown that this does not represent the painter but the benefactor⁶³. In this interpretation, 'Iste perfectit opus!' (line 377) means 'caused the work to be made' and not, as Browning meant it, 'made the work'. There are a lot of specialists who share Browning's opinion. Frances Haberly-Robertson states in his *Famous Italian Pictures and Their Stories*⁶⁴ that:

The picture explains the poem, and the poem explains the picture. St. John Baptist stands in the right. Kneeling by him, his hands clasped, is Fra Filippo himself. A genuine portrait. Just in front of him is a kneeling cherub, from whose mouth come the words, "Iste perfectit opus." (He [Fra Filippo] made this perfect work.)'

Within Browning's point of view concerning this case, 'this pure company' (line 368) is rather ambiguous. This might be the company he is presently with, namely the policemen, or it may be the saints accompanying him on the painting.

At the end of the poem, Fra Lippo Lippi takes the upper hand in the conversation again and decides that it is time for him to leave. He finishes by referring to the 'grey beginning'. Next to the fact that it is a paradox to mention the word 'beginning' in the very last line of this poem, the word 'grey' also contains a special meaning. Since he contrasts black and white through the poem, this may be evidence of a compromise he has made. He did paint some saints like the other monks wanted him to, but at the same time he managed to keep up his own artistic ideology.

4.3. Porphyria's Lover⁶⁵

Porphyria's Lover was first published in January 1816 in *Monthly Repository*, under the title *Porphyria*. In 1842, it was republished in Browning's collection *Dramatic Lyrics*. He paired it with an other poem of his, *Johannes Agricola in Meditatio*, and titled it *Madhouse Cells*. The poem received its final title in 1863. The

⁶³ <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/275.html>

⁶⁴ Haberly-Robertson, Frances. "Famous Italian Pictures and Their Stories." Available at http://www.archive.org/stream/famousitalianpic00habe/famousitalianpic00habe_djvu.txt.

⁶⁵ Cfr. Appendix C

difference between the original and the final title lies in the fact that the final title, *Porphyria's Lover*, accounts for the narrator of the events. The fact that he is Porphyria's lover is the only explicit detail of his identity Browning provided us with.

The poem is again one of Browning's dramatic monologues. By titling it *Porphyria's Lover*, the title directly refers to the imaginary narrator.⁶⁶ On the other hand, the original title referred to the second protagonist of the poem. Nevertheless, the choice for the final title is a good one. Obviously, Porphyria is an important character but the emphasis in the poem lies on the feelings and the twisted thoughts of her lover. Additionally, it is Porphyria's lover who is talking in the first person here and this leads to another, and probably the most important, reason for Browning's choice of the title. As has already been described earlier, he opted for this title to maintain the distance between himself as a poet and his poetic character. He did not want to be identified with this sick and crazy murderer, and by clearly stating in his title that this poem concerns Porphyria's lover, Browning was able to distance himself from the horrific actions of the protagonist. Glennis Byron (2003) has pointed out in her *Dramatic Monologue* that there are several strategies to maintain this distance between speaker and poet, e.g. the use of historical figures or the creation of a temporal or cultural boundary. However, none of these occur in *Porphyria's Lover* and therefore it is important that the title points out this distinction between speaker and poet.

Browning opted for a fixed rhyme scheme: ABABB. Obviously, this decreases the poet's freedom within his poem. Wordsworth (1802) defined this in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*⁶⁷ as 'an engagement thus voluntarily contracted'. In *Porphyria's Lover*, this becomes clear through some strange constructions and the enjambment in some verses. Nevertheless, Browning was able to get the monologue across rather fluently and the fact that most of the words are monosyllables contributes to this perception. His verses never seem to be too farfetched.

Again, Browning started off in medias res in this poem. This assumption can be made because of the past tenses and verse 58: 'And thus we sit together now'. From the first verse onwards, the narrator is talking in the past tense and the reader

⁶⁶ This is similarly the case in e.g. *Fra Lippo Lippi*.

⁶⁷ William Wordsworth. "Preface to Lyrical Ballads." Available at <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/Courses/Spring2001/040/preface1802.html>. Last updated Spring 2001.

immediately knows that the events already have taken place. On the other hand, the mentioning of 'to-night' in the very first verse clearly shows that the events are to be situated in a recent past. In verse 58, we get the first allusion to the present. The narrator has finished his description of the events and reached the present through his narrative. The moment he starts his monologue, he already killed his lover, Porphyria and is sitting next to her dead body. Taking this into consideration, the poem starts off in the middle of things. We can draw this even further and see the poem and the description of the past events as a flashback.

Another interesting aspect of the opening of the poem is its setting and atmosphere. The opening lines remind us of 19th century romantic poetry and according to John Lye's scheme in his *NEOCLASSICAL and ROMANTIC Literature: Some General Distinctions*⁶⁸, the setting of a romantic poem may best be described in terms of 'rural, the countryside'. In Browning's poem, the storm is raging outside and the protagonist sits in his cosy, warm house. This idea of nature at its wildest is expressed through the mentioning of the rain and the personification of the wind in the opening lines of the poem.⁶⁹ This personification reaches a climax in line 4: 'And did its worst to vex the lake'. To expand the personification further and assume that the wind has a 'point of view', it is possible to say that, from the point of view of the wind, the storm raging outside brings out its best. Nevertheless, the protagonist is sheltering in his cottage and thinks of this storm as a sad and bad scenario. The storm is beautifully brought into the poem by means of an alliteration with onomatopoeical effect: 'straight She shut the cold out and the storm' (lines 6 and 7). The repetition of these hissing sounds together with the description of how Porphyria comes into the cottage makes the reader think of a door that is quickly opened and closed again but let some wind from the raging storm outside slip into the room.

Throughout the poem it becomes clear that the narrator shifts between reason and insanity leaning towards the latter. This duality pops up for the first time from line 11 until 13.⁷⁰ Browning was talking about 'the dripping cloak and shawl', 'her solved

⁶⁸ Lye, John. "NEOCLASSICAL and ROMANTIC Literature: Some General Distinctions." Available at <http://brocku.ca/english/courses/1F95/romclas>. Last updated 1996.

⁶⁹ 1 The rain set early in to-night,
2 The sullen wind was soon awake,
3 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
4 And did its worst to vex the lake:

⁷⁰ 11 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,

gloves', 'her hat' and 'the damp hair'. A clear shift is made between the possessive pronoun and the definite article and one could argue that this is Browning's way of avoiding repetition. However, this shift is used to indicate the duality that is raging inside the speaker. On the one hand, he really cares for Porphyria⁷¹, but on the other hand, he does not feel the affection one should feel for a lover. Within this point of view, the use of the possessive pronoun shows his love for her, whereas the definite article refers to the distance he wants to keep from Porphyria. Another striking example of this shift between madness and reason within the speaker's head is the mere form of the poem. As mentioned earlier, the poem is written in an ABABB rhyme scheme. Browning used his rhyme pattern as a metaphor for the emotional condition of his protagonist. The A's and B's are intertwined in the same way Porphyria's lover is suffering from ambiguous feelings and thoughts. 'Odi et Amo' is an ideal quote to summarize the lover's feelings towards Porphyria.

The insanity of the speaker is revealed again further in the poem: 'And called me. When no voice replied' (line 15). Apparently, he is aware of the fact that she is calling him but, on the other hand, he is virtually talking about himself in the third person in the second part of the line. He uses a metonymy to refer to himself: 'When no voice replied' actually means 'when I did not reply'. It is as if the speaker is watching over this scene and describing it, as if he acts as an external focalizer. This brings about a very strange opposition. He describes the scene as if he is watching it from the outside but he actually is part of the whole action. Browning emphasized this opposition by changing the focalisation in the next line: 'She put my arm about her waist'. Here, the speaker is again describing the action but he does this as an internal focalizer and this makes him consciously part of the scene again.

The last line mentioned leads the reader to a progressive theme in Browning's poem. The narrator is talking about how Porphyria starts touching him. The temporal difference between us as modern readers and Victorian readers is significant in this case. Joanna Watson (2002) states in her *Women's Sexuality: Then and Now*⁷² that:

12 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied

13 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,

⁷¹ The fact that he cares for her becomes clear through the positive words that are used to describe her entrance in the cottage: 'blaze up', 'warm'.

⁷² Watson, Joanna. "Women's Sexuality: Then and Now." Available at <http://www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~ulrich/femhist/sexuality.shtml>. Last updated 18 May 2002.

Victorian women were not allowed to freely engage themselves in sexual acts unless it was with the specific purpose of procreation. A woman's worth before marriage rested in her chastity, and once married she was expected to only engage in conjugal acts when necessary.

Since nowhere in the poem a reference to a marriage between the two protagonists occurs, the reader assumes that they weren't married and this makes that their relationship suffers from a great social pressure at the time. They want to make love to one another, but Porphyria keeps thinking rational and does not bend for her feelings but obeys social expectations. From line 21 until 25⁷³, the speaker is expressing his frustration. It frustrates him that he knows that she wants the same thing but that she does not listen to her heart but to social pressure. He describes how he likes Porphyria: 'That moment she was mine, mine, fair, Perfectly pure and good' (lines 36 and 37). The repetition of the word 'mine' means that he really likes the idea of possessing her and it is that feeling that makes him convince himself to act out the horrible act he is about to do and is described in the following lines.⁷⁴ The actual killing her is described twice in these lines. Nevertheless, the word choice contrasts in both cases. The first time he is talking about 'A thing to do' (line 38). A reader who reads the poem for the first time does not know what the speaker is talking about at this point. Later on, in line 41 ('And strangled her'), it becomes clear that this expression should be interpreted as a euphemism since his 'thing to do' is actually strangling her with her own hair. In my opinion, he wants to cherish this moment in which he possesses her in a sick way and by killing her makes it eternal. Browning made this horrible action audible in a way by using a sort of onomatopoeia:

⁷³ 22 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
23 To set its struggling passion free
24 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
25 And give herself to me for ever.

⁷⁴ 37 Perfectly pure and good: I found
38 A thing to do, and all her hair
39 In one long yellow string I wound
40 Three times her little throat around,
41 And strangled her.

'Three times her little throat around' (line 40). The accumulation of the diphthongs and the dental sounds [t] makes the reader think of the sound Porphyria produced while she was being strangled.

Later on, the narrator's switch between reason and insanity is brought to the surface again: 'No pain felt she; I am quite sure she felt no pain' (lines 41 and 42). He first strangled her in a coldblooded moment and then starts calming himself down by reassuring that she felt no pain. However, this does not feel as a strong argument to him since he softens his utterance down in the next line. He goes from certainty ('No pain felt she') to doubt ('I am quite sure she felt no pain').

When the narrator is touching and caressing his dead lover, it seems as if he finally is capable of fully appreciating her. Death makes her look prettier and desirable. Whereas he described in the first lines how she approached him but she never really gave him what he actually wanted, he now clearly states how he looks for physical contact with her dead body. The culminating point of this occurs in line 50: 'Only, this time my shoulder bore'. This contrasts with line 17: 'And made her smooth white shoulder bare'. The fact that she bares her shoulder in the first lines makes him long for her, but at the same time it frustrates him because he can not fully have her. This is why line 50 shows his satisfaction after all these disappointments. He now takes pleasure in what he was disgusted at when she did it because of the fact that when she did it, it often did not get a sexual continuation⁷⁵. At this point, he decides what happens and she is fully possessed by him. He is sexually in control and this gives him a superior feeling.

The poem ends with the suggestion that Porphyria's lover does not regret his action because he feels as if he has been pardoned by God himself: 'And all night long we have not stirred,--And yet God has not said a word!' (lines 59 and 60). In his opinion, God would have shown him His disapproval if He thought of his strangling Porphyria as a horrible action. However, God has given him no sign and therefore he feels pardoned.

In my opinion, this poem, thus, is about a man who, driven by his sexual frustrations, ends up killing the woman he loves. She drove him mad because of the fact that she, in a way, sexually challenged him. He could not stand the thought of

⁷⁵ Line 26 ('But passion sometimes would prevail') shows that there were moments that the passion did take the upper hand and a sexual continuation would take place.

not possessing her completely and this drove him insane, it drove him to the point where he ended up killing her and caressing her dead body.

4.4. The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Cathedral⁷⁶

In contrast with *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Porphyria's Lover* the title of the poem does not tell the reader who will be addressing him/her but contains a description of the events that will take place in the poem. Additionally, it contains an anglicism. The church Browning referred to as Saint Praxed's Church is the Basilica of Santa Prassede in Rome. John Woolford and Daniel Karlin (1991) state in their *The Poems of Browning: 1841-1846*⁷⁷ that 'B. [Browning] saw the church of Santa Prassede in Rome during his second trip to Italy in the autumn of 1844' (258). How Browning found his inspiration for the poem during his passage in the church is described by Richard S. Kennedy and Ronald S. Hair in *The Dramatic Inspiration of Robert Browning*⁷⁸:

It is also typical of Browning that his attention fastened less on the gorgeous mosaics than on two burial monuments: one highly decorated and embellished with motifs from classical and Christian sources, the sepulchre of Cardinal Alain Cetine de Taillebour; the other the rather plain tomb of Cardinal Panteleone Anchier de Troyes. The contrast between the two tombs struck a creative spark in Browning that later developed into his poem "The Tomb at Saint Praxed's" (subsequently entitled "The Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church") (105).

Additionally, the title accounts for an ironic touch of Browning. Since the poem deals with a bishop who is describing how he would like his tomb to look like, the choice for the Saint Praxed's church is an ironic one. This is clarified by Philip V. Allingham when he states in his *Robert Browning's "The Bishop Orders his Tomb" (1845)*:

⁷⁶ Cfr. Appendix D

⁷⁷ Woolford, John and Daniel Karlin. *The Poems of Browning: 1841-1846*. Pearson Education, 1991.

⁷⁸ Kennedy, Richard S. and Ronald S. Hair. *The Dramatic Inspiration of Robert Browning*. University of Missouri Press, 2007.

*Another Renaissance Portrait – The Sensual, The Profane, and the Sacerdotal*⁷⁹, that '[m]uch of the poem's irony lies in the fact that "St. Praxed" (as Browning has anglicized her name) was a virgin saint of the second century who gave her wealth to the poor and to the Church'. A bishop should live with the saints as his example. However, whereas Saint Praxed is not at all materialistic, the bishop speaking in the poem does seem to be interested in material and wealth. By placing the bishop's ideal tomb in the church of Saint Praxed, Browning alluded to the earthly desires of this bishop in an ironic way.

To maintain the distance between himself and the bishop as a speaker, Browning drew upon the function of the bishop since people knew that Browning was no member of the clergy. Therefore, he could create this alter-ego in this poem. On top of that, the setting of the poem also contributes to the distinction between the poet and the speaker. The poem is set in Italy and the bishop is talking about the church of Santa Prassede. However, not to let his British readers alienate too much, Browning anglicizes the name of the church (Saint Praxed's Church).

This poem also starts off in *medias res*, it begins in the middle of conversation. The first line creates the expectations of a sermon with the readers: 'Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!'. Similar to the title, this opening line can be considered as ironic. The bishop is referring to the words of a preacher. Obviously, Browning chose these opening words very carefully and it is very plausible that through them he wanted to remind his reader of a Latin quote: 'vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas'. Ecclesiastes spoke these famous words in the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible⁸⁰. The ironic part lies in the fact that the bishop does come across as vain because he wants his tombstone to be impressive and made out of the wealthiest stone types. The summit of his vanity is his longing to, even in the afterlife, steal a march on Gandolf and this becomes clear in line 31: '—Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone'. The bishop is talking in a derogatory way about this dead rival of his, Gandolf. He wants to show off with his beautiful tombstone by comparing it to the less expensive one of Gandolf.

⁷⁹ Allingham, Philip V. "Robert Browning's "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" (1845): Another Renaissance Portrait - The Sensual, The Profane, and the Sacerdotal." Available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/bishop/pva314.html>. Last updated 19 February 2004.

⁸⁰ See: <http://www.latinvulgate.com/verse.aspx?t=0&b=23>

Later on, it becomes clear that this rivalry between the bishop and Gandolf is based upon a woman: 'She, men would have to be your mother once, Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!' (lines 4 and 5). Actually, it is kind of inappropriate for a father to talk to his sons on his death bed about his rival in the quest for the love of their mother. The bishop is able to draw extra attention to it through the use of a hyperbaton: 'Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!' (line 5). If Browning would have kept the normal order ('so fair was she'), he would have created rhyme within this line. On the other hand, this rhyme would have made this a very fluent line, easily read over by the inattentive reader but by changing the word order Browning managed to draw the reader's attention to the line. Apparently, this rivalry is a big motivation for the bishop to outdo Gandolf in terms of tombstones and this is why Browning highlighted this through a hyperbaton that makes sure that the reader attentively looks at this line. That this woman was important to the speaker becomes clear through the fact that he became a bishop when she died: 'Dead long ago, and I am bishop since' (line 7).

As is normally the case in a dramatic monologue, this poem is addressed to a silent hearer identified through the words of the bishop himself: 'Nephews – sons mine...ah God, I know not! Well –' (line 3). Thus, the identification is partial and unclear. The only direct reference to his listeners is the mentioning of the name 'Anselm' (line 2). All other characteristics need to be derived from the bishop's words and the reader does not even get to know how many people the bishop is addressing. He himself is not sure about his relationship with his listener and this brings about three possibilities. Firstly, Browning might have been giving an account of the words of a hallucinating bishop. In this case, there are not necessarily other people present and the confusion between sons and nephews is then an imaginary one. Secondly, the bishop might be addressing his by-standers in metaphorical terms. If he calls them his 'nephews' or 'sons', he is pointing at the metaphorical family the Christian community forms. Nevertheless, the fact that he, as mentioned earlier, describes his rivalry with Gandolf over this wife makes this interpretation less obvious because if you expand the metaphor, the wife he is referring to is the holy Virgin. Therefore, it is rather unthinkable to engage yourself as a bishop in a fight over the love of the Virgin. Thirdly, he might have lived through an unfaithful marriage before his time as a bishop. His confusion, then, would be based on an affair between him and his sister-in-law or he could have been aware of an affair between

his wife and his brother. Therefore, his confusion between sons and nephews is plausible.

The fact that the bishop refers nine times to death, directly or indirectly, between lines 6 and 12⁸¹, takes him to the theme of death. He goes on to reveal the fact that he is uttering this monologue in his last hours and that his sons are gathered around his death bed: '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' (lines 10, 11 and 12). These lines show that the bishop experiences these last hours as a real exhausting agony. The mentioning of 'dying by degrees' is a first argument for this statement. He feels he is on the decline gradually and death is steadily coming closer. This idea is elaborated by the insertion of the climax 'hours and long hours'. The bishop first mentions the fact that he is waiting for death for 'hours' and then adds force to this by rephrasing it and talking about 'long hours'. His final living hours are a real agony and he is even talking about a 'dead night'. This brings about the idea of a sleepless night. The bishop is experiencing these last moments with the living as a night in which one is tossing about in bed without getting any sleep. All he longs for is the moment in which he can peacefully fall asleep forever. He expresses this wish: "Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all' (line 13). He would give everything to stop the agony and end his life in peace. This idea comes back later on in the poem where the bishop is again describing this agony he is going through: 'For as I lie here, hours of the dead night, Dying in state and by such slow degrees' (lines 85 and 86). This expresses the same idea, namely that he is exhausted and longs for eternal peace.

After this fragment of self-pity, the bishop gets to the theme that is really important to him: his tomb. He wants to reassure that this will be placed and ornamented just the way he wants it and broaches this subject in line 15: 'And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought'. He starts by describing the place in the church he reserved for it. Apparently, he liked a certain place but Gandolf deceived him and

⁸¹ 6 What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
7 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
8 And as she died so must we die ourselves,
9 And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
10 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
11 In his state-chamber, dying by degrees,
12 Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask

took it from him which lead to an other reason for their rivalry. It is in this description that a first sign of the bishop's pagan view of afterlife occurs. He seems to be jealous of Gandolf because he got the best place in the church to install your tomb but a bishop should not be jealous of other people's material things in the first place, let alone of material things a person takes with him in death. The speaker, here, cannot hide his jealousy and expresses this: 'Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South He graced his carrion with. God curse the same!' (lines 18 and 19). He reduces the body of Gandolf to carrion, 'dead and putrefying flesh'⁸². In stead of having his thoughts on the after-life and on saying goodbye properly, the bishop is thinking about how to outdo Gandolf in death, even though the latter succeeded in getting a grip on the best place for his tomb.

In the description of the place for his tomb in the church, the bishop is drawing upon two personifications to make it seem idyllic. He is talking about 'silent seats' (line 22) and refers to the fact that 'a sunbeam's sure to lurk' (line 24)⁸³. These personifications draw the attention of the reader and make the scene look very peaceful. He sees himself lying in his tomb, everything is quiet and the sun is shining. This clearly shows that his idea of the after-life is based on a non-Christian view since he does not believe in his soul going to heaven and considers death to be an earthly and bodily experience. It is as if he thinks of his tomb as his eternal bed where he will consciously enjoy the rest of time. William Lyon Phelps (2007) states in his *Robert Browning: How to Know Him*⁸⁴ about the bishop that, 'having lived a life of physical delight, it is natural that his last thoughts should concern themselves with the abodes of his body rather than with the destination of his soul' (151).

His dying wishes do not have anything to do with spiritual longings but with a surreal desire to secure his material well-being when he's dead. An additional reason for wanting his tomb to be an architectural masterpiece is his attempt to have the upper hand in death in his struggle with Gandolf. That the bishop sees it as a competition becomes clear in line 33: 'Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!'. He presents it as a real battle between his tomb and Gandolf's that, in his eyes, he

⁸² Definition according to Merriam Webster (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/carrion>).

⁸³ However, Barbara Melchiori points out in her *Brownings Poetry of Reticence* that the dome of the Santa Prassede Church is not that sunny. She argues that 'Santa Prassede is one of the few Roman Churches without a sunny or even a sunless dome' (20).

⁸⁴ Phelps, William Lyon. *Robert Browning: How to Know Him*. BiblioBazaar, LLC, 2007.

deserves to win. The use of the colon was carefully chosen by Browning. The bishop thinks he outdoes Gandolf because his materials ('Peach-blossom marble'⁸⁵) are more expensive than Gandolf's ('paltry onion-stone'). To make this clear to his readers that this onion-stone is inferior to the marble, Browning anglicized the Italian word 'cipollino', a marble that breaks into layers⁸⁶. The reason for earning the prize described before it and the result, namely earning the prize, after it points out that the colon sort of says 'and therefore'. Throughout the description of his ideal tomb the bishop also uses very ornamental language to make it look even more masterful, e.g. 'Peach blossom marble' (line 29), 'True peach' (line 32), 'Rosy and flawless' (line 33), etc. Additionally, he uses a very visual simile: 'As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse' (line 30). The bishop takes this competition between him and Gandolf even further when he asks to place him so that he, even after death, can look down on Gandolf: 'Put me where I may look at him!' (line 32). This would mean the final victory for the bishop.

In the following lines, it becomes clear that the bishop has prepared this moment quite well. He wants his tomb to be magnificent and therefore took the trouble to hide some items he really wants to expose on his tomb. In *Browning's dramatic monologues*⁸⁷ (2007), the author is right when he/she states that '[t]he Bishop is remarkably un-Christian in his desire to leave his mark on the world and to find immortality; it is apparent that he has been thinking about his tomb for some time, evidenced by the hiding away of treasured materials'. He wants his heirs to go look for these hidden materials, again described by means of two visual similes. He is talking about a lump 'Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape, Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast...' (lines 43 and 44). The three periods indicate a hesitation on the part of the bishop. It seems as if he becomes aware of the favour (digging up these hidden materials) he is asking of his heirs and of the harshness of the accumulation of imperatives in his lines. Therefore, he tries to remind them of what he is bequeathing them in the following lines: 'Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all, That brave Frascati villa with its bath' (lines 45 and 46). He suddenly addresses them

⁸⁵ Barbara Melchiori (1968) points out that '[m]arble Browning always loved and used lavishly for decoration throughout his poetry, yet its two main characteristics offer a striking contrast: for although it is beautiful and precious, it is also very hard and cold' (5).

⁸⁶ <http://rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poem/265.html>

⁸⁷ Unknown. "Browning's dramatic monologues". Available at <http://www.teachit.co.uk/attachments/6127.pdf>. Last updated 2007.

with 'sons', trying to flatter them this way. Additionally, he is pointing them on the fact that he only asks them to go dig up something whereas they will be rewarded with villas.

The bishop accounts for the musings of a normal, Christian dying person in lines 51 and 52: 'Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years: Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?'. Nevertheless, his materialistic side quickly takes over and he is again referring to the material he wants for his tomb: 'Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black –' (line 53). He's afraid that he forgot to mention an aspect of his tomb and therefore inserts this in the middle of his semi-philosophical discourse. An Anglicism is again used not to alienate the readers from the dying bishop when he turned *Negro antico* into 'antique-black' (line 54). Through this interruption, Browning clearly showed what is really important to the bishop, namely his tomb and the prestige he will derive from this when he's dead. In this point of view, lines 51 and 52 can be seen as a philosophical slip of the bishop's tongue.

In what follows, the bishop is describing his expectations for his tomb further and it turns out that he has spoken to his sons about this before. Melchiori (1968) also states that 'we learn that this was not the first time the Bishop had told his sons of his wishes' (29). This is obvious because he is talking about 'ye promised me' (line 56) and 'ye wot of' (line 57), which reveal previous conversations about this subject. Another striking fact is that he wants his tomb to be ornamented with some pagan figures and objects. He mentions 'Pans and Nymphs' (line 57), 'tripod' and 'thyrsus' (line 58) in one breath with 'The Saviour' (line 59) and 'Moses' (line 62). Barbara Melchiori (1968) also refers to this and argues that '[i]t draws attention to the Bishop's essentially pagan nature. The mixture of classical and Christian elements is in no way surprising on a Renaissance tomb, but the introduction of Pan, the pagan and Arcadian earth-god is interesting' (35). Pan is a mythical figure, famous for his pursuit of the nymph Syrinx.⁸⁸ This is what the bishop refers to in line 61: 'Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off'. However, Pan trying to rape the nymph is not the only reference to Greek religion. The tripod and thyrsus form two ancient symbols within this. In her essay *Apollo: Background, Mythology and Images*⁸⁹, Angie M. Kenna describes how 'The Delphic oracle, known also as "Pythia", would be seated on a

⁸⁸ Ovid. *The Metamorphoses*. Trans. Gregory Horace. Signet Classics, 2001.

⁸⁹ Kenna, Angie M. "Apollo: Background, Mythology and Images." Available at <http://people.hsc.edu/dnjclassics/syllabi/greekreligion/apollo.htm>.

tripod (Apollo's symbol of prophesy) in a trance. Scholars believe that the tripod might have been situated above a fissure in the floor of the temple from which arose the vapors'. A thyrsus can be defined as 'a staff tipped with a pine cone and sometimes twined with ivy and vine branches, borne by Dionysus and his votaries'.⁹⁰ The fact that the bishop is preoccupied with a wealthy and beautiful grave is not a good characteristic of a member of the clergy, but it is even worse that he wants to ornament this grave with images of pagan figures and objects he wants to unite with pure Christian figures and objects ('The Saviour', 'Saint Praxed' and 'Moses with the tables').

He does not only describe the figures he wants for his tomb, he also requests for a certain type of stone. To make sure that these orders are obeyed, he draws upon his son's moral abilities: 'Nay, boys, ye love me – all of jasper, then!' (line 68). He uses another visual simile in line 71: 'One block, pure as a pistachio-nut'. He refers to it like this to make sure that his sons will not pass off the matter easily. This is expanded when the bishop's inconsistent ideas about religion are again exposed through his words. He promises his sons that, when he's dead, he will pray to Saint Praxed for 'Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts, And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs' (lines 74 and 75). In other words, he is promising them everything a young man dreamed of in those days: horses, literature and women. This can be seen as a kind of emotional blackmailing since this would not be the same bishop if he did not expect a service in return: '—That's if ye carve my epitaph right' (line 76). It turns out that he wants this epitaph to be ornamented with Latin phrases of Marcus Tullius Cicero. He refers to Cicero as 'Tully' (line 77). By having put a phrase of Cicero on his epitaph, he is again searching for a way to outdo Gandolf. However, the bishop is unaware of the fact that by insulting the epitaph of Gandolf, he actually is referring in a humiliating way to himself. This insult is rendered in line 78: 'No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line –'. The irony lies in the word 'gaudy'. The bishop is in the middle of his description of how he wants his tomb to look like, he wants it to be an artistic masterpiece, an eye-catcher. By referring to Gandolf's tomb as gaudy, he is actually drawing attention to his own ostentatious tomb.

⁹⁰ Definition according to Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/Thyrsus>)

Browning used one long, expanded synaesthesia from line 81 until 84⁹¹. He is able to mingle the stimulation of all human organs of sense. Since the bishop is convinced of the fact that he will consciously lie in his tomb and feel and experience all the things a living human being feels and experiences, this points out his blasphemous view on a life after death again. He mentions the hearing ('hear'), the sight ('see'), the touch ('feel') and the taste ('taste'). In contradiction with the general Christian beliefs about heaven, he sees the future life as sensorial and earthly. Therefore, it is not only his materialistic way of life that makes the monk blasphemous, but also his view on the afterlife. Next to the synaesthesia, Browning used a metaphor in line 82: 'And see God made and eaten all day long'. However, in contrast with his blasphemous ideas about heaven, this metaphor is actually a reference to one of the Christian rituals, namely the transubstantiation. In *The Doctrine of the Real Presence*⁹², Edward Bouverie Pusey (1855) states that:

[T]his transubstantiation into the Body of Christ is nothing else than that the Body of Christ, by virtue of the sacramental words, as a whole and with each part thereof, co-exists with each part of the bread; and then, according to that opinion, the accidents of the Host do not exist without any subject, after consecration, but they are in the bread as their subject, as before (16).

Therefore, the fact that the bishop mentions 'God' in stead of 'Host' indicates that he does have some Christianity running through his veins after all. Nevertheless, the transubstantiation has to do with the Body of Christ and not of God. On top of that, his reference to the sounds in the church as 'mutter' does not account for much respect for the Church as an institution. Melissa E. Buron (2003) states in her *The*

⁹¹ 81 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
82 And see God made and eaten all day long,
83 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
84 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!

⁹² Pusey, Edward Bouverie. *The Doctrine of the Real Presence: As Contained in the Fathers from the Death of S. John the Evangelist to the Fourth General Council, Vindicated, in Notes on a Sermon, "The Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist," Preached A.D. 1853, Before the University of Oxford.* Oxford University Press, 1855.

*Question of Salvation in "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church"*⁹³
that:

Images of clerics muttering through a service and the graphic reference to God being eaten relate to the bishop's overall disregard for the purpose of religion. This has the effect of emphasizing the fact that the bishop's overarching concern on his death bed is not making peace with god, but attempting to create his own immortality through material means.

This immortality is the bishop's main preoccupation and he wants to establish it by means of his tomb.

The bishop describes how he is lying on his deathbed and seems to compare himself with the sculptures of important clerics on top of their tombs which are always presented as lying peacefully and calmly holding their rod. Another common feature is the cloak that is wrapped around their bodies and artfully sculptured by the artists referred to by the bishop from line 87 until 90⁹⁴. He is rendering the comparison between his position and the sculptures on the tombs of high clerics through the use of some similes. He is talking about how he folds his arms 'as if they clasped a crook' (line 87). However, even though he is a bishop, he does not have a crook to clasp. He refers to his feet and argues that he stretches them 'straight as stone can point' (line 88). The feet of the mentioned statues are always pointing upwards and this is what the bishop is alluding to. The last feature of these sculptures mentioned is their drapery of stone which the bishop compares to his 'bedclothes': 'And let the bedclothes, morthcloth, drop Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work' (lines 89 and 90).

The attention is drawn to the dying state of the bishop in a contrastive way by the repetition of the word 'life' in lines 93 and 94: 'About the life before I lived this life, And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests'. The dying bishop describing his

⁹³ Buron, Melissa E. "The Question of Salvation in "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church"." Available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/bishop/buron3.html>. Last updated 22 September 2003.

⁹⁴ 87 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
88 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
89 And let the bedclothes, for a morthcloth, drop
90 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's work:

thoughts while lying on his deathbed experiences again one of his rare, clear spiritual moments. The question of the tombstone and all of the concerns that come with it are momentarily shelved and he is reflecting upon his life. Apparently, he thinks of this as consisting of two parts: 'this life' and 'the life before I lived this life'. The former is the life he leads as a bishop, the latter refers to the life he lived together with his wife.

This contemplation does not take long, the bishop goes on threatening his sons to cut them out of his testament: 'All lapis, all, sons! Else I give the Pope My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?' (lines 102 and 103). First, he expresses his wish to have some lapis lazuli worked up in his tomb and to make sure that this will be granted by his sons, he threatens that he will otherwise leave his villas to the Pope. To emphasize this threat even more, he uses a hyperbaton in these lines: in stead of saying 'Else I give my villas to the Pope', the bishop says 'Else I give the Pope my villas'. By changing the word order, he wants to draw the maximum attention of his sons because he is afraid that they only stand beside him to see him die and receive the attached inheritance. He describes this greed of his sons by means of two similes: 'Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick, They glitter like your mother's for my soul' (lines 104 and 105). Since a lizard's eyes can turn very quickly, the bishop is alluding to his greedy sons who want to look at and have everything. The comparison between the glitter in their eyes and the glitter in his wife's eyes actually also contains a contradiction since he and his wife had a healthy relationship. The glitter in her eyes is one out of love, whereas the glitter in his son's eyes is due to their greed and the approaching inheritance. Glenn Everett points out in his *The Silent Listener in Browning's Dramatic Monologues*⁹⁵ that 'there are only the barest suggestions that his "nephews" intend to rob him; he assumes that they want to, and we have no other source of information about them, but his view of them (and of Gandolf) is certainly tainted by his own obsessions'. Barbara Melchiori (1968) also refers to the Bishop's nephews/sons when she is talking about the moral of the poem. She states that:

[T]he moral was appropriate to Browning's Bishop, for his sin lay in the begetting of those "nephews" who stand round his bed, and it is they who are to be the means of depriving him of the only kind of future existence that he believes in or desire: the monument of his rich marble tomb' (32).

⁹⁵ Everett, Glenn. "The Silent Listener in Browning's Dramatic Monologues." Available at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/rb/dm3.html>. Last modified 18 December 2003.

Additionally, In the earlier mentioned *Browning's dramatic monologues*, the author argues that '[t]owards the end of the monologue, his strength begins to alter and he becomes more irritated with those around him – perhaps aware that his time is near and his wishes won't be carried through'. Barbara Melchiori (1968) also refers to this fear when she states that:

[H]is growing fear was lest his sons should cheat him and leave him for eternity "Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine". The conviction that this will ultimately be the case, becoming increasingly intense throughout the poem, builds up the dramatic tension which is so effective, until the reader, as so often in Browning, is led to suspend all moral judgment in his pity for the predicament of a sinner, presented so vividly from that sinner's own point of view' (37-38).

The last lines are full of the expression of the bishop's fear that his sons won't grant his last wishes concerning the tomb, reaching its climax in line 114: 'For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude'. He is mad at his sons because they seem ungrateful and greedy and, in his eyes, their dying father is for them nothing more than a treasure that will be opened soon. The bishop is afraid that they will choose all the cheapest materials for his tomb and expresses this from line 116 until 118: 'Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat As if the corpse they keep were oozing through – And no more lapis to delight the world!'. After this, he asks them to leave him with 'Old Gandolf'. The bishop ends his monologue with another reference to his rivalry with Gandolf arguing that according to him he wins this eternal battle even if his sons use the cheapest material for his tomb because he gained the woman. This thought is expressed from line 123 until 125: '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!'. The same hyperbaton that was used in line 5 occurs. Since he fears that he will not be able to outdo Gandolf with his tomb, he decides that he won the competition between them because of the fact that his wife chose him. This last line shows that the Bishop does not show any sign of repentance and can be aligned with Barbara Melchiori (1968) who argues that:

Browning might sympathise with his sinners, but he never suggests that the offender can or should be allowed to get away with it. Salvation for Browning could only be in strictly Christian terms, through repentance, and the Bishop shows no signs of repenting. The last line of the poem “As still he envied me, so fair she was!” leaves him where the first line had found him: “Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!” (39).

4. 5. A Toccata of Galuppi's⁹⁶

A Toccata of Galuppi's was published in Browning's bundle *Men and women*⁹⁷ in 1855. In this case, the title does not refer to the speaker but to the content of the poem. Since this title contains some uncommon words, it might need some clarification. First of all, a toccata is:

[A] virtuoso piece of music typically for a keyboard or plucked string instrument featuring fast-moving, lightly fingered or otherwise virtuosic passages or sections, with or without imitative or fugal interludes, generally emphasizing the dexterity of the performer's fingers⁹⁸.

Secondly, the speaker in this poem is playing a toccata of Galuppi. To identify this Galuppi, it is useful to refer to Donald Jay Grout and Hermine Weigel Williams who state in their *A short history of opera*⁹⁹ that:

One of the most prolific composers of the day was Baldassare Galuppi (1706-1785), called “Il Buranello” from the name of his birthplace, an island near Venice. Although Galuppi's serious and comic operas, nearly a hundred in number, were presented for the most part in Venice, they nevertheless achieved fame all over Europe (277).

⁹⁶ Cfr. Appendix E.

⁹⁷ Browning, R. *Men and women*. Ticknor and Fields, 1856.

⁹⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toccata>

⁹⁹ Grout, Donald Jay and Hermine Weigel Williams. *A short history of opera*. Columbia University Press, 2003.

This immediately points out that the poem will deal with an artistic way of expression, namely music. Browning introduced this theme of musicality in his poetical form by dividing the poem in fifteen separate stanzas, each consisting of three lines. The effect of separating these different stanzas is that it makes the poem look like a score. Another formal feature of musicality is the rhyme scheme in all fifteen separate stanzas in which all three lines rhyme¹⁰⁰, all adding up to the musicality and rhythm of the poem. In *Robert Browning, A Study of His Poetry*¹⁰¹, Thomas Blackburn (1967) argues that ‘this poem gives some essence of Galuppi’s clavichord music by the subtle flow and pause of its rhythms’ (177).

The distance between the speaker and Browning is less obvious in *A Toccata of Galuppi’s* than in the previous poems. A first reason for this is the fact that the title does not refer to the speaker but to the content of the poem. Additionally, Clyde de L. Ryals (1996) states in his *The Life of Robert Browning*¹⁰², that this poem, together with Browning’s *Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha*, is spoken:

[N]ot by the composers themselves but by the performers who seek in the music they play a kind of sexual energy that they do not find. Although monologues, they are different from the dramatic monologues dealing with painters in that the performers converse with the composers about the meaning of their music (121).

Therefore, the distance between the speaker and the poet needs to be created in another kind of way. An option to do this is to situate the speaker of the poem in a different time setting than that of the poet. Nevertheless, the speaker can perfectly be seen as contemporary to Browning and this may be derived from line 4: ‘Here you come with your old music, and here’s all the good it brings’. The ‘you’ the speaker is addressing is the composer, Baldassare Galuppi. Since Galuppi was born in 1706 and died in 1785, the word ‘old’ is an indication of the fact that the speaker may be contemporary to Browning who published this poem in 1855. However, the main

¹⁰⁰ This creates the following rhyme scheme: aaa bbb ccc ddd eee fff ggg hhh ddd iii jjj kkk lll mmm nnn.

¹⁰¹ Blackburn, Thomas. *Robert Browning, A Study of His Poetry*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1967.

¹⁰² De L. Ryals, Clyde. *The Life of Robert Browning*. Wiley Blackwell, 1996.

indication of the fact that the speaker and poet should not be mixed up occurs further on in the poem: 'I was never out of England – it's as if I saw it all' (line 9). This does not hold for Browning himself. Gilbert Keith Chesterton (2003) states in his *Robert Browning*¹⁰³ that '[t]he married pair [Browning and Elisabeth Barrett Browning] went to Pisa in 1846 and moved soon afterwards to Florence' (81). Browning fell in love with Italy and the choice to write a poem about Galuppi went together with this new love. Another factor that contributes to the distance between speaker and poet is the fact that the speaker does not know anything about Venice. Clyde de L. Ryals points out that:

In "A Toccata of Galuppi's" the performer, an Englishman who has never left home, has an idea of eighteenth-century Venice that is totally in variance with what he hears in the music that so delighted the people at the time. For the speaker, Venice of the preceding century represents love and life in colourful, romantic gaiety. The inhabitants were truly alive, always on the move, living both in the pleasurable moment and in anticipation of future enjoyments (121).

The speaker starts off by addressing the composer of the piece he's playing and expressing the sadness that this brings to his heart: 'Oh Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!' (line1). In this address, the speaker uses a wrong name. He starts by using the composer's last name ('Galuppi'), then he bethinks himself and comes up with what he thinks is his first name ('Baldassaro'). Galuppi's first name being 'Baldassare', the question remains whether this is a mistake from Browning's or the speaker's part. Assuming that Browning's cultural knowledge was outstanding, this little mistake can be held against the speaker. Moreover, it is possible that Browning used this to distance himself from the speaker and to show that the cultural baggage of this speaker is not that weighty. Although Browning's persona does not really feel Galuppi's music as it should, he does not dare to dislike it because of the social and cultural pressure attached to this: 'I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind; But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!' (lines 2 and 3). If he did not like Galuppi, this would prove him deaf and blind in the eyes of the cultural community.

¹⁰³ Chesterton, Gilbert K. *Robert Browning*. Kessinger Publishing, 2003.

He goes on to the second stanza and describes his stereotypical view of Venice because he associates this with Galuppi and his music: 'What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings, Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?' (lines 5 and 6). He is writing in the past tense because he is referring to the past state of the city of Venice, which had had a flourishing economy and because the merchants had the economical power, the speaker metaphorically calls them 'kings'. However, Thomas Blackburn (1967) points out that '[t]he ostensible theme of the poem is Venice at about the time of the Austrian occupation when the city had lost both the great art and industry of her past' (177). The speaker also refers to the famous Saint Mark's square and to a peculiar Venetian tradition which had to do with a symbolical wedding between Venice and the sea. S.P. Serasano (2003) also refers to the ring the speaker of the poem is talking about in his *A Routledge literary source book on William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice*¹⁰⁴ and defines it as '[t]he gold ring that was cast by the Venetian doge into the sea during the city's annual "wedding of Venice to the sea"' (19). The speaker's description of Venice continues in the third stanza of the poem: 'Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched by... what you call... Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival' (lines 7 and 8). These lines can be perfectly aligned with the idea Daniel Simonis¹⁰⁵ (2004) expresses when he states in his *Venice* that '[t]he roads of Venice are made of water' (5). The bridge mentioned in line 8 is a reference to Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, in which a scene starring a character called Shylock is set on the Rialto Bridge. The setting of the scene is described by S.P. Cerasano (2004) as '[a] street in Venice, traditionally the Rialto bridge on which much business was conducted in the city: Bassiano approaches Shylock' (150). The speaker has brought these two concepts together and refers to it as 'Shylock's bridge' in line 8. In the next line, he reveals that even though he never saw what he is alluding to, it is 'as if I saw it all' (line 9). Galuppi's music makes him see all of these Venetian scenes and settings because Browning's persona attributes a visual power to the music. Karol Berger (2000) states in her *A theory of art*¹⁰⁶ that 'tonal music, like a visual medium, may represent an

¹⁰⁴ Serasano, S.P. *A Routledge literary source book on William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice*. Routledge, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Simonis, Daniel. *Venice*. Lonely Planet, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Berger, Karol. *A theory of art*. Oxford University Press, 2000.

imaginary object different from myself, an imaginary world' (34). In this poem, the imaginary world Berger refers to is the city of Venice at the time of Galuppi.

This becomes even clearer in stanzas 4, 5 and 6 where Browning's persona is addressing Galuppi in some kind of way. The speaker, performing the piece composed by Galuppi, is asking the latter some questions. We, as readers, have to imagine the speaker sitting behind his keyboard and performing a musical piece written by Galuppi and meanwhile visualising all kinds of Venetian scenes and actions. However, because he has never been in Venice he asks the composer of the piece, Galuppi, if what he sees in his imagination is accurate. Like all questions in a dramatic monologue, these are rhetorical. It has already been pointed out that rhetorical questions in a dramatic monologue can differ. Because of the temporary boundary between the speaker and Galuppi, these questions are prototypically rhetorical since the speaker does not expect an answer from Galuppi's part. Another interpretation consists of seeing these questions as the rendering of Galuppi's situation through the words of the speaker. Then, it seems as if Galuppi has told the speaker about the setting when he was performing in Venice and the speaker is asking him if this was really the case and asking for a confirmation of Galuppi's words. This last interpretation is the most plausible one since Browning's persona concludes his rhetorical questions in stanza 4 with the address of Galuppi: 'do you say?' (line 12). This can be perfectly aligned with the addressing of the famous composer in the first line. Nevertheless, we have to take the poetical freedom into account while defending this interpretation since Browning made it look as if Galuppi and the speaker are separated by a significant temporal boundary. Therefore, the impossibility of their asking each other real questions adds to the defining of these rhetorical questions as stereotypical. However, if we take the temporal boundary between Galuppi and the speaker into consideration, the address 'do you say?' in line 12 points to the possibility of communicating through music and Galuppi's music would then be a form of communication between him and the person performing his work.

The content of these questions creates the following setting: Galuppi is sitting in a crowded room where people are partying. When he starts playing his clavichord, the room goes silent and listens to his music. In stanza 4¹⁰⁷, the speaker is asking

¹⁰⁷ 10 Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?

about the young people and how they lived from adventure to adventure. This can be perfectly aligned with Blackburn's (1967) description of Venice at the time when he states that '[s]he [Venice] was the "play city" of the world and her rich aristocracy had little occupation but a search for pleasure' (177). Browning's persona goes on in stanza 5¹⁰⁸ to describe the beauty of the ladies. This is a kind of metonymy because he singles out one lady to describe the beauty of the whole group. In this same stanza, he describes how people would stop with their activities and listen when Galuppi starts playing.

This neatly brings the reader to stanza 6¹⁰⁹ that contains some musical references to the toccata Galuppi has composed. Browning used some musical terms and attributed a negative association to all of them when he was talking about 'lesser thirds', 'sixths' and 'sevenths'. Catherine Schmidt-Jones explains in *Interval*¹¹⁰ that '[s]econds, thirds, sixths, and sevenths can be *major intervals* or *minor intervals*. The minor interval is always a half-step smaller than the major interval'. The 'lesser third' the speaker is referring to is the same as a minor third. Browning's persona is here talking about the musical composition of Galuppi's toccata in professional terms. Considering the gay setting, a ball or a mask, it is striking that the speaker refers negatively to all of these musical terms through the use of the adjectives: 'lesser', 'plaintive', 'diminished' and 'commiserating'.

In stanza 9¹¹¹, the speaker speaks in the name of the Venetian listeners of Galuppi, who praised him: 'Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay! I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!'" (lines 26 and 27). The listeners think positively of his music and even call him a 'master'.

11 Ball and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,

12 When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

¹⁰⁸ 13 Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,--

14 On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,

15 O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?

¹⁰⁹ 19 What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,

20 Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions - 'Must we die?'

21 Those commiserating sevenths - "Life might last! We can but try!

¹¹⁰ Schmidt-Jones Catherine. "Interval." Available at <http://cnx.org/content/m10867/latest/>.

Last updated 2 March 2007.

¹¹¹ 25 So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say!

26 "Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!

27 "I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

Death occurs as a theme in the following lines. The speaker contrasts the death of a great master as Galuppi with that of some, in his eyes, insignificant people who attended Galuppi's performance. As for the latter he describes how they lived and died: 'Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone, Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun' (lines 29 and 30). He describes these people's lives by means of a pleonasm: 'Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone'. He states that these people lived an insignificant life and were never able to put their stamp on the world. Since a pleonasm consists of inserting something superfluous, this is symbolical in this case because the speaker considers the lives of these people to be meaningless and superfluous, emphasizing this by the use of a pleonasm. Their meaningless death contrasts with the death of Galuppi. Blackburn (1967) summarizes this view on death by arguing that:

Galuppi's strenuous existence has fitted him for immortality, but Browning's elegy ends, as is often the case with this poet, on a question. What is the fate of men and women who have lived solely by temporal values and seem to bear no relevance to death? (178-179).

The impact of Galuppi's death is described in the following stanzas and is actually anticipated by the well chosen adjective 'tacitly' in line 30. If you interpret it in a figurative way, the conclusion will be that these people have died without the world ever really noticing. However, if you think of it in a literal way it is quite appropriate considering the continuation of the poem in which the speaker is talking about how Galuppi, even after his death, still affects his life through his music: 'In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every nerve' (line 33). This dead composer is still audible in the persona's life and therefore makes a difference. This becomes beautifully clear in stanza 12¹¹² in which the speaker compares Galuppi to a 'ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned' (line 34). Galuppi being the cricket and the burned house being Venice. The adjective 'ghostly' is an important one because it makes the comparison more real and clarifies even more that the speaker is

¹¹² 34 Yes, you like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:

35 "Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.

36 The soul, doubtless, is immortal - where a soul can be discerned.

referring to Galuppi, who died some time ago. The idea being that even though Venice has figuratively burnt down, Galuppi is sitting next to it playing his songs, just like a cricket that sits creaking next to a burning house. The decay and destruction of Venice did not stop his songs from being played to all eternity and this is also expressed in the idea of the soul being immortal if it can be discerned. Browning expanded this in stanza 13¹¹³ where his persona describes Galuppi's qualities ('mathematics', 'physics', 'geology') and deduces from them that his soul will become and already is immortal: "Butterflies may dread extinction, – you'll not die, it cannot be!" (line 39). Even though Galuppi died physically, he will never really leave this world because of the immortality of his soul and work. Browning was actually trying to get across the idea that if you can make a difference in the arts, you can make a difference in the world.

The speaker obviously did not like the way the young people acted throughout the scene of the ball where Galuppi played and thinks of these people as superficial and expresses this in stanza 14¹¹⁴. In his eyes, these people are 'merely born to bloom and drop' (line 40). They will have their fun during those parties and balls but in the end no one will remember them and their souls will vanish into oblivion. This is what he means by his question in line 42: "What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?". The 'kissing' is here used as a metonymy and stands for the balls in general. This is also linked to line 23: "Then, more kisses". Since these kisses are merely an image for the balls, line 42 questions how the souls of these people will survive if the balls end. In the speaker's eyes, they will not, they will be forgotten after leading this insignificant life that took them from 'adventure' (line 12) to adventure. This thought is expanded in the final stanza of the poem¹¹⁵ in which the repetition of 'Dust and ashes' (line 35 and 42) points out how the speaker thinks of these insignificant souls. They are reduced to dust and ashes whereas Galuppi's soul will survive eternity. The speaker ends his dramatic monologue by stating that he

¹¹³ 37 "Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
38 "Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
39 "Butterflies may dread extinction, – you'll not die, it cannot be!

¹¹⁴ 40 "As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop.
41 "Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
42 "What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

¹¹⁵ 43 "Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
44 Dear dead women, with such hair, too – what's become of all the gold
45 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

feels 'chilly and grown old' (line 45). Blackburn (1967) is talking about this final line when he states that '[f]inally, in the last short statement – 'I feel chilly and old' – he creates an intimacy between himself and the reader which binds his poem to a tense which is always present' (179). The chilly feeling can come from Galuppi's 'cold music' (line 33) or it may be caused by a cold feeling that takes over him when he realizes that his soul might also disappear into oblivion. This is why he adds that he feels that he has 'grown old' (line 45).

4.6. Childe Roland to The Dark Tower Came¹¹⁶

Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* was also published in his bundle *Men and women* in 1855. The title is directly derived from Shakespeare's play *King Lear* in which a character, Edgar, speaks the words that Browning will later use to entitle his poem with. Edgar ends act 3, scene 4 with the following words: 'Childe Rowland to the dark tower came'¹¹⁷. Browning took over Edgar's words including the hyperbaton which might have been used to place the protagonist (Childe Roland) and his eventual goal (the Dark Tower) close together. The utterance in Shakespeare's play must have triggered off something in Browning's mind which made him want to describe Roland's journey to this dark tower. The title refers to the content of the poem in stead of its main persona. Actually, it does contain the name of the protagonist and speaker of the poem but the entire title describes the content of the poem. Another important aspect of the title is the use of the word 'Childe'. This can be defined as 'an archaic term referring to a youth of noble birth or a youth in training to be a knight'¹¹⁸. Therefore, Roland is not yet a real knight but he is training to become one.

Formally, the poem is divided into 34 stanzas, each of them written in iambic pentameters and organised according to the same rhyme scheme: abbaab. This clearly shows Browning's poetical greatness again because the fact that he was restricted to a limited rhyme scheme, did not make him lose much quality. He often managed to get round this difficulty through the use of enjambment, hyperbaton and ellipsis and even turned this disadvantage into an advantage managing to construe

¹¹⁶ Cfr. Appendix F

¹¹⁷ <http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/kinglear/14/>

¹¹⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/111106/childe>

these stanzas in a very rhythmical way. This makes his poem sound like a song whose fluidity contrasts with the harsh content of the difficult journey Childe Roland is undertaking.

Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came may be considered a dramatic monologue and like most of these, it starts off in medias res. Apparently, Childe Roland encountered someone during his journey and this person is giving him some advice concerning his quest. Browning had his poem started right after this advice had been given, the first lines partially identifying the interlocutor: 'My first thought was, he lied in every word, That hoary cripple, with malicious eye' (lines 1 and 2). The interlocutor is first referred to in the third person and is then defined as a 'hoary cripple'. Another factor that immediately pops up is the speaker's disillusionment. Even though he is no knight yet, the childe's idealistic view on the world has already suffered some real damage and this gives the reader the impression that the speaker immediately seems to see the worst in people. The cripple is stamped as a liar before any certainty is provided about his information. The speaker goes on to give a physical description of the cripple man¹¹⁹, but in stead of an objective one, the reader is provided with a description of how this cripple is viewed by the speaker, who is being very suspicious and therefore depicts the cripple as the malign person that he thinks he is. The man is smiling, but Roland immediately derives from this that the cripple has difficulties suppressing a smile because he had just consciously misled him. It is even possible that the man is not cripple at all and Childe Roland would then use the word 'cripple' as an offensive term to denote his disapproval of the man who advised him.

That the speaker has lost his idealism becomes clear through the lack of believe in the goodness of men he exposes in line 7: 'What else should he be set for, with his staff?'. Because in his eyes, the cripple man can only be a malicious type and it never occurs to him that this man could be genuine and helpful, the speaker uses this rhetorical question which he expects to be answered with 'nothing'. He expresses this throughout the whole second stanza¹²⁰. According to Childe Roland,

¹¹⁹ 3 Askance to watch the working of his lie
4 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
5 Suppression of the glee, that pursed and scored
6 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

¹²⁰ 7 What else should he be set for, with his staff?

the cripple man derives pleasure from ensnaring 'all travellers who might find him posted there, And ask the road' (lines 9 and 10). This idea shows that Childe Roland does not think of himself as a single case, there must have been predecessors and the future will bring other travellers who will fall the same lot. According to him, this lot will lead them to death and he expresses this through the use of the words 'skull-like' (line 10) and 'epitaph' (line 11), both referring to death and mortality. The third stanza picks up this theme of the final journey of the childe and it turns out that he acquiesces in his approaching death which becomes clear in line 15 where he uses the word 'acquiescingly' and in line 18: 'So much as gladness that some end might be'. Childe Roland is just happy with the fact that there is an end in sight and whether this end involves reaching the Dark Tower or reaching death is secondary to him since he obviously has made peace with his fate.

The fourth stanza starts off with an expanded alliteration: 'For, what with my whole world-wide wandering' (line 19). This labial sound, being a relatively long one, emphasizes the toughness of and boredom throughout such a journey. The patience that one should have when undertaking such a quest is not only alluded to through the alliteration but also through the fact that Roland describes it as 'my search drawn out thro' years' (line 20), which shows that the speaker has been travelling for a long time before he starts this monologue, his journey has not been successful up until now. He started it with hope, but this has 'Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope With that obstreperous joy success would bring' (line 21). His hope is, just like he described his own state, virtually dead, it has turned into a ghost that would be unable to handle all the things that would come with success. The use of the word 'would' is important in this stanza because it shows that Childe Roland does not believe in the possibility of success in this quest at all. He is in a very pessimistic mood and it seems as if he continues his journey because of an unexplainable resignation. His quest is described in this dramatic monologue through the use of a beautiful Homeric simile in which the imagery of approaching death occurs again. The first part of the simile is a 'sick man very near to death' (line 25). Childe Roland

8 What, save to waylay his lies, ensnare
9 All travellers who might find him posted there,
10 And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
11 Would break, what crutch'gin write my epitaph
12 For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

uses this image of the dying man to clarify his own mental state. It has already been pointed out that he thinks he is heading for his own death but does not really seem to care. Therefore, he compares his own thoughts and feelings to those of a man who is experiencing his last hours. However, death is not seen as a final point but as a new beginning as it is stated that this dying man 'feels begin' (line 26). The fact that death does not bring an end to something and it is seen as the start of something new, would also explain the acquiescence from the part of Roland. Nevertheless, the dying man does not want pity from his friends and clearly states that 'no grieving can amend' (line 30). This makes it clear to the reader that the childe does not speak this monologue out of a desire for pity or sympathy. The sixth stanza¹²¹ is actually a quite harsh and pathetic one in which is explained how the dying man feels almost ashamed because he sees himself as a nuisance for his friends: 'He may not shame such tender love and stay' (line 36). The use of 'tender love' is ironic in this case since it refers to the previous lines. The ironic aspect lies in the description of the dubious emotional engagement of his friends who are merely preoccupied with the practical side of his death (room for his grave, a suiting day, properties), together with the mentioning of 'tender love'. The fact that his friends will lose a beloved one is reduced to a practical burden rather than an emotional cliff and if this is defined in terms of 'tender love' then the ironic part of the sentence becomes really clear. The last sentence of the sixth stanza points out that the dying man would feel ashamed if he stayed alive because of all the practical concerns his friends would have because of that. As has been mentioned, this is obviously intended in an ironic way. It is as if he says that the fact that his friends have taken into account all these practical matters that come with his death is a sign for their love for him and that the least he could do for his friends is leaving this earth to liberate them from these concerns. The second part of the homeric simile occurs in the seventh stanza and refers to childe Roland himself and his quest. He compares his quest to the agony of the man: 'Thus I had so long suffered in this quest' (line 37). Since all his predecessors failed in their search for the Dark Tower and it has often been prophesied that he would fail too, it

¹²¹ 31 While some discuss if near the other graves
32 Be room enough for this, and when a day
33 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
34 With care for the banners, scarves and staves;
35 And still the man hears all, and only craves
36 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

seemed best for him just to fail. He started his journey with a couple of companions who as a group were called 'The Band' (line 39) but they all failed somewhere along the line and this makes Roland want to quit because he questions his own abilities.

Nevertheless, he continues his quest and without saying a word ('quiet as despair' [line 43]) follows the cripple's advice¹²². In the eighth stanza¹²³, the speaker is also describing the setting in a way saying that the weather is really bad, described by Browning in his own witty way: 'All the day Had been a dreary one at best' (lines 45 and 46). As he walks further into the plain, he gets surrounded by the dim and this is described through a personification: 'and dim Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim Red leer to see the plain catch its estray' (lines 46, 47 and 48). The dim was setting in and with the setting of the sun, this created a red effect. Browning chose to personify the dim with the result that it receives the human ability of sight and is able to shoot a grim and can be looking at the plain catching 'its estray' (line 48). This is Childe Roland who is slowly disappearing in the plain and its environment. This idea is expanded in the ninth stanza¹²⁴ and that it surprised the traveller becomes clear in line 49: 'For mark!'. He really wants to involve his reader in this natural phenomenon describing how all around him the only thing he could see was plain and he refers to this surrounding: 'grey plain all round' (line 52). The adjective could either refer to the colour or to the barrenness and inanimateness of the plain. Since this plain seemed to have swallowed him entirely, he could do nothing but continue his journey: 'I might go on, nought else remained to do' (line 54).

Childe Roland goes on to describe this landscape he travelled through in the tenth stanza. This may be aligned with Thomas Blackburn (1967) who argues that 'Browning looks at Nature with an interest which resembles that of the zoologist and

¹²² This is stated in line 45: 'Into the path he pointed'.

¹²³ 43 So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
44 That hateful cripple, out of his highway
45 Into the path he pointed. All the day
46 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
47 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
48 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

¹²⁴ 49 For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
50 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
51 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
52 O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
53 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
54 I might go on; nought else remained to do.

botanist. What fascinates him and determines his imagery is the spawning vitality of the animal and vegetable world' (187). Browning personified a lot of natural elements throughout this poem and this makes these more vivid starting in line 56: 'Such starved ignoble nature'. Nature is starving, nature does not find the proper food supplies. He was trying to get across the inanimateness of the landscape again by mentioning the lack of natural nourishment and nutrients and consequently the fact that 'nothing throve' (line 56). Additionally, the barrenness of the land is expressed through a metaphor: 'a burr had been a treasure-trove' (line 60). Burr is known for its low standards in terms of surface, it grows everywhere. If Roland compares a burr in this plain with a treasure-trove, he means that even a burr would be very hard to find there. Nevertheless, this might be seen as an exaggeration to denote the poor condition of the landscape he found himself in. This is elaborated and in a way summarized in two lines in stanza 11: 'No! penury, inertness and grimace, In some strange sort, were the land's portion' (lines 61 and 62). In this same stanza, Browning gave a voice to this land. Whereas the first personification of nature came with the ability of sight¹²⁵, this one has to do with the ability of speech and nature seems to be addressing childe Roland. Obviously, it is the mind of Roland himself that is speaking, but Browning personified it and made nature utter these words and gave nature another human characteristic by stating that nature spoke these words 'peevishly' (line 63). This shows that she is not happy with the situation either and she expresses her inability to ameliorate the situation and that the end of the world is the only thing that can make this doomed place more attractive: 'I cannot help my case: "'Tis the Last judgment's fire must cure this place' (lines 64 and 65). Because of rhythmical reasons Browning used an ellipsis here by leaving out the word 'that'. The lost position this plain is in is underlined by the paradoxical view of the 'Last judgment's fire' as a liberating event.

The description of the natural elements of the plain goes further in the twelfth stanza¹²⁶ which alludes to the lack of greenness of the plain and the fact that nature

¹²⁵ Cfr. lines 46-48.

¹²⁶ 67 If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
 68 Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
 69 Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
 70 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
 71 All hope of greenness? 't is a brute must walk
 72 Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

herself is trying to nip every form of greenness of the landscape in the bud. Personification occurs again as a main trope. If there are some green thistle-stalks who are rising above the others, they are spontaneously chopped off because 'the bents Were jealous else' (lines 68 and 69). Another reference to the self-destruction of the greenness in nature occurs in lines 70 and 71: 'In the dock's harsh, swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk All hope of greenness?'. The dock is actually a green plant, but the 'holes and rents' (line 69) make it look darker and therefore Roland is describing it in terms of 'bruised as to baulk All hope of greenness'. When green is described in a natural setting, grass can impossibly be left out and therefore, in the thirteenth stanza, Browning started with a simile in which grass forms the first part: 'As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair In leprosy' (lines 73 and 74). To grasp this comparison, it is interesting to know that 'leprosy induces involuntary hair loss'¹²⁷ and the simile thus describes the lack of grass in the landscape. The comparison to leprosy again attributes to the negative image of the setting.

In the same stanza, the first living creature since he has left the cripple man occurs: 'One stiff blind horse' (line 76). The adjectives that describe the horse are not really alluding to its vivid state. On the contrary, 'stiff', 'blind' and 'stupefied' (line 77) refer to the fact that this first living creature encountered can hardly be regarded as alive. Childe Roland, from his part, sees this horse as the former 'devil's stud' (line 78). He anticipates the reader's question in the fourteenth stanza: 'Alive?' (line 79). Since there is no imagined interlocutor, this question can not be a repetition of an interactant's. The description of the horse comes with negative terms, as I mentioned earlier, and therefore, childe Roland anticipates the reader's question with reference to the real state of the horse. Browning's persona expresses his uncertainty on this part: 'he might be dead for aught I know' (line 79). The stanza continues with a description of the physical appearance of the horse: 'With that red gaunt and colloped neck a-strain, And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane' (lines 80 and 81). It obviously does not beam forth any kind of vivacity. Nevertheless, childe Roland, on the one hand, stands in awe for the size of the animal but on the other hand, the lack of liveliness compensates this and makes his feelings bend over to the negative and hateful side: 'Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe; I never saw a brute I hated so' (lines 82 and 83).

¹²⁷ http://www.medical-look.com/Skin_diseases/Leprosy.html

Then, Roland intercalates a moment to come to his senses. Browning got this across beautifully by means of a kind of metaphor: 'I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart' (line 85). Obviously, this would be physically impossible if you interpret this in the literal sense. Therefore, this ought to be understood metaphorically: the speaker is taking a moment to think about his life and how he will mentally convince himself to continue his journey. This contemplation of the knight in training is compared to the actions of a man that is about to start a fight: 'As a man calls for wine before he fights' (line 86). To calm himself down and to let the alcohol make him more courageous, a man who is about to fight would call for wine. This comparison is expanded in the next lines: 'I asked one draught of earlier, happy sights, Ere fitly I could hope to play my part' (lines 87 and 88). Here, the word 'draught' is used in a metaphorical way and childe Roland wants his happy memories to calm him down and give him the courage to continue his quest. Just like a draught of wine would calm down a man in battle, a 'draught of earlier, happier sights' would calm the childe down and convince him to persevere. Line 89 renders childe Roland's view on battle: 'Think first, fight afterwards---the soldier's art'. This may be seen as Browning's equivalent to the following proverb: look before you leap. The stanza ends with another reference to the imagery of the draught of one's memory: 'One taste of the old time sets all to rights' (line 90). His memory and the happy thoughts he connects to his past are able to calm childe Roland down. He is musing on two former companions of his, Cuthbert and Giles and dedicates a stanza on each of them (stanza 17 and 18). The memories that come with them become very vivid and visual: 'I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face' (line 92). He is seeing his friend with his inner eye. This vividness goes further in the next lines and reaches a climax in lines 94 and 95: 'Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold An arm in mine to fix me to the place'. He is thinking about his fellow and by doing this his friend's presence becomes almost tangible. The effect of these thoughts is also significant since Roland feels as if Cuthbert takes him by the hand to lead him to the Dark Tower. However, this feeling does not last for long as is described in line 96: 'Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold'. This memory of his friend sets his heart on fire for a moment but this extinguishes just as quickly. The same canvas is used in the next stanza, dealing with Giles who childe Roland sees with his inner eye standing there again, in which the childe starts off with a positive description but ends with a negative image. At first, Giles is described in terms of 'soul of honour' (line 97), 'frank'

(line 98), 'knighted' (line 98) and 'honest man' (line 99). However, the stanza ends with a negative identification of Giles: 'but the scene shifts' (line 100). It seems as if the image that popped up in childe Roland's head suddenly changes and the created negative image reaches its climax: 'Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!' (line 102). The negative memories make Roland appreciate his present more. This present is not an ideal one, but it is better than his past as he remembers it: 'Better this present than a past like that' (line 103). Therefore, he will leave his past rest and turn himself to the present situation: 'Back therefore to my darkening path again!' (line 104). While he is describing the dark scenery he is wandering through, a 'sudden little river' crosses his path literally. That he did not really see this coming is expressed by the use of the word 'sudden' but also by means of a simile in the next line: 'As unexpected as a serpent comes' (line 110). The rest of the stanza clarifies that 'little river' is definitely an understatement. In childe Roland's eyes, an appropriate river for the darkness would be a silent and calm one, whereas in this scenery, the river appears to be a very rough and wild one: 'No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms' (line 111). Browning used a lot of words that allude to the wildness of this river in the next three lines: 'frothed' (line 112), 'bath For the fiend's glowing hoof' (lines 112 and 113), 'wrath' (line 113), 'eddy' (line 114), 'bespate' (line 114), 'flakes' (line 114) and 'spumes' (line 114). To render the sound of the raging river the poet beautifully varied between the [s] and [p] sound in line 115: 'So petty yet so spiteful!'. Along this river Roland sees some trees whose actions are described by means of some personifications: 'alders kneeled' (line 116) and 'willows flung them headlong' (line 117). This reaches a culmination in line 118: 'a suicidal throng'. The trees are compared to a group of human beings who are prepared to commit suicide. Browning created the illusion of this river crossing the landscape like an all-destroying king with the trees as a bowing and kneeling audience for this passage. Nevertheless, the river, being the metaphorical king, does not seem to give any attention to this since it 'rolled by, deterred no whit' (line 120).

In the 21st stanza¹²⁸, Roland is describing how he crossed the river and was afraid to step on a corpse. He is using a spear to come into touch with the bottom of

¹²⁸ 121 Which, while I forded,---good saints, how I feared
 122 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
 123 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
 124 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!

the river. The 22nd stanza accounts for his arrival at the other bank: 'Glad was I when I reached the other bank' (line 127). He hoped to arrive at an other and thus more appealing land but this was all in vain: 'Now for a better country. Vain presage!' (line 128). This country seems to be even worse than the one on the other side of the river. He encounters 'Toads in a poisoned tank' (line 131), 'wild cats in a red-hot iron cage' (line 132), a 'fell cirque' (line 133) and 'horrid mews' (line 135). Browning inserted a reference to history when he compares the situation there with the one of the galley-slaves during the battle of Lepanto (1571): 'like galley-slaves the Turk pits for his pastime' (lines 137 and 138). Michael Novak (2006) is referring to this battle when he states in his *Remembering Lepanto, A battle not forgotten*¹²⁹ that '[t]housands of Venetians and others were slaughtered on the spot, or driven off in captivity for service on Turkish galleys or in Turkish harems'. This way Browning showed his readers that childe Roland should be set in times after the battle of Lepanto. Roland is talking in the next stanza about how he moved along in the landscape that does not seem to be getting any prettier and about how he encounters a 'harrow fit to real Men's bodies out like silk' (lines 141 and 142). He goes on with his description of the landscape and the scenery in the next stanzas. In stanza 25¹³⁰, Browning described the surface of the land Roland is passing through and therefore, childe Roland is talking about 'ground', 'wood', 'marsh', 'earth', 'rood', 'Bog', 'clay', 'rubble' and 'dearth'. He also refers to an oak that he encounters in the landscape and this oak turns out to represent all the negative features of the scenery: it is 'palsied' (line 154), has 'a cleft in him' (line 154) and is 'Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils' (156). In other words, the oak which normally could be seen as a sign of life because this type of tree is known for its very long life expectancy, is here

125 ---It may have been a water-rat I speared,
126 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

¹²⁹ Novak, Michael. "Remembering Lepanto, A battle not forgotten." Available at <http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=YWVhYWJmMDJINzQwZWZhYWVIM2FmNjE3MDY3MjZmZWQ=#more>. Last updated October 2006.

¹³⁰ 145 Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
146 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
147 Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
148 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
149 Changes and off he goes!) within a rood---
150 Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

associated with death and disease. This all adds up to the negative image of the scenery.

Childe Roland is getting frustrated because he does not seem to get any closer to his goal, the Dark Tower. This frustration is expressed in line 157: 'And just as far as ever from the end!'. He has been walking around for a long time and the end does not get in sight. He becomes desperate and nothing seems to help him find the right way to the Dark Tower: 'nought To point my footstep further!' (lines 158 and 159). This feeling can be perfectly aligned with Glennis Byron (2003) when she points out that:

Browning offers a grotesque, frightening and incomprehensible landscape, and offers no guidance as to what it might mean. With its intensely figurative language, this monologue places the reader in much the same relationship to the poem as Roland is placed to the landscape through which he travels, and the reader is consequently forced to enact much the same hopeless search for meaning (87).

However, at this point of frustration and despair, a sprinkle of hope pops up when he sees a 'great black bird' (160). It is ironic that a great black bird, described as being 'dragon-penned' (line 161) and thus has wings like a dragon, has to account for a moment of hope in this poem: 'perchance the guide I sought' (line 162). This guide makes him look up and notice that 'the plain had given place All round to mountains' (lines 163 and 164). However, Childe Roland quickly realizes that 'mountains' is actually a hyperbole in this case and expresses this in lines 165 and 166: 'mountains--with such name to grace Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view'. Because of the darkness, the surrounding by mountains surprised him and he does not see a clear way out: 'How to get from them was no clearer case' (line 168). Childe Roland describes in stanza 29¹³¹ how he gets the feeling of being trapped by nature, as if something closes behind him and he is captured between this and the mountains.

¹³¹ 169 Yet half I seemed to recognize some trick
170 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when---
171 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
172 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
173 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
174 As when a trap shuts---you're inside the den!

Browning created this through the use of some words that allude to a kind of entrapment: 'trick of mischief' (lines 169 and 170), 'a click as when a trap shuts' (lines 173 and 174) and 'you're inside the den!' (line 174).

All of a sudden he realizes that he has reached his goal: 'This was the place!' (line 176). He finds himself at a place where he was flanked by 'two hills on the right' (line 176) and 'to the left, a tall scalped mountain' (line 178). It suddenly all makes sense to him, he is sure of the fact that in the middle of these he will encounter the Dark Tower he was looking for. This tower is described by Roland and Jim Rockhill (2000) is talking about it when he states in his essay *Robert Browning's Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*¹³² that:

According to contemporary sources, Robert Browning was inspired to write his narrative poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" [...] based on a tower he had seen in Italy, a painting he had seen in France, the figure of an emaciated horse depicted on a tapestry in his own drawing room and Edgar's song in *King Lear*.

The horse and Edgar's song have already been looked at in this analysis, but the object of the quest, the tower itself turns out to be inspired on a tower Browning had seen in Italy and is described by Roland in more detail in the first lines of stanza 31¹³³. The fact that Browning saw this tower in Italy and talked in the poem about its being 'without counterpart' (line 188) does not necessarily mean that the childe's quest should be set in Italy. The universality of the poem forces the reader to read this without any spatial boundary in mind.

The climax of the poem, his blowing on his horn when he reached the Dark Tower, is preceded by two rather negative stanzas. Browning draws upon dark and lugubrious imagery: 'the dying sunset' (line 195), 'Now stab and end the creature'

¹³² Rockhill, Jim. "Robert Browning's *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*." Available at <http://www.violetbooks.com/REVIEWS/rockhill-browning.html>. Last updated in 2000.

¹³³ 186 What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
187 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
188 Built of brown stone, without a counter-part
189 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
190 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf
191 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

(line 198), 'lost adventurers' (line 201) and 'Lost lost! one moment knelled the woe of years' (line 204). The last two examples deal with his predecessors who also tried to reach the Dark Tower but died somewhere along the way. When childe Roland finally manages to reach this tower he dedicates this to all of those who perished trying: 'I saw them and I knew them all. And yet Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, And blew. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."' (lines 208, 209 and 210).

5. Conclusion

Since the distance and distinction between the speaker and the poet is an important characteristic of the dramatic monologue, the poet has to create this distance in one way or another. In the six poems analysed above, Browning managed to do this in different ways. Obviously, the persona he created is the main aspect to make the distinction between the speaker in the poem and the poet himself. However, since all of the poems contain a first person speaker, this distinction is not always that clear-cut since it makes it tempting for the reader to identify the speaker of the poem with the writer himself. To prevent the reader to give in to this temptation, the poet of a dramatic monologue has to give his/her reader some signs to make sure that the distance between poet and speaker is maintained. Browning did this in different ways in the six poems mentioned. All of these contribute to what Glennis Byron (2003) means when she states that 'in a poem like 'My Last Duchess', establishing in detail a world that is clearly not the poet's, the feint begins to approximate to fiction and no one would mistake it for the lyric voice' (14). The lyric voice would then be the voice of the poet and this would consequently not be mistaken with the speaker of the poem's voice. This 'world that is not the poet's' can be created in different kind of ways as has been briefly touched upon earlier. These different strategies, used by Browning in the six analysed poems, will be described underneath.

5.1. Persona

Since the distance between the speaker of the poem (the persona) and the poet is a crucial element in the dramatic monologue, this persona is an important aspect to investigate. Because of its poetical omnipresence it is obvious that every other sign of or contribution to the distance created between the speaker and the poet will have something to do with the created persona. It will become clear that Browning created all kinds of personas and that the distance between these and himself was not always established in the same way.

The analyses of the poems has already pointed at the different personae speaking in them but it might be useful to repeat them shortly. In *My Last Duchess*, Browning created a Renaissance Duke, namely the Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso II. In *Fra Lippo Lippi* the illusion is created that the reader is reading the written version of a monologue uttered by a fourteenth century monk. A twisted lover is relating about

how he killed his partner in *Porphyria's Lover*. In *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, Browning created a bishop who seems to be speaking some of his last words. *A Toccata of Galuppi's* provides the reader with an individual playing a piece of Galuppi and dreaming about the city of Venice in Galuppi's time. Finally, in *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, Childe Roland is talking about his difficult journey. In this poem, the persona Browning created takes on an other form than his previous speakers. Thomas Blackburn (1967) refers to Childe Roland in terms of 'that Everyman who is Childe Roland' (197). Therefore, the reader needs to see him as a universal individual, that is to say, he is a metaphor for every human being. This is what Blackburn (1967) means when he states that:

In *Childe Roland* we find his [Browning's] most startling use of landscape to create a sense of the mystery and labyrinthine complexity of the human psyche and the strange, often savage fauna which inhabit it. The poem describes a man's journey into the interior darkness of himself in order to confront that nexus of destructive energy which Jungians call the Shadow (193).

The imagery Browning used in this poem often refers to this idea of darkness. Browning described a lot of dark places and alluded in more than one way to the colour of black. These all have to do with the difficult inner journey each human being has to deal with. The quest Childe Roland is undertaking symbolizes this universal inner journey and this metaphorical use of the speaker and his quest does not help to establish a proper distinction between Browning and the speaker. There are cultural, temporal and other indications towards this distance, but the fact that Roland is actually an Everyman means that he also contains characteristics of Browning himself.

The distance between all of these characters and Browning himself is created through all kinds of strategies. The most important ones (title, spatial setting, temporal boundary and silent auditor) will be further investigated below.

5.2. Title

Browning chose his titles very carefully. This is clear through the fact that he for example changed *Porphyria* in *Porphyria's Lover* to make his title refer to the actual speaker. Alan Sinfield (1977) writes about the title of these poems in his *Dramatic Monologue* and argues that:

The title, perhaps, and other hints as we go along indicate that the speaker is not the poet and hence has something to do with fiction, but the first person mode makes an opposing claim for the real-life existence of the speaker on the reader's plane of actuality' (24).

These other hints will become clear later on, but the title appears to be an important feature of Browning's dramatic monologues. It is an indication of the distance between the speaker and the poet which is often confusing because of the first person mode. Looking at the six titles above this idea is supported in several cases.

My Last Duchess indicates the subject of the speaker's monologue and, in other words, does not refer to the speaker as a historical figure. This points out that this poem makes the distinction between its speaker and writer in an other way than through the title since the title does not coincide with the speaker. Nevertheless, the title does show in a way that the speaker is hardly to be mistaken with Browning himself since Browning was no Duke and therefore could not talk about 'my' last Duchess. However, this belongs to the cultural and temporal boundary that Browning set between him and the speaker.

Porphyria's Lover is a great example of how the title of a dramatic monologue adds to the distinction between the speaker and the poet. The initial title being *Porphyria*, it is obvious that Browning changed this because of the effect it has on his readers. The initial title only referred to the subject and the victim in the poem whereas the second title did refer to the speaker and thus adds to the distance between Browning and the speaker. Because of the cruelty in this poem, it was an important factor for Browning to make this distinction clear from the beginning. It is interesting to link this with Thomas Blackburn (1967) who states that:

[I]f Browning's poems about other men and women were not at one and the same time about himself, if a kind of union had not taken place between himself and the men and women he writes about so that they are both

themselves and indirect expressions of some aspect of Browning's personality, then the poems would lack vitality and general interest (188).

Since *Porphyria's Lover* does not lack vitality nor general interest, Blackburn is actually saying that some characteristics of this cruel man are also features present in Browning's personality. Obviously, the persona Browning created in this poem is a sick and horrible person but this does not mean that he can not have anything in common with Browning himself. Blackburn (1967) clarifies this in a way by pointing out that:

He [Browning] was also more aware of evil, of the shadow side of human nature than any poet of his age. No doubt he knew evil because he had experienced it within himself; he certainly knew the sterility and self-destructiveness of acute depression' (192).

Therefore, identifying Browning with *Porphyria's Lover* would be a crucial mistake, but this does not mean that they do not have anything in common.

With *Fra Lippo Lippi* Browning created the same effect on his readers as with *Porphyria's Lover*. He immediately distanced himself from the monk uttering the monologue. The title also provides the reader with the information that the speaker will belong to the clergy and this is an other factor in the distinction between the speaker and Browning. However, this has more to do with the cultural or social boundaries Browning sets in his poems.

The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church is a peculiar case since Browning both mentioned the speaker of the poem and the content of the poem in its title. Moreover, the specific place where the events will occur is also included. This way he is able to clarify again the fact that speaker and poet should not be mixed up. The title adds to this and even plays a very important role since it contains almost every aspect a dramatic monologue can draw upon to show this distinction to its readers: it includes the speaker of the poem and by merely stating that we are dealing with a 'bishop', Browning distanced himself from his created persona. Moreover, the place where the monologue was uttered is also mentioned and creates a special boundary between speaker and poet.

In *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, the title does not account in any way for the distance between the speaker and the poet. Browning's title does not indicate his speaker but gives the reader an idea of the content of the poem he or she is about to read. Therefore, he had to draw upon other elements to maintain this distance.

Finally, *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* can be compared to *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church* in terms of the title. It also contains the speaker of the poem, namely childe Roland and additionally, in a way, it renders the place where the events will occur. The main difference is that the bishop stays in Saint Praxed's church during his entire monologue whereas the Dark Tower is childe Roland's goal and final destination. In the latter poem, Browning was able to distance himself from the speaker of the monologue through the title because of the fact that he mentions the speaker's name in it. It even alludes to his social and military rank, namely his being a childe. This makes the distance between Browning and the speaker immediately clear.

5.3. Spatial Setting

Browning was writing for an English audience but he actually had a metaphorical crush on Italy. His first encounter with the Mediterranean country is described by C. H. Herford (2005) when he states in his *Robert Browning*¹³⁴ that 'in the April of the following year [1838], Browning embarked on a sudden but memorable trip to the South of Europe. It gave him his first glimpse of Italy' (27). Herford also points out that '[i]n the autumn of 1844 Browning made a second tour to Italy. [...] The journey quickened and enriched his Italian memories; and left many vivid traces in the poetry of the following years' (61). Because of this love for Italy, four of the six analysed poems are set in Italy: *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, *My Last Duchess* and *A Toccata of Galuppi's*.

The first poem, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, is set in Florence where Browning settled with his wife in 1847 which is pointed out by C. H. Herford (2005) when he argues that 'they settled towards the close of April, 1847, in furnished apartments in Florence, moving some four months later into the more permanent home which their presence was to render famous, the Palazzo (or "Casa") Guidi, just of the Piazza Pitti' (83).

¹³⁴ Herford, C.H. "Robert Browning." Kessinger Publishing, 2005.

Browning stayed 14 years in Florence but left when his wife died. C.H. Herford (2005) describes this and points out that '[b]efore the end of June in the following year [1861] Mrs. Browning died, and Browning presently left Florence for ever' (169). Thus, based on the mere setting of the poem, the reader could not easily distinguish between Browning and Fra Lippo Lippi since they both can be situated in the city of Florence. Therefore, Browning had to draw upon other signs to point out the distance between himself as a poet and the persona he created in his poem to this readers.

In *The Bishop orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, the setting is already mentioned in the title. However, Browning anglicised the name of the church to make his readers more familiar with the title of the poem. The church Browning means is the Basilica of Santa Prassede in Rome. C.H. Herford (2005) writes about the Brownings that 'after 1853 they repeatedly wintered in Rome' (86). Browning was thus familiar with the city of Rome. Nevertheless, the title of this poem describes the events that will take place and makes the distinction between speaker and poet clear from the start. This poem will deal with a bishop who orders a tomb, the fact that this is set in Rome, where Browning spent some of his winters does not blur this distinction between speaker and poet.

In *My Last Duchess* the setting where the poem takes place nor the name of the created persona is rendered directly. However, it turns out to be a monologue of the fifth Duke of Ferrara, Alfonso II, and therefore, we can set it in Italy again, although Browning never mentioned this as such and the poem itself never really reveals the name of the speaker, let alone the setting of the poem. On the one hand, this would make it more confusing for the reader to make the proper distinction between speaker and poet. But the world of the Duke described in this poem obviously differs in a whole lot of aspects from Browning's world.

In terms of setting, *A Toccata of Galuppi's* is a very interesting poem. Whereas the speaker can be located in England since he states that he 'was never out of England' (line 9), biographical information of Galuppi¹³⁵ teaches us that he lived in Italy. Therefore, a spatial boundary is created between Galuppi and the speaker of the poem but this does not account for the distance between Browning and the speaker. The main reason to be able to speak about a distinction between Browning and the speaker lies in the line mentioned above: 'I was never out of England'. It was

¹³⁵ Cfr. Pages 50 and 51.

commonly known that Browning spent a great part of his life abroad and therefore he would never say that he was never out of England.

As far as setting is concerned, *Porphyria's Lover* is undetermined. This poem could be set anywhere in the world since there are no specific place indications. These are not present in *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* either. This poem deals with a very particular landscape but it is never really mentioned where the reader should locate this. However, the fact that the journey through the dark scenery is a kind of metaphor for the mental obstacles a human being has to deal with during his life, makes it possible that the omnipresent darkness is the main indication of the landscape. It would be of no importance where the poem is set exactly, but the fact that it is a bare and dark setting does form a significant attribution to the poem.

5.4. Temporal Boundary

Alan Sinfield is talking about means to establish the distinction between the speaker and the poet and refers to the fact that circumstances play an important role. He states that '[i]f there is a heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail which establishes for the speaker a world which we know is not the poet's, then the feint begins to approximate to fiction' (25). The heaviness of this apparatus differs from poem to poem but the circumstantial details are mostly present. One aspect of these details lies in the time setting of the poem compared to Browning's own time. This temporal boundary is very closely linked with the aspect of the persona because of the fact that a person and its historical setting are unextricably bound up with each other. As a matter of fact, the same goes for its spatial setting.

In the analysed poems, the temporal boundary between the poet and the speaker is not always clear. Some of Browning's poems are set in a different time setting than his whereas others are dealing with Browning's time or are undefined in terms of time. Obviously the first group establishes a clearer distinction between speaker and poet since the speaker is set in an other time setting than the poet. That this is closely linked with the concept of the persona becomes clear through poems like *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *My Last Duchess* and *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*. The first two are obviously set in times before Browning's since the speaker is twice a historical figure, Fra Lippo Lippi himself and the Duke of Ferrara respectively. *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came* is set in earlier times than the poet's and this is clear

through the social title Roland brings about. The concept of the childe is one of times before Browning. Additionally, Roland's reference to the battle of Lepanto (1571) in the poem is the only real temporal indication present and shows the readers that he should be set in times after 1571. On the other hand, this poem comes with a universal overtone because of its theme, dealing with the mental journey every human being of every time has to undertake.

In *Porphyria's Lover*, *A Toccata of Galuppi's* and *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church* there is no explicit time reference. The time setting is undefined in these poems and this creates a possible confusion with reference to the distinction between the poet and the speaker. Because of the fact that there is no specific indication of time, it is plausible for the reader to assume that the poet is the speaker, if it weren't for the other indications that clarify the distance between the two in the dramatic monologue.

5.5. Silent Auditor

The relationship between the speaker and the silent auditor is an important feature in the genre of the dramatic monologue. Sinfield (1977) slightly touches this through his first definition of the genre in which he mentions the need for 'some dramatic interaction between speaker and auditor' (3). To align this with the need for signs that indicate the distinction between the speaker and the poet he elaborates this further in his *Dramatic Monologue*. He argues that '[i]n dramatic monologue, [...] the silent auditor tends to tilt the feint towards fiction because it provides more evidence that the speaker lives in a world of his own' (26). This means that the poet might be able to show the reader that he or she is reading a fictional work through using a silent auditor that interacts in some sort of way with the persona of the poem. This interaction becomes clear by means of some utterances from the part of the persona speaking in the dramatic monologue. This is what Sinfield (1977) means when he states that 'it is useful to have another person present because he acts as a catalyst, obliging the speaker to respond to an immediate challenge, but the poem must not develop into dialogue because that would destroy the feint' (26). If the speaker would really start to talk dialogically with the other person present, this would destroy the illusion of the fictional character in the dramatic monologue. Glennis Byron (2005) also touches this important aspect when she states in her *Dramatic*

Monologue that '[m]ost Victorian dramatic monologues feature an auditor who must, in order for the monologue not to slide into dialogue, remain silent, or at least unheard by the reader, since interventions and responses are sometimes implied by the speaker's words' (20).

In *My Last Duchess*, this silent auditor is certainly present in the form of the envoy. Nevertheless, there are no real indications of him having addressed the Duke in some kind of way. His presence is made clear through the fact that the Duke often addresses him with 'sir' and two other significant lines: 'Will 't please you sit and look at her?' (line 5) and 'Will 't please you rise?' (line 47). These lines, together with the forms of address, are an indication to the reader that the Duke is not talking to himself but that there is another person present. Glennis Byron (2003) affirms this when she states that '[w]hile only the duke speaks, interplay between speaker and auditor is clearly indicated: the duke's words frequently reveal that he is responding to comments made by the envoy' (9).

Porphyria's Lover is a difficult poem to link with the presence of a silent auditor. Obviously, a dead Porphyria is present during the utterance of the monologue but it does not seem as if the speaker is directly addressing her. He talks about her in the third person and thus does not consider her as an interlocutor.

In *Fra Lippo Lippi* the presence of a silent auditor is very clear throughout the poem. The clearest example of Fra Lippo Lippi referring to this auditor probably occurs in line 14 where Fra Lippo Lippi repeats a question the city guards asked him: 'Who am I?'. The city guards obviously asked him to identify himself but Browning can not render this question directly because this would turn the monologue into a dialogue.

In *The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church*, the presence of the bishop's sons/nephews is omnipresent. The main reason for this is the fact that the bishop needs to depend on them to fulfil his final wish, namely being buried in the tomb of his dreams and this way outdo Gandolf.

A Toccata of Galuppi's is an interesting poem in terms of this silent auditor too. The speaker does not address a real and present interlocutor but does seem to be communicating with Galuppi while he is performing a play of his. Browning gave us the impression that Galuppi is a direct auditor of the speaker of the poem by using three words: 'do you say?' (line 12). This shows that the speaker is in a way repeating the words of Galuppi. Nevertheless, the poem makes clear that the

speaker can not be addressing Galuppi in a direct way because of the temporal and spatial boundary between the two.

In *Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came*, the same situation occurs as in *Porphyria's Lover*. That is to say, the speaker does not address anyone and does not refer to the presence of a silent auditor.

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Appendixes

Appendix A: My Last Duchess

1 That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
2 Looking as if she were alive. I call
3 That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
4 Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
5 Will 't please you sit and look at her? I said
6 "Frà Pandolf" by design, for never read
7 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
8 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
9 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
10 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
11 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
12 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
13 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
14 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
15 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
16 Frà Pandolf chanced to say, "Her mantle laps
17 Over my Lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
18 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
19 Half-flush that dies along her throat"; such stuff
20 Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough
21 For calling up that spot of joy. She had
22 A heart . . . how shall I say? . . . too soon made glad,
23 Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er
24 She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
25 Sir, 'twas all one! My favour at her breast,
26 The dropping of the daylight in the West,
27 The bough of cherries some officious fool
28 Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
29 She rode with round the terrace--all and each
30 Would draw from her alike the approving speech,
31 Or blush, at least. She thanked men,--good; but thanked
32 Somehow . . . I know not how . . . as if she ranked
33 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
34 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
35 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
36 In speech--(which I have not)--to make your will
37 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
38 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
39 Or there exceed the mark"--and if she let
40 Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
41 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
42 --E'en then would be some stooping; and I chuse
43 Never to stoop. Oh, sir, she smiled, no doubt,
44 Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
45 Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;
46 Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

47 As if alive. Will 't please you rise? We'll meet
48 The company below, then. I repeat,
49 The Count your Master's known munificence
50 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
51 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
52 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
53 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
54 Together down, Sir! Notice Neptune, though,
55 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
56 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

Appendix B: Fra Lippo Lippi

1 I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
2 You need not clap your torches to my face.
3 Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!
4 What, 'tis past midnight, and you go the rounds,
5 And here you catch me at an alley's end
6 Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
7 The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
8 Do,--harry out, if you must show your zeal,
9 Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
10 And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,
11 *Weke, weke*, that's crept to keep him company!
12 Aha, you know your betters! Then, you'll take
13 Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
14 And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
15 Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
16 Three streets off--he's a certain . . . how d'ye call?
17 Master--a ...Cosimo of the Medici,
18 I' the house that caps the corner. Boh! you were best!
19 Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
20 How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
21 But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
22 Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
23 Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
24 And count fair price what comes into their net?
25 He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
26 Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
27 Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hang-dogs go
28 Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
29 Of the munificent House that harbours me
30 (And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
31 And all's come square again. I'd like his face--
32 His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
33 With the pike and lantern,--for the slave that holds
34 John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
35 With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
36 And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!

37 It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
38 A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
39 Yes, I'm the painter, since you style me so.
40 What, brother Lippo's doings, up and down,
41 You know them and they take you? like enough!
42 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye--
43 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
44 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
45 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
46 To roam the town and sing out carnival,
47 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
48 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
49 And saints again. I could not paint all night--
50 Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
51 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
52 A sweep of lute strings, laughs, and whiffs of song, --
53 *Flower o' the broom,*
54 *Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!*
55 *Flower o' the quince,*
56 *I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?*
57 *Flower o' the thyme--and so on. Round they went.*
58 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
59 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,--three slim shapes,
60 And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
61 That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
62 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
63 All the bed-furniture--a dozen knots,
64 There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
65 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
66 And after them. I came up with the fun
67 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,--
68 *Flower o' the rose,*
69 *If I've been merry, what matter who knows?*
70 And so as I was stealing back again
71 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
72 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
73 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
74 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
75 You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
76 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head--
77 Mine's shaved--a monk, you say--the sting 's in that!
78 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
79 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
80 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
81 I was a baby when my mother died
82 And father died and left me in the street.
83 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
84 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
85 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
86 My stomach being empty as your hat,

87 The wind doubled me up and down I went.
88 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
89 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
90 And so along the wall, over the bridge,
91 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
92 While I stood munching my first bread that month:
93 "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
94 Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,--
95 "To quit this very miserable world?
96 Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;
97 By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
98 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
99 Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
100 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
101 Have given their hearts to--all at eight years old.
102 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
103 'Twas not for nothing--the good bellyful,
104 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
105 And day-long blessed idleness beside!
106 "Let's see what the urchin's fit for"--that came next.
107 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
108 Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
109 Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
110 *Flower o' the clove.*
111 *All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!*
112 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
113 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
114 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
115 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
116 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,--
117 Which gentleman processional and fine,
118 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
119 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
120 The droppings of the wax to sell again,
121 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,--
122 How say I?--nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
123 His bone from the heap of offal in the street,--
124 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
125 He learns the look of things, and none the less
126 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
127 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
128 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
129 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
130 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
131 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
132 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
133 And made a string of pictures of the world
134 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
135 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
136 "Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d'ye say?"

137 In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
138 What if at last we get our man of parts,
139 We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
140 And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
141 And put the front on it that ought to be!"
142 And hereupon he bade me daub away.
143 Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
144 Never was such prompt disembodying.
145 First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
146 I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
147 From good old gossips waiting to confess
148 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,--
149 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
150 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
151 With the little children round him in a row
152 Of admiration, half for his beard and half
153 For that white anger of his victim's son
154 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
155 Signing himself with the other because of Christ
156 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
157 After the passion of a thousand years)
158 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
159 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
160 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
161 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
162 (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
163 I painted all, then cried " `T#is ask and have;
164 Choose, for more's ready!"--laid the ladder flat,
165 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
166 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
167 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
168 Being simple bodies,--"That's the very man!
169 Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
170 That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
171 To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
172 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd;
173 Their betters took their turn to see and say:
174 The Prior and the learned pulled a face
175 And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
176 Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
177 Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
178 As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
179 Your business is not to catch men with show,
180 With homage to the perishable clay,
181 But lift them over it, ignore it all,
182 Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
183 Your business is to paint the souls of men--
184 Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
185 It's vapour done up like a new-born babe--
186 (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)

187 It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
188 Give us no more of body than shows soul!
189 Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
190 That sets us praising--why not stop with him?
191 Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
192 With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
193 Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
194 Rub all out, try at it a second time.
195 Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
196 She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,--
197 Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
198 Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
199 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
200 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
201 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
202 When what you put for yellow's simply black,
203 And any sort of meaning looks intense
204 When all beside itself means and looks nought.
205 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
206 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
207 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
208 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
209 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint--is it so pretty
210 You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
211 Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
212 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
213 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
214 And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?
215 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all--
216 (I never saw it--put the case the same--)
217 If you get simple beauty and nought else,
218 You get about the best thing God invents:
219 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
220 Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
221 "Rub all out!" Well, well, there's my life, in short,
222 And so the thing has gone on ever since.
223 I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
224 You should not take a fellow eight years old
225 And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
226 I'm my own master, paint now as I please--
227 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
228 Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front--
229 Those great rings serve more purposes than just
230 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
231 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
232 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
233 The heads shake still--"It's art's decline, my son!
234 You're not of the true painters, great and old;
235 Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;
236 Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:

237 Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
238 *Flower o' the pine,*
239 *You keep your mistr ... manners, and I'll stick to mine!*
240 I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
241 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
242 They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
243 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
244 To please them--sometimes do and sometimes don't;
245 For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
246 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints--
247 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world--
248 *(Flower o' the peach*
249 *Death for us all, and his own life for each!)*
250 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
251 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
252 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
253 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
254 In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
255 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
256 Although the miller does not preach to him
257 The only good of grass is to make chaff.
258 What would men have? Do they like grass or no--
259 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
260 Settled for ever one way. As it is,
261 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
262 You don't like what you only like too much,
263 You do like what, if given you at your word,
264 You find abundantly detestable.
265 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
266 I always see the garden and God there
267 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
268 The value and significance of flesh,
269 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

270 You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.
271 But see, now--why, I see as certainly
272 As that the morning-star's about to shine,
273 What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
274 Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
275 Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
276 His name is Guidi--he'll not mind the monks--
277 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk--
278 He picks my practice up--he'll paint apace.
279 I hope so--though I never live so long,
280 I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
281 You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
282 However, you're my man, you've seen the world
283 --The beauty and the wonder and the power,
284 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
285 Changes, surprises,--and God made it all!

286 --For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
287 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
288 The mountain round it and the sky above,
289 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
290 These are the frame to? What's it all about?
291 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
292 Wondered at? oh, this last of course!--you say.
293 But why not do as well as say,--paint these
294 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
295 God's works--paint any one, and count it crime
296 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
297 Are here already; nature is complete:
298 Suppose you reproduce her--(which you can't)
299 There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
300 For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
301 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
302 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
303 And so they are better, painted--better to us,
304 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
305 God uses us to help each other so,
306 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
307 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
308 And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
309 If I drew higher things with the same truth!
310 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
311 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
312 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
313 And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
314 Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
315 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.
316 "Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
317 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
318 It does not say to folk--remember matins,
319 Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
320 What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
321 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
322 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
323 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
324 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
325 "How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?"
326 I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns--
327 "Already not one phiz of your three slaves
328 Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
329 But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
330 The pious people have so eased their own
331 With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
332 We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
333 Expect another job this time next year,
334 For pity and religion grow i' the crowd--
335 Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

336 --That is--you'll not mistake an idle word
337 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
338 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
339 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
340 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
341 It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
342 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
343 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
344 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
345 ... There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
346 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
347 They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
348 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
349 Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
350 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
351 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
352 When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
353 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two--
354 Saint John' because he saves the Florentines,
355 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
356 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
357 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
358 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
359 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
360 Secured at their devotion, up shall come
361 Out of a corner when you least expect,
362 As one by a dark stair into a great light,
363 Music and talking, who but Lippo! !!--
364 Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck--I'm the man!
365 Back I shrink--what is this I see and hear?
366 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
367 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
368 I, in this presence, this pure company!
369 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
370 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
371 Forward, puts out a soft palm--"Not so fast!"
372 --Addresses the celestial presence, "nay--
373 He made you and devised you, after all,
374 Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw--
375 His camel-hair make up a painting brush?
376 We come to brother Lippo for all that,
377 *Iste perfecit opus!* So, all smile--
378 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
379 Under the cover of a hundred wings
380 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
381 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
382 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
383 The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
384 To some safe bench behind, not letting go

385 The palm of her, the little lily thing
386 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
387 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
388 And so all's saved for me, and for the church
389 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
390 Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
391 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
392 Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

Appendix C: Porphyria's Lover

1 The rain set early in to-night,
2 The sullen wind was soon awake,
3 It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
4 And did its worst to vex the lake:
5 I listened with heart fit to break.
6 When glided in Porphyria; straight
7 She shut the cold out and the storm,
8 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
9 Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
10 Which done, she rose, and from her form
11 Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
12 And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
13 Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
14 And, last, she sat down by my side
15 And called me. When no voice replied,
16 She put my arm about her waist,
17 And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
18 And all her yellow hair displaced,
19 And, stooping, made my cheek lie there,
20 And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,
21 Murmuring how she loved me --- she
22 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
23 To set its struggling passion free
24 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
25 And give herself to me for ever.
26 But passion sometimes would prevail,
27 Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
28 A sudden thought of one so pale
29 For love of her, and all in vain:
30 So, she was come through wind and rain.
31 Be sure I looked up at her eyes
32 Happy and proud; at last I knew
33 Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
34 Made my heart swell, and still it grew
35 While I debated what to do.
36 That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
37 Perfectly pure and good: I found
38 A thing to do, and all her hair

39 In one long yellow string I wound
40 Three times her little throat around,
41 And strangled her. No pain felt she;
42 I am quite sure she felt no pain.
43 As a shut bud that holds a bee,
44 I warily oped her lids: again
45 Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.
46 And I untightened next the tress
47 About her neck; her cheek once more
48 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:
49 I propped her head up as before,
50 Only, this time my shoulder bore
51 Her head, which droops upon it still:
52 The smiling rosy little head,
53 So glad it has its utmost will,
54 That all it scorned at once is fled,
55 And I, its love, am gained instead!
56 Porphyria's love: she guessed not how
57 Her darling one wish would be heard.
58 And thus we sit together now,
59 And all night long we have not stirred,
60 And yet God has not said a word!

Appendix D: The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church

1 Vanity, saith the preacher, vanity!
2 Draw round my bed: is Anselm keeping back?
3 Nephews--sons mine . . . ah God, I know not! Well--
4 She, men would have to be your mother once,
5 Old Gandolf envied me, so fair she was!
6 What's done is done, and she is dead beside,
7 Dead long ago, and I am Bishop since,
8 And as she died so must we die ourselves,
9 And thence ye may perceive the world's a dream.
10 Life, how and what is it? As here I lie
11 In this state-chamber, dying by degrees,
12 Hours and long hours in the dead night, I ask
13 "Do I live, am I dead?" Peace, peace seems all.
14 Saint Praxed's ever was the church for peace;
15 And so, about this tomb of mine. I fought
16 With tooth and nail to save my niche, ye know:
17 --Old Gandolf cozened me, despite my care;
18 Shrewd was that snatch from out the corner South
19 He graced his carrion with, God curse the same!
20 Yet still my niche is not so cramped but thence
21 One sees the pulpit o' the epistle-side,
22 And somewhat of the choir, those silent seats,
23 And up into the aery dome where live
24 The angels, and a sunbeam's sure to lurk:

25 And I shall fill my slab of basalt there,
26 And 'neath my tabernacle take my rest,
27 With those nine columns round me, two and two,
28 The odd one at my feet where Anselm stands:
29 Peach-blossom marble all, the rare, the ripe
30 As fresh-poured red wine of a mighty pulse.
31 --Old Gandolf with his paltry onion-stone,
32 Put me where I may look at him! True peach,
33 Rosy and flawless: how I earned the prize!
34 Draw close: that conflagration of my church
35 --What then? So much was saved if aught were missed!
36 My sons, ye would not be my death? Go dig
37 The white-grape vineyard where the oil-press stood,
38 Drop water gently till the surface sink,
39 And if ye find . . . Ah God, I know not, I! ...
40 Bedded in store of rotten fig-leaves soft,
41 And corded up in a tight olive-frail,
42 Some lump, ah God, of *lapis lazuli*,
43 Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
44 Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast ...
45 Sons, all have I bequeathed you, villas, all,
46 That brave Frascati villa with its bath,
47 So, let the blue lump poise between my knees,
48 Like God the Father's globe on both His hands
49 Ye worship in the Jesu Church so gay,
50 For Gandolf shall not choose but see and burst!
51 Swift as a weaver's shuttle fleet our years:
52 Man goeth to the grave, and where is he?
53 Did I say basalt for my slab, sons? Black--
54 'Twas ever antique-black I meant! How else
55 Shall ye contrast my frieze to come beneath?
56 The bas-relief in bronze ye promised me,
57 Those Pans and Nymphs ye wot of, and perchance
58 Some tripod, thyrsus, with a vase or so,
59 The Saviour at his sermon on the mount,
60 Saint Praxed in a glory, and one Pan
61 Ready to twitch the Nymph's last garment off,
62 And Moses with the tables . . . but I know
63 Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
64 Child of my bowels, Anselm? Ah, ye hope
65 To revel down my villas while I gasp
66 Bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy travertine
67 Which Gandolf from his tomb-top chuckles at!
68 Nay, boys, ye love me--all of jasper, then!
69 'Tis jasper ye stand pledged to, lest I grieve.
70 My bath must needs be left behind, alas!
71 One block, pure green as a pistachio-nut,
72 There's plenty jasper somewhere in the world--
73 And have I not Saint Praxed's ear to pray
74 Horses for ye, and brown Greek manuscripts,

75 And mistresses with great smooth marbly limbs?
76 --That's if ye carve my epitaph aright,
77 Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word,
78 No gaudy ware like Gandolf's second line--
79 Tully, my masters? Ulpian serves his need!
80 And then how I shall lie through centuries,
81 And hear the blessed mutter of the mass,
82 And see God made and eaten all day long,
83 And feel the steady candle-flame, and taste
84 Good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke!
85 For as I lie here, hours of the dead night,
86 Dying in state and by such slow degrees,
87 I fold my arms as if they clasped a crook,
88 And stretch my feet forth straight as stone can point,
89 And let the bedclothes, for a mortcloth, drop
90 Into great laps and folds of sculptor's-work:
91 And as yon tapers dwindle, and strange thoughts
92 Grow, with a certain humming in my ears,
93 About the life before I lived this life,
94 And this life too, popes, cardinals and priests,
95 Saint Praxed at his sermon on the mount,
96 Your tall pale mother with her talking eyes,
97 And new-found agate urns as fresh as day,
98 And marble's language, Latin pure, discreet,
99 --Aha, ELUCESCEBAT quoth our friend?
100 No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
101 Evil and brief hath been my pilgrimage.
102 All *lapis*, all, sons! Else I give the Pope
103 My villas! Will ye ever eat my heart?
104 Ever your eyes were as a lizard's quick,
105 They glitter like your mother's for my soul,
106 Or ye would heighten my impoverished frieze,
107 Piece out its starved design, and fill my vase
108 With grapes, and add a vizor and a Term,
109 And to the tripod ye would tie a lynx
110 That in his struggle throws the thyrsus down,
111 To comfort me on my entablature
112 Whereon I am to lie till I must ask
113 "Do I live, am I dead?" There, leave me, there!
114 For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
115 To death--ye wish it--God, ye wish it! Stone--
116 Gritstone, a-crumble! Clammy squares which sweat
117 As if the corpse they keep were oozing through--
118 And no more *lapis* to delight the world!
119 Well, go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
120 But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
121 --Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
122 And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
123 That I may watch at leisure if he leers--
124 Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,

125 As still he envied me, so fair she was!

Appendix E: A Toccata of Galuppi's

I

1 Oh Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to find!
2 I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
3 But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

II

4 Here you come with your old music, and here's all the good it brings.
5 What, they lived once thus at Venice where the merchants were the kings,
6 Where Saint Mark's is, where the Doges used to wed the sea with rings?

III

7 Ay, because the sea's the street there; and 'tis arched by . . . what you call
8 . . . Shylock's bridge with houses on it, where they kept the carnival:
9 I was never out of England--it's as if I saw it all.

IV

10 Did young people take their pleasure when the sea was warm in May?
11 Balls and masks begun at midnight, burning ever to mid-day,
12 When they made up fresh adventures for the morrow, do you say?

V

13 Was a lady such a lady, cheeks so round and lips so red,--
14 On her neck the small face buoyant, like a bell-flower on its bed,
15 O'er the breast's superb abundance where a man might base his head?

VI

16 Well, and it was graceful of them--they'd break talk off and afford
17 --She, to bite her mask's black velvet--he, to finger on his sword,
18 While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

VII

19 What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh,
20 Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions--"Must we
die?"
21 Those commiserating sevenths--"Life might last! we can but try!

VIII

22 "Were you happy?" --"Yes."--"And are you still as happy?"--"Yes. And
you?"
23 --"Then, more kisses!"--"Did I stop them, when a million seemed so few?"
24 Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

IX

25 So, an octave struck the answer. Oh, they praised you, I dare say!
26 "Brave Galuppi! that was music! good alike at grave and gay!

27 "I can always leave off talking when I hear a master play!"

X

28 Then they left you for their pleasure: till in due time, one by one,
29 Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as well undone,
30 Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never see the sun.

XI

31 But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor swerve,
32 While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
33 In you come with your cold music till I creep thro' every nerve.

XII

34 Yes, you, like a ghostly cricket, creaking where a house was burned:
35 "Dust and ashes, dead and done with, Venice spent what Venice earned.
36 "The soul, doubtless, is immortal--where a soul can be discerned.

XIII

37 "Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology,
38 "Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree;
39 "Butterflies may dread extinction,--you'll not die, it cannot be!

XIV

40 "As for Venice and her people, merely born to bloom and drop,
41 "Here on earth they bore their fruitage, mirth and folly were the crop:
42 "What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?

XV

43 "Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
44 Dear dead women, with such hair, too--what's become of all the gold
45 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.

Appendix F: Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came

1 My first thought was, he lied in every word,
2 That hoary cripple, with malicious eye
3 Askance to watch the working of his lie
4 On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
5 Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
6 Its edge, at one more victim gained thereby.

7 What else should he be set for, with his staff?
8 What, save to waylay with his lies, ensnare
9 All travellers who might find him posted there,
10 And ask the road? I guessed what skull-like laugh
11 Would break, what crutch 'gin write my epitaph
12 For pastime in the dusty thoroughfare,

13 If at his counsel I should turn aside

14 Into that ominous tract which, all agree,
15 Hides the Dark Tower. Yet acquiescingly
16 I did turn as he pointed: neither pride
17 Nor hope rekindling at the end descried,
18 So much as gladness that some end might be.

19 For, what with my whole world-wide wandering,
20 What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope
21 Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope
22 With that obstreperous joy success would bring,
23 I hardly tried now to rebuke the spring
24 My heart made, finding failure in its scope.

25 As when a sick man very near to death
26 Seems dead indeed, and feels begin and end
27 The tears and takes the farewell of each friend,
28 And hears one bid the other go, draw breath
29 Freelier outside ("since all is o'er," he saith,
30 "And the blow fallen no grieving can amend";)

31 While some discuss if near the other graves
32 Be room enough for this, and when a day
33 Suits best for carrying the corpse away,
34 With care about the banners, scarves and staves:
35 And still the man hears all, and only craves
36 He may not shame such tender love and stay.

37 Thus, I had so long suffered in this quest,
38 Heard failure prophesied so oft, been writ
39 So many times among "The Band"--to wit,
40 The knights who to the Dark Tower's search addressed
41 Their steps--that just to fail as they, seemed best,
42 And all the doubt was now--should I be fit?

43 So, quiet as despair, I turned from him,
44 That hateful cripple, out of his highway
45 Into the path he pointed. All the day
46 Had been a dreary one at best, and dim
47 Was settling to its close, yet shot one grim
48 Red leer to see the plain catch its estray.

49 For mark! no sooner was I fairly found
50 Pledged to the plain, after a pace or two,
51 Than, pausing to throw backward a last view
52 O'er the safe road, 'twas gone; grey plain all round:
53 Nothing but plain to the horizon's bound.
54 I might go on; nought else remained to do.

55 So, on I went. I think I never saw
56 Such starved ignoble nature; nothing throve:

57 For flowers--as well expect a cedar grove!
58 But cockle, spurge, according to their law
59 Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
60 You'd think; a burr had been a treasure-trove.

61 No! penury, inertness and grimace,
62 In some strange sort, were the land's portion. "See
63 Or shut your eyes," said Nature peevishly,
64 "It nothing skills: I cannot help my case:
65 'Tis the Last Judgment's fire must cure this place,
66 Calcine its clods and set my prisoners free."

67 If there pushed any ragged thistle-stalk
68 Above its mates, the head was chopped; the bents
69 Were jealous else. What made those holes and rents
70 In the dock's harsh swarth leaves, bruised as to baulk
71 All hope of greenness? 'tis a brute must walk
72 Pashing their life out, with a brute's intents.

73 As for the grass, it grew as scant as hair
74 In leprosy; thin dry blades pricked the mud
75 Which underneath looked kneaded up with blood.
76 One stiff blind horse, his every bone a-stare,
77 Stood stupefied, however he came there:
78 Thrust out past service from the devil's stud!

79 Alive? he might be dead for aught I know,
80 With that red gaunt and coloped neck a-strain,
81 And shut eyes underneath the rusty mane;
82 Seldom went such grotesqueness with such woe;
83 I never saw a brute I hated so;
84 He must be wicked to deserve such pain.

85 I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
86 As a man calls for wine before he fights,
87 I asked one draught of earlier, happier sights,
88 Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.
89 Think first, fight afterwards--the soldier's art:
90 One taste of the old time sets all to rights.

91 Not it! I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face
92 Beneath its garniture of curly gold,
93 Dear fellow, till I almost felt him fold
94 An arm in mine to fix me to the place
95 That way he used. Alas, one night's disgrace!
96 Out went my heart's new fire and left it cold.

97 Giles then, the soul of honour--there he stands
98 Frank as ten years ago when knighted first.
99 What honest men should dare (he said) he durst.

100 Good--but the scene shifts--faugh! what hangman hands
101 In to his breast a parchment? His own bands
102 Read it. Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!

103 Better this present than a past like that;
104 Back therefore to my darkening path again!
105 No sound, no sight as far as eye could strain.
106 Will the night send a howlet or a bat?
107 I asked: when something on the dismal flat
108 Came to arrest my thoughts and change their train.

109 A sudden little river crossed my path
110 As unexpected as a serpent comes.
111 No sluggish tide congenial to the glooms;
112 This, as it frothed by, might have been a bath
113 For the fiend's glowing hoof--to see the wrath
114 Of its black eddy bespate with flakes and spumes.

115 So petty yet so spiteful! All along
116 Low scrubby alders kneeled down over it;
117 Drenched willows flung them headlong in a fit
118 Of mute despair, a suicidal throng:
119 The river which had done them all the wrong,
120 Whate'er that was, rolled by, deterred no whit.

121 Which, while I forded,--good saints, how I feared
122 To set my foot upon a dead man's cheek,
123 Each step, or feel the spear I thrust to seek
124 For hollows, tangled in his hair or beard!
125 --It may have been a water-rat I speared,
126 But, ugh! it sounded like a baby's shriek.

127 Glad was I when I reached the other bank.
128 Now for a better country. Vain presage!
129 Who were the strugglers, what war did they wage,
130 Whose savage trample thus could pad the dank
131 Soil to a splash? Toads in a poisoned tank,
132 Or wild cats in a red-hot iron cage--

133 The fight must so have seemed in that fell cirque.
134 What penned them there, with all the plain to choose?
135 No foot-print leading to that horrid mews,
136 None out of it. Mad brewage set to work
137 Their brains, no doubt, like galley-slaves the Turk
138 Pits for his pastime, Christians against Jews.

139 And more than that--a furlong on--why, there!
140 What bad use was that engine for, that wheel,
141 Or brake, not wheel--that harrow fit to reel
142 Men's bodies out like silk? with all the air

143 Of Tophet's tool, on earth left unaware,
144 Or brought to sharpen its rusty teeth of steel.

145 Then came a bit of stubbed ground, once a wood,
146 Next a marsh, it would seem, and now mere earth
147 Desperate and done with; (so a fool finds mirth,
148 Makes a thing and then mars it, till his mood
149 Changes and off he goes!) within a rood--
150 Bog, clay and rubble, sand and stark black dearth.

151 Now blotches rankling, coloured gay and grim,
152 Now patches where some leanness of the soil's
153 Broke into moss or substances like boils;
154 Then came some palsied oak, a cleft in him
155 Like a distorted mouth that splits its rim
156 Gaping at death, and dies while it recoils.

157 And just as far as ever from the end!
158 Nought in the distance but the evening, nought
159 To point my footstep further! At the thought,
160 A great black bird, Apollyon's bosom-friend,
161 Sailed past, nor beat his wide wing dragon-penned
162 That brushed my cap--perchance the guide I sought.

163 For, looking up, aware I somehow grew,
164 'Spite of the dusk, the plain had given place
165 All round to mountains--with such name to grace
166 Mere ugly heights and heaps now stolen in view.
167 How thus they had surprised me,--solve it, you!
168 How to get from them was no clearer case.

169 Yet half I seemed to recognise some trick
170 Of mischief happened to me, God knows when--
171 In a bad dream perhaps. Here ended, then,
172 Progress this way. When, in the very nick
173 Of giving up, one time more, came a click
174 As when a trap shuts--you're inside the den!

175 Burningly it came on me all at once,
176 This was the place! those two hills on the right,
177 Crouched like two bulls locked horn in horn in fight;
178 While to the left, a tall scalped mountain . . . Dunce,
179 Dotard, a-doing at the very nonce,
180 After a life spent training for the sight!

181 What in the midst lay but the Tower itself?
182 The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart
183 Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
184 In the whole world. The tempest's mocking elf
185 Points to the shipman thus the unseen shelf

186 He strikes on, only when the timbers start.

187 Not see? because of night perhaps?--why, day
188 Came back again for that! before it left,
189 The dying sunset kindled through a cleft:
190 The hills, like giants at a hunting, lay
191 Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,--
192 "Now stab and end the creature--to the heft!"

193 Not hear? when noise was everywhere! it tolled
194 Increasing like a bell. Names in my ears
195 Of all the lost adventurers my peers,--
196 How such a one was strong, and such was bold,
197 And such was fortunate, yet each of old
198 Lost, lost! one moment knelled the woe of years.

199 There they stood, ranged along the hillsides, met
200 To view the last of me, a living frame
201 For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
202 I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
203 Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
204 And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*"