

"Is Not Outside Seeming Real as Substance Inside":
A Bakhtinian Reading of the Relationship Between
Art and Life in Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues

by

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"Is Not Outside Seeming Real As

Substance Inside": A Bakhtinian

Reading of the Relationship Between Art

and Life in Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues

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Abstract

Throughout their extensive careers, both Robert Browning and Mikhail Bakhtin were pre-occupied with the problem of aesthetics, with the position of the self in relation to others, in both art and life. Although volumes of literature were produced by both the poet and the philosopher, neither one of them came up with a theory of art that could be considered conclusive. Their work is forever marked by the movement that marks each of our lives -- the movement of quest and question.

Without providing any conclusive answers, this thesis engages Bakhtin's theories of answerability, dialogism, laughter, and speech genres (to name a few), in order to provide a new and enriching context within which to explore three of Browning's more popular dramatic monologues: "My Last Duchess," "Andrea del Sarto," and "Fra Lippo Lippi." Following Bakhtin's belief that it is the "reader's reaction to reactions in the work of art that transforms a text into an event by giving it meaning" (*A&A* xxxi) an emphasis is placed on the interaction that takes place between the "author," reader, "hero," and the larger socio-historical world as they *all* meet and interact through that which is spoken as text.

It is my position that what Browning valued most in the relationship between art and life is what Bakhtin would define as that which takes place on the *boundary*, on the *threshold* between one's own and someone else's consciousness. As readers of the dramatic monologue, we occupy a threshold space betwixt and between varying perspectives, a space which forces us to understand that truth and meaning, for Browning, were always expressed as a matter of potential -- as that which is always worth seeking.

for Westley and Kaela

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For it is with this world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves: the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtilized, but the raw material it operates on must remain. There may be no end of the poets who communicate to us what they see in an object with reference to their own individuality: what it was before they saw it, in reference to the aggregate human mind will be as desirable to know as ever.

(Robert Browning, *An Essay on Shelley*)

The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers.

(Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*)

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Abbreviations

All works below are signed by Bakhtin unless otherwise identified.

- A&A** Bakhtin, M.M. *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays*. Ed. M. Holquist and V. Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990. In this thesis, I make reference to the following essays printed in this anthology: "Art and Answerability" (1919), "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (ca. 1920-1923).
- CofP** *Mikhail Bakhtin, Creation of a Prosaics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990. By Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson.
- DI** *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson & M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981. In this thesis, I make reference to the following essays printed in this anthology: "Epic and Novel," "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse," "Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel," and "Discourse in the Novel."
- FCS** *Freudianism--A Critical Sketch*. Ed. Neal H. Bruss. Trans. I.R. Titunik. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976. Signed by V. N. Voloshinov. In this thesis, I make reference to the following appendix printed in this anthology. "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art." (also signed by V.N. Voloshinov)

MPofL *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Trans. L. Matejka & I.R. Titunik. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973.
Signed by V.N. Volosinov.

PofDP *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ed. & Trans. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. This anthology includes two appendixes which are referred to in this thesis: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) and "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book" (1961).

R&HW *Rabelais & His World*. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

SG *Speech Genres & Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl Emerson & Michael Holquist. Trans. V. McGee. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986. In this thesis, I make reference to the following essays printed in this anthology include: "Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff," "The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance to the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)," "The Problem of Speech Genres," "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis," "From Notes Made in 1970-71" and "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences."

PofA *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Ed. V. Liapunov & M. Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993.

Chapter One: Introduction

Mikhail Bakhtin's distaste for the "monologic steadfastness" of poetic genres is as well-known and well-documented as his appreciation and celebration of the "novelized" form. Although there is still a general tendency among literary critics to argue that Bakhtin's theories are most relevant to the study of narrative fiction, the application of his ideas to other genres, including certain forms of poetry, is becoming more and more common. The poetry of Robert Browning is no exception. As a few critics have recently proven,¹ a Bakhtinian interpretation can enable the reader to better understand the incongruities, the dialogic interplay of voices, and the ironies in Browning's poems. What has yet to be illustrated is the extent to which Bakhtin's theories can shed some much needed light on the relationship between the dynamics of the dramatic monologue and what constituted, for Browning, his own "theory of art."

When it comes to defining Browning's "aesthetic sensibilities," it would appear that there are no simple answers. As David Healy points out, "Browning's view of art and life is a lofty one . . . 'nothing less than the whole can be taken as even approaching his thoughts' . . . And even if it were possible to grasp the whole, one would be hard pressed to pigeonhole the man who told the truth 'obliquely' and wrote 'beyond the facts'" (75).² To

¹ See Cheryl Walsh's article "The Voices in Karshish: A Bakhtinian Reading of Robert Browning's 'Epistle,'" Hongsang Yeo's essay, "Browning's Novelist Discourse in *The Ring and the Book*" and Ashton Nichol's article "Dialogism in the Dramatic Monologue: Suppressed Voices in Browning."

² As Healy points out, the first inserted quote is from Roma King's *The Bow and the Lyre: The Art of Robert Browning* (44). The second inserted quote is from Browning's poem *The Ring and the Book* (860, 866).

complicate matters further, there is, as John Maynard attests, "something about the dramatic monologue itself [which] seems to have been especially unreceptive to organic, unifying conceptions of art." As a form it shows a "special resistance to the text-oriented, aestheticizing tendencies of the New Criticism" (105). Consequently, Maynard argues, the strategy for approaching Browning's work which has remained the most influential is Robert Langbaum's rather famous one in which he suggests that the dramatic monologue derives its "special effect from the tension between sympathy and judgment" (3).³ But as a number of critics have pointed out, even Langbaum's approach proves to be weak when it comes to exploring the extraordinarily complex and often mutable dynamics of Browning's poems. To put it simply, Langbaum does not place enough emphasis on the discrepancy that exists between the consciousness of the poet (or implied author) and the consciousness of the speaker.

This is where Bakhtin's theories can be especially useful. Like Browning, Bakhtin was pre-occupied for most of his life with the problem of aesthetics; he was fascinated by issues of authorial intention and historical "representation," with "voice" and form, language and genre. Most importantly, Bakhtin and Browning shared a fascination with the objective and subjective positioning of the self in relation to others, in both art and life -- a fascination which resulted in both men exploring the various ways in which an individual's point of view enables him/her to construct varying "truths." Browning's work demands an aesthetic response that is always verging on the precarious -- a response that demands that we experience what it is to live betwixt and between, and on the threshold of varying perspectives.

³ See Maynard (105-6) for a further discussion of what he understands to be Langbaum's theory of "reader response."

Since Bakhtin worked toward defining this "threshold" experience throughout his career, his critical thinking provides a framework for approaching Browning's work that I think the poet himself would have approved of. This is not to say that a Bakhtinian approach to Browning provides answers where once there were none. Rather, Bakhtin's ideas allow the reader to explore new possibilities, to raise further questions, to engage in further dialogue. To enter into an understanding of Bakhtin's work is to become involved in an open-ended process: his texts, as Michael Holquist points out, "are clearly attempts to test out, to contest, to try the propositions they engage" (*A&A* xi). The more one reads of Bakhtin, the more one can hear him openly challenging his own thoughts, questioning the past and disrupting the present in order to make way for new possibilities.

The best example of this open-ended process (and the one most relevant to Browning's work) can be seen in Bakhtin's approach to what he defined as "aesthetic activity." In his two earliest works, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, and *Art and Answerability*, published in approximately 1917- 1922, Bakhtin explicitly argues that "without finalization, there would be no art, no self, and no responsibility" (*CofP* 91). By the late 1920's, his vision of what constituted "art" had definitely changed. In *The Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, he no longer asserts that in order for art to qualify as art, it must be *finalizable*. Instead, he advances the term *unfinalizability* in order to "designate a complex of values central to his thinking: innovation, 'surprisingness,' the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, and creativity" (*CofP* 36-7). By the end of his career, he concedes that language itself is always dialogic -- that the author's intentional closure can lead to a disclosure of a multiplicity of meanings. He once more sees the "value of the

given," and argues that the "right sort of finalization can make unfinalizability possible" (*CofP* 229).

Fortunately, this "growth," or contradiction, in Bakhtin's thinking assists, rather than impedes, our understanding of Browning's own attempts to explore the limits of the dramatic monologue. Like Bakhtin, Browning ultimately appears to have been against "enclosure in the text " (*SG* 169). Yet, paradoxically, he chose to work primarily with a form which uses "(en)closure as a prime characteristic," a form which David Lawton labels as a "closed model of communication -- one which, for all Browning's use of the progressive aspect -- is firmly cordoned off in a textual past to which the reader has access only by consent of the poet" (96). Browning's tendency to posit his authority, albeit an often untenable and unknowable one, is an important characteristic of the dramatic monologue and Lawton is right to draw attention to it. And he is right to describe dramatic monologues as essentially "transcriptions of the 'utterances' of the past addressed by dead speakers to dead interlocutors" (89). What needs to be further emphasized in this paradigm is the fact that it is the *act* of "transcription" which keeps these dead utterances alive and ultimately unfinalizable. The utterances of Browning's speakers may indeed be fictive and illusive, and for the most part "(en)closed," but the utterance that is Browning's work is itself an open-ended, fragmented art form -- one which Herbert Tucker quite rightly suggests "resists its own finalities" (5). To put it in Bakhtinian terms, there may well be centripetal, centralizing, unifying forces (those which support hierarchical perspectives, finalization, and fixed meaning) at work within the dramatic monologue, but these forces are constantly giving way to the centrifugal, decentralizing destabilizing forces -- to forces which disrupt that

which is "given," in favour of what is indeterminate, what is "yet-to-be" (*DI* 271-2) .

Given these inherent characteristics, it should not be surprising that the dramatic monologue so appealed to Browning or that he spent most of his lifetime perfecting the form, and testing its limits. In various ways, it is a form which allowed him to express his dissatisfaction with the present, to "champion the imperfect," and to explore his faith in the power of art and language to convey a future vision of a world of possibilities.⁴ From the moment he wrote his first translation of *Ossian* at the age of five until the day of his death, Browning showed an interest in resurrecting and mimicking voices from the past. He believed in the potential to bring literature and art to life, once again, through re-reading, rewriting, and re-accentuation. He believed that "the unforeseen is the dramatically excellent" (*Dearest Isa* 251), that the "worst things of all to look back on are the times of comparative standing still, rounded in their impotent completeness" (*Kintner* 2:710).⁵

As Tucker observes, Browning was "addicted to anticipation" (4). The fact that this addiction manifests itself in a stylistic obscurity that tends to create confusing and unsettling responses in the reader has long been a source of frustration for critic and reader alike. Full of vigorous colloquialisms, elliptical syntax, and knotted consonants, Browning's poetry challenged even the most patient Victorian reader. Even Elizabeth Barrett wrote to her future husband to complain of his "tendency . . . which is almost a habit . . . of making lines difficult for the reader to read . . . that the uncertain rhythm

⁴ For further discussion of this idea, see Tucker (4) and Ryals' *A World of Possibilities* (15).

⁵ This letter is dated May 17, 1846.

throws the reader's mind off the *rail* . . . and interrupts his progress with you and your influence with him" (Kintner 1:131).⁶ In a letter written ten years later, John Ruskin similarly complained to Browning of grammatical disagreements that made him quite "uncomfortable" and threw him "quite out -- like a step in a floor which one doesn't expect" (DeLaura 324). Referring to a number of the poems in the recently published *Men and Women*, Ruskin further protested that he didn't understand, that he "didn't understand at all!!!!!!" (DeLaura 326).

Although Browning's earlier work was even more bewildering, from all accounts it appears that Ruskin was the first reader vehement enough (and perhaps important enough) to provoke Browning into offering a vague, but fascinating, defense of his practice. Within days of receiving Ruskin's letter, Browning responded:

Do you think poetry was ever generally understood or can be?
 Is the business of it to tell people what they know already, as
 they know it, as so precisely that they shall be able to cry out --
 'Here you should supply this-that, you evidently pass over and
 I'll help you from my own stock?'
 . . . I shall never change my point of sight, or feel other than
 disconcerted and apprehensive when the public, critics and all,
 begin to understand and approve me. (*Ruskin's Works* 36:31)

Browning's belief that the poet should steer clear of explanations, so as to avoid locking the reader into the emptiness of stasis is evident even in these few lines. However, it is his response to Ruskin's accusation that he is "worse than the Worst Alpine Glacier [Ruskin] ever crossed . . . Bright & deep enough truly, but so full of Clefts that half the journey has to be done

⁶ This letter is dated July, 21, 1845.

with ladder & hatchet" (DeLaura 326) that provides us with the most insight into how this belief manifests itself in Browning's methodology:

We don't read poetry the same way, by the same law; it is too clear. I cannot begin writing poetry till my imaginary reader has conceded licences to me which you demur altogether. I know that I don't make out my conception by my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite. You would have me paint it all plain out, which can't be; but by various artifices I try to make shift with touches and bits of outlines which succeed if they bear the conception from me to you. You ought, I think to keep pace with the thought tripping from ledge to ledge of my 'glaciers,' as you call them; not stand poking your alpenstock into the holes, and demonstrating that no foot could have stood there; -- suppose it sprang up over there? (*Ruskin's Works* 36:29)

Tucker suggests that in order to make sense of Browning's paradoxical phrase, "all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite," we must "discard the ludicrous spatial metaphor" that Browning's word "putting" implies and "reconceive it in temporal terms" (13):

That, after all, is what Browning's entire letter encourages Ruskin to do: to reconceive meaning as a process instead of an entity . . . while Ruskin's letter compares Browning to a craggy glacier, Browning takes the glacier to stand not for himself, but for his poems. He silently revises Ruskin's image in order to distinguish himself and his "conception" from the work that is its trace. This revision allows him to relocate meaning not *in* the poem, as an object one stands and pokes at, but *through* the poem, as a method or series of signs that one actively traverses. Only in springing from sign to sign does a reader recover the poet's "conception"; only in granting a wide poetic "licence" does a reader fulfill the "law" of Browningsque reading. Browning's imaginary reader must also be a highly imaginative one, whose pursuit of meaning retraces and in effect recreates the poet's prior pursuit, of which the poem itself is a various and artful record. (11-13)

What Browning sets up, then, for his reader is a quest -- a quest which is entirely impossible to satisfy. He insists that the presence or position we

must occupy before the text is one which will always be in flux, always in motion. If we are looking for simple answers there will be none. We must take responsibility for what we do not know and make it part of our life -- a point which Browning emphasized in yet another response to Ruskin's letter. When the art historian and critic complained that "in Fra Lippo -- I am only fast at the grated orris root, which I looked for in the Encyclopaedia and couldn't find" (DeLaura 327) Browning replied:

Why don't you ask the next perfumer for a packet of *orris*-root?
 Don't everybody know 'tis a corruption of *iris*-root -- the
 Florentine lily, the *giaggolo* of world-wide fame as a good
 savour? And because 'iris' means so many objects already, and I
 use the old word, you blame me! (*Ruskin's Works* 36:31)

Of course, Browning was well aware that "everybody" "don't" know -- just as he was well aware that his contemporary, as well as his future readers would make some effort to understand what he "meant" by using a word so colloquial it could not be found in a dictionary or encyclopaedia. Browning does not want to be "blamed" for what Ruskin does not understand because he wants Ruskin, and all his readers, to take some responsibility for what we have read. He wants us to understand that "the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned" (*Essay on Shelley* 1009). And he wants us to understand that we are implicated in the text for a reason.

In "Art and Answerability," one of the first essays he ever published, Bakhtin makes a point that is not only useful for understanding Browning's response to Ruskin, but is a good starting point for better understanding the reader's role in the dramatic monologue. Bakhtin writes:

But what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability. I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and

understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life . . . Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself -- in the unity of my answerability. (*A&A* 1-2)

Although it is necessary to read a great deal more of Bakhtin's work to get a full sense of how this statement applies to the reader, what he implies here is that coming before a text, or any work of art, entails for the reader, viewer and author (who is also a reader) a splitting of the self. We cannot read the words that are expressed by Fra Lippo without casting ourselves off into a different world *outside* ourselves. If we continue to read the text or "speak" it as if we are mimicking it, we cannot be answerable or responsible for what we have experienced. It is the act of internalizing the speaking voice of a character, the act of incorporating it into our own life, into our own voice, that brings about the "unity" or wholeness of which Bakhtin speaks. Whether we are conscious of it or not, answerability involves acknowledging our "self" in relation to an other. We cannot be responsible for what we have experienced in art, nor can we "respond" to it until we are thrown back on ourselves and are able to acknowledge our participation in a dialogic interaction.

According to Bakhtin, becoming responsible for what we have experienced in art also involves acknowledging the author's presence in a text. At one point in his essay, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, Bakhtin insists that a work of art cannot be understood unless the reader is willing to acknowledge his/her own position in relation to the author's struggle to consummate the work as a whole. Michael Holquist summarizes Bakhtin's thoughts on this in his introduction to *Art and Answerability*:

It is as an event that we come to know the work of art . . . Every word in narrative literature expresses a reaction to another reaction, the author's reaction to the reaction of the hero; . . . It is

the reader's reaction to reactions in the work of art that transforms a text into an event by giving it meaning.

It is the meaning or, in other words, the particular configuration of time, space, and values that I construct through architectonically shaping relations between author/hero as self/other -- as they both are other to myself as reader -- for which I, in the unique place I occupy in existence am answerable. (*A&A* xxxi)

The phrase "construct through architectonically shaping," when translated, is particularly useful for understanding the effect Browning's own aesthetic project has on the reader. Earlier in the same introduction Holquist points out that

aesthetics is treated by Bakhtin as a subset of architectonics: . . . architectonics is the general study of how entities relate to each other, whereas aesthetics concerns itself with the problem of consummation, or how parts are shaped into wholes. Wholeness, or consummation, is always to be understood here as a relative term: in Bakhtin, consummation is almost literally in the eye of the beholder . . . wholeness is a kind of fiction that can be created only from a particular point of view . . . wholeness can never be absolute. (*A&A* x)

Bakhtin's notion of answerability or "*responsibility*" is inherently connected to his earliest beliefs that it is during the actual moment of consummation that the aesthetic process, or the aesthetic struggle begins. Since the act of consummation (however temporary) cannot take place without seeing oneself in relation to an "other," aesthetic activity, for Bakhtin,

⁷ In *The Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin speaks of the architectonic act as if it necessarily implies a high degree of finalization or closure. As Morson and Emerson point out, he sees "the *act* is valuable as a concrete closed event around which I can wrap my responsibility." His vision of an open-ended "dialogic" or "novelistic" utterance/word, seems a long way in the future (*CofP* 70). Yet, as we can see here, his idea of architectonics has taken on a much different flavour in *Art and Answerability* (written only a few years later). Already we can see that his work is about to undergo a "copernican revolution" (*CofP* 70) -- that he is going to see the aesthetic act in a very different light, particularly as it applies to the relationship between author, hero and reader.

has its roots in anticipation, in what is "yet to be" (*A&A* 16). This concept is obviously paradoxical. Because we are never able to see ourselves from a position of outsideness, Bakhtin insists that we always perceive our "selves" as unconsummated, as incomplete. Our perception of the "other," however, is quite different. From our position of outsideness, we see the "other" as consummated, as finalized, complete, whole. In any relationship between two autonomous consciousnesses, the roles, of course, are reversed. According to Bakhtin, one of the challenges we all face in life is learning how to adopt the "other's" perception of us (so that we can see ourselves as subjects in the world) without allowing that perception to finalize or consummate the meaning of that subjectivity. As Bakhtin sees it, "all the moments that can consummate us in the consciousness of the other lose their consummating power by being anticipated in our own consciousness, and as such they merely extend our consciousness in its own direction" (*A&A* 16) -- the direction of what is "yet-to-be." In order for life to mean anything, we must always be on the threshold of "becoming;" we must always be in a state of anticipation. This is why the aesthetic act must be "tension-filled" and anticipatory if it is to reflect the true nature of the relationship between art and life.

In his essay "Art and Answerability," Bakhtin suggests that separating art from life all too often is seen incorrectly as the primary aesthetic task. He argues that for too long artists have been encouraged to leave behind the cares of everyday life and enter into a world of "inspiration, sweet sounds, and prayer." The result, he argues, is that art becomes "too self-confident, audaciously self-confident, and too high-flown, for it is in no way bound to answer for life . . . Inspiration that ignores life and is itself ignored by life is not inspiration but a state of possession . . ." (*A&A* 1-2). The artist who is

concerned with life must therefore struggle to overcome a state of "unity which is *given* and strive instead for a unity that is set as a *task*" (A&A 16), an ongoing project. In the case of narrative literature, Bakhtin suggests that the author must situate himself *outside* his hero, if this "task" is to succeed, and that often this position is "gained by conquest, and the struggle for it is often a struggle for life" (A&A 15). In order to achieve a finalized aesthetic whole, the author must be able to separate himself from his characters -- his heroes. He must be able to view the hero as a separate, distinct entity -- as an "other" consciousness.

Late into his career, Bakhtin was still developing his ideas concerning the author/hero relationship. In *Problems of the Text* he further explores the relationship between creative or dialogic understanding and his notion of what constitutes aesthetic activity:

To see and comprehend an author's work is to see and comprehend another, alien consciousness and its world, that is, another subject (*'Du'*). With *explanation* there is only one consciousness, one subject; with *comprehension* there are two consciousnesses, two subjects. There can be no dialogical relationship to an object, and therefore explanation has no dialogic aspects (except formal, rhetorical ones). Understanding is always dialogic to some degree. (SG 111)

As long as we remain aware of the author's presence within the text and interaction within his hero, the question of his presence is sustained rather than settled and dialogic understanding is encouraged. It seems important to note, then, that when Browning exclaimed to Ruskin that he was afraid of being understood, it was not dialogic understanding which he feared. Rather, what he feared was "explanation" that would crucify the meaning of his work, eliminating its potential to be "understood" in new and enriching ways.

In one of his notes from 1970-1, Bakhtin writes "Meaning always responds to particular questions. Anything that does not respond to something seems meaningless to us; it is removed from dialogue" (SG 145). It is through dialogue that potentials are revealed, and it is through the process of dialogue that new potentials and new meaning are created. As long as the reader of Browning's dramatic monologues is forced to ask questions, the text will continue to surge with life; it will continue to present new possibilities. What many readers and critics don't recognize is that Browning keeps the meaning of his texts "alive" by creating utterances that will continue to respond open-endedly to their future addressivity. Paradoxically, one of the ways he achieves this is to make his presence within the text *noticeably* absent.

I emphasize noticeably, because I believe Browning's "choice to renounce any direct representation of his views" (Mitchell 18) must be understood as a will not to say, or a will to unsay. Every time Browning draws attention to his absence, he in some way draws attention to his own situatedness, to his own position as "other" -- as author/creator and to his own struggle to separate himself from his hero in various and discerning ways. It is the moments, however temporary, when Browning consummates his heroes and renders them passive that provide us with the most clues as to what he valued in terms of the relationship between art and life.⁸ For these are the moments when it becomes possible to imagine Browning returning into himself and becoming answerable to an "other." As Bakhtin put it, the "event in the life of the text -- that is, its genuine essence -- develops *along the boundary*

⁸ In "The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin suggests that "all of the moments that actively consummate the hero render the hero passive, the way a part is passive in relation to the whole which encompasses and consummates it" (14).

between two consciousnesses, two subjects" (SG 106).⁹ As readers, we can never specifically recreate the dialogic interaction that took place between Browning and his speakers, or Browning and his socio-historical world. All we can do is attempt to understand how the poet went about creating and negotiating this tension-filled environment. All we can do is attempt to imagine how our experience of living on the threshold betwixt and between the poet's consciousness and the speaker's reflects the poet's own aesthetic concerns.

This can be accomplished if we take a further hint from Bakhtin and begin by treating the poem itself as a speech genre or "secondary (complex) utterance." According to Bakhtin, a dialogic relationship between author and reader, speaker and listener, is only possible when the text becomes "discourse, that is, an utterance, and receive[s] an *author*, that is, a creator of the given utterance whose position it expresses" (*PofDP* 184). To put this another way, as soon as we label a text, or any artistic work as an "utterance" and begin to speak in terms of our response to it, we are in effect positing an author -- whether an author (in the biological sense of the word) actually exists or not.

Defining literary artistic works as secondary (complex) utterances or speech genres also enables us to assign the role of "speaking subject" to the creator of the "whole work." As readers, it is natural to think of the speaker or the "hero" of the poem as the primary, if not the *only* speaking subject who

⁹ One can see the germ for this idea as early as Bakhtin's essay on the *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*. He states: "The author's actual creative act always proceeds along the boundaries (the axiological boundaries) of the aesthetic world . . . along the boundary of the body and the boundary of the soul; and it proceeds in the spirit. The spirit, however, does not exist yet: everything is yet-to-be for the spirit, whereas everything that already exists is, for the spirit, something that *has* already existed (*A&A* 110).

demands our response. Since Browning himself insisted on characterizing his own dramatic monologues, or dramatic lyrics, as "so many utterances of so many imaginary persons not mine" (*Poetical Works* 2), our reaction can hardly be considered surprising. However, Browning did not preclude the possibility that his presence might be felt within his poems -- or that there might be a difference between the speaker's utterance and the utterance that is the poem itself. As he put it in a poem he dedicated to Elizabeth Barrett entitled "One Word More":

Love, you saw me gather men and women,
 Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
 Enter each and all, and use their service,
 Speak from every mouth, -- the speech a poem.

Let me speak this once in my true person,
 Not as Lippo, Roland, or Andrea . . .
 (129-132, 137-8)

Clearly, Browning perceived that there was a difference between entering the mouths of others, and sharing their experience, their point of view. But Browning was also willing to acknowledge that there might be a sameness -- that parts of himself and his intentions might occasionally be expressed through his characters, or through "the speech a poem." He himself admits this possibility rather ambiguously to Ruskin (who also accused him in the aforementioned letter of coming up "through all manner of characters"): "I may put Robert Browning into Pippa and other men and maids. If so, *peccavi*: but I don't see myself in them at all events" (*Ruskin's Works* 36:30).

The majority of contemporary Browning scholars generally agree that Browning and his speakers tend to interpret life differently, that we "can tell the difference between the 'voices' of two subjects in a single discourse"

(Martin 109). When analyzing Browning's work, it is still much easier to pretend we are dealing with one speaking subject. As Ralph Rader has pointed out, most readers and critics still tend to treat the speaker "as if he were in effect a real person, as if he and the reader's response to him were independent of the poet's control" (133). Since Browning himself wanted us to buy into this illusion, this approach can hardly be considered wrong. But it is limiting. And it does downplay a very important dynamic of the dramatic monologue -- that is, the interaction that takes place between reader, speaker, poet, and the larger socio-historical world as they all meet and interact through that which is spoken as text.

Once we come to understand that there is more than one speaking subject in the dramatic monologue, then the experience of reading can be better understood as interactive -- as an experience in which we are constantly being asked to negotiate borders -- especially borders in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. For Bakhtin, the border is not a "wall" defining territories, but a boundary over which or through which communication takes place; it is a meeting place, a threshold space where interaction or action occurs within a territory that is shared. According to Bakhtin, our very existence, our very sense of self is liminal; it is built upon threshold experience. This is what is set out without qualification in his unfinished essay, "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book":

The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). Separation, dissociation, and enclosure within the self as the main reason for the loss of one's self. Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*. And everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tension-filled encounter lies its entire essence . . . *To be*

means to *communicate*. Absolute death (non-being is the state of being unheard, unrecognized, unremembered . . . To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks *in the eyes of the other* or *through the eyes of the other* . . . Life is very dialogical by its nature. To live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to agree, etc. (*PofDP* 287, 293)

As readers we imagine that the consciousness of Browning's character is "given as *someone else's* consciousness" (*PofDP* 7). Even though we recognize that the hero of the dramatic monologue is one who unwittingly reveals that he or she is living in an enclosed, fictive and illusive world, we become answerable to this consciousness as if it were a living, breathing entity -- a person in his or her own right. In a sense, it is our reading which keeps the speaker's consciousness alive. But this is not all we are "responsible for" or answerable to. The dialogic interaction that takes place within the text is not limited to that which exists between consciousnesses -- that is, between the poet or implied author, speaker, listener or implied listener, and reader. In his essay, "Dialogism in the Dramatic Monologue: Suppressed Voices in Browning" Ashton Nichols argues that "Dialogism is valuable to our reading of Browning because it focuses our attention on complex interactions among poet, poetic speaker, speaker's apparent self, speaker's 'hidden' self, and reader. The hidden and suppressed voices so important to dialogic reading operate in Browning's poems to emphasize the multiplicity of even the most seemingly monologic texts" (30). As Charles Schuster points out, the "term 'dialogic' . . . describes the interactive nature of language itself which inevitably proceeds according to a dialogic model" (596). From Bakhtin's perspective, there is no thought, no existence, no meaning that doesn't enter into dialogic relations with the other. Dialogic

interaction exists at the level of the utterance, genre, and even more profoundly, at the level of the word.

In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," Bakhtin suggests that

During the process of their formation, [secondary (complex) speech genres] absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in mediated speech communion. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. For example, rejoinders of everyday dialogue or letters found in a novel retain their form and their everyday significance only on the plane of the novel's content. They enter into actual reality only via the novel as a whole, that is, as a literary-artistic event and not as everyday life. (SG 62)

Paradoxically, Browning's abundant use of "everyday dialogue" or "colloquial language" is one of the characteristics of the dramatic monologue that makes it easy for the reader to *forget* that any loss in relation to reality has taken place. When Fra Lippo proclaims "Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!" it is difficult *not* to imagine him standing before us at the "alley's end." Similarly, when the duke proclaims, "that's my last duchess on the wall," we may wonder what form her image has taken, or what context he has placed it in, but we do not doubt its presence or the duke's assertion. What we have to remember, then, is that even though the speech of Browning's characters defines their experience and maintains a characteristic tone when incorporated into the complex utterance which is the work itself, there is necessarily a kind of *invisible* double-voicing. Browning is not simply resurrecting the "voice" of a fifteenth century bishop, or artist. He is redefining the past usage of simple speech genres while simultaneously re-accentuating them for his present use. It is, as Bakhtin would put it, one of the ways in which the poet ensured that his works would continue to break through the "boundaries of their own time" (SG 4).

Like all forms of literature, the dramatic monologue not only assimilates *primary* speech genres in the process of its formation, it also assimilates and responds to other *secondary* speech genres. Though Browning always worked toward creating something "new," he existed in the cultural matrix of Romanticism and his poetry consistently reflects its themes. Most of his dramatic monologues deal, in some way, with the "subjective" search for the self. As so many have already noted, his poetry is also highly influenced by the dramatic works of Shakespeare and Donne.¹⁰ At the same time, his technique of distantiation, his objective approach, and the investigative demands he places on the reader are certainly reminiscent of the Augustan poetry and prose of Pope, Dryden, and Johnson. As Warwick Slinn points out, "Structurally, Browning brings together two essentially different approaches, the expressive and the mimetic, or the lyric and the dramatic, juxtaposing the single vision of an isolated mind with the multiple views of the social world" (20).

Designating Browning's dramatic monologues as secondary complex utterances enables us to see his work as an act of communication which has been written in response to, and in anticipation of, certain "generically determined" responses. In Bakhtin's words, "any communication . . . addressed to someone or evoking something, has a particular purpose, that is, it is a real link in the chain of speech communion in a particular sphere of human activity or everyday life" (SG 83). He explains this a little more explicitly in an earlier work, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:¹¹

¹⁰ See Cohn (286-7), Stange (xix), & Maynard (105-110).

¹¹ This work is signed by Voloshinov. Bakhtinian scholars continue to debate the question of whether V.N. Voloshinov and Medvedev are pseudonyms for Bakhtin, or whether they traveled in the same political circles. For the purposes of this thesis, Bakhtin's authorship is assumed.

Any utterance -- the finished, written utterance not excepted -- makes response to something and is calculated to be responded to in turn. It is but one link in a continuous chain of speech performances. Each monument [written utterance] carries on the work of its predecessors, polemicizing with them, expecting active, responsive understanding, and anticipating such understanding in return. (72)

For Bakhtin, the segmentation of language into individual utterances depends on who is answering or responding at any given moment. The segmentation of language does not necessarily depend on linguistic elements such as syntax or grammatical pauses: "One does not exchange sentences any more than one exchanges words (in the strict linguistic sense) or phrases. One exchanges utterances that are constructed from language units: words, phrases, and sentences. And an utterance can be constructed both from one sentence and from one word, so to speak, from one speech unit (mainly a rejoinder in dialogue), but this does not transform a language unit into a unit of speech communion" (SG 75).

Bakhtin also argues that "complexly structured . . . artistic genres, in spite of all the ways in which they differ from rejoinders in dialogue are by nature the same kind of units of speech communication" (SG 75). It is the "change of speaking subjects" that frames an utterance and this change can only take place when the utterance is *finalized* -- that is, "when the speaker has said (or written) *everything* he has to say at a particular moment or under particular circumstances . . . The first and foremost criterion for the finalization of the utterance is *the possibility of responding to it*, or more precisely and broadly, of assuming a responsive attitude toward it . . ." (SG 76). It is, according to Bakhtin, the "finalized wholeness of the utterance" that guarantees "the

possibility of response (or of responsive understanding). This wholeness is determined by three "aspects (or factors): 1. semantic exhaustiveness of the theme; 2. the speaker's plan or speech will; 3. typical compositional and generic forms of utterance" (SG 76-7).

The way in which these three aspects apply to Browning's dramatic monologues will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters. However, there are a few things worth drawing attention to at this point. In the first place, one of Browning's major objectives is to avoid exhausting his subject, his theme. He intentionally poses problems in such a way that the reader responds to a "certain minimum of finalization" (SG 77). In the second place, embracing, understanding and sensing the speaker's *speech plan* or *speech will* is generally far from easy. As is the case with most literature we have no problem anticipating the length and boundaries of the "whole utterance," for that is circumscribed by the work itself. However, because the speaker's utterance is presented as a fragment, often we have no idea what or who the speaker of a dramatic monologue is responding to, let alone how what he is saying reflects the condition of his addressivity or his situation. To complicate matters further, the "hybridization"¹² of the dramatic monologue makes it very difficult to determine when "the inner side of the change of speaking subjects takes place" (76). The boundaries which mark the beginning and end of the poet's entire utterance and the speaker's utterance *appear* to be one and the same. Yet, Browning's speech will and the speaker's speech will are most often quite different. Consequently, the

¹² The term "hybridization," for Bakhtin, refers to hybrid construction: "We call hybrid construction any utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional features, to a single speaker, but that actually contains intermingled within it two utterances, two manners of speaking, two styles, two "languages," two semantic and axiological horizons" (as quoted in Todorov 73).

responsive understanding Browning demands of his reader is also often quite different from the responsive understanding the speaker *appears* to demand from his listener. What is important to remember is that the form itself demands that we are always responding to both speaking subjects simultaneously.

Because we are always responding, at one and the same time, to the "enclosed utterance" of the speaker, and the "open-ended fragmented utterance" that is the work itself, there is never any guarantee that we will come to a dramatic monologue equipped with what Bakhtin would define as the appropriate "apperceptive background of responsive understanding" (SG 96). We are not meant to. Our position as readers in relation to speaker is, and to some extent always remains, that of an eavesdropper or "overhearer" (Maynard 106). Our position in relation to the speaking subject that is Browning is generally no less confusing or unsettling. This is because the meaning of even a single word bears the weight and intonation of not just one but often two or more voices. As readers, we generally tend to assume that the words on the page are simply acting as a bridge between the speaker and listener -- that the poem will mean a great deal more once we have a fuller sense of the context in which the words are spoken. This is to some extent true of Browning's dramatic monologues. But what we discover, especially in subsequent readings, is that the meaning of the words of the dramatic monologue cannot be limited to the enclosed world of the speaker, that is, to one context. For even when we have a fairly good idea of what the speaker's intentions are, these intentions are never free of Browning's expression -- or our own. As a double-voiced discourse the dramatic monologue "serves two speakers at the same time and simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention

of the author" (*DI* 324). To complicate matters further, the words expressed within this shared discourse exist for each of the speakers (as it does for any speaker) in "three aspects: as a neutral word of language belonging to nobody; as an *other's* word which belongs to another person and is filled with the echoes of the other's utterance; and finally as *my* word, for, since I am dealing with it in a particular situation, with a particular speech plan, it is already imbued with my expression" (*SG* 88).

Earlier in his essay "Marxism and the Philosophy of Language," Bakhtin explores this phenomenon from a slightly different angle. He suggests that even in the case of everyday dialogue the "word is a two-sided act. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'" (*M&PL* 86). Since the reader of the dramatic monologue must be considered an addressee, this theory has to be revised, or at least further complicated. As a result of the dramatic monologue's hybridization the word becomes a "four-sided" and, at times, a multi-sided act. For instance, when, in "My Last Duchess," we read "perhaps / Fra Pandolf chanced to say . . . 'Paint / Must never hope to reproduce the faint / Half flush that dies along her throat'" the words in quotation marks, though most obviously spoken by the Duke, do not simply belong to him. They also belong to Browning and Fra Pandolf. Consequently, the words which on the surface seem only meant for the envoy, are also "meant" for the Duke, for the reader, and for the poet himself. How we put the bits and pieces together and attempt to shape them into a whole does not primarily depend on how we situate ourselves in relation to the most obvious speaking subject -- the "Duke." It depends as much, if not more, on how we respond to what

Browning, the less obvious speaking subject, "makes us see" through his interaction and struggle with his hero.

Although this dynamic will also be discussed further in subsequent chapters it does seem important to emphasize, once again, that, according to Bakhtin, the meaning of a text is created by both author and reader; and while it is the author who is responsible for consummating the whole of a work, it is the reader who is responsible for "consummating the discourse act."¹³

Browning may be able to "finalize" his utterance, to consummate the whole of the work, but he never lets us forget that his dramatic monologues are links in an endless chain of dialogue. He never lets us forget that the act of authoring is linked to the act of reading, responding, and becoming answerable to the text.

In one form or another, each of the following three chapters explores Browning's fascination with "Artistry's haunting curse -- the Incomplete."¹⁴ Chapter Two examines "My Last Duchess" through the lens of Bakhtin's essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." His work is used to illustrate how Browning's aesthetic project effects the reader's understanding of the poem, and ultimately illuminates that which is problematic about the Duke's whole approach to art and to life. Langbaum's influential view that the dramatic monologue derives its "special effect from the tension between sympathy and judgment" (3) is explored on a more complex level -- one

¹³ Helen Rothschild Ewald emphasises this relationship in her essay, "Waiting for Answerability: Bakhtin and Composition Studies." "Another way to interpret answerability," Ewald suggests, "is as an answer or response. Answerability-as-response is intimately linked in Bakhtin to the act of authorship. Answering is authoring. Authoring is responding. For Bakhtin, the word, and the writing of the word, is a two-sided act where the meaning is created by both writer and reader. The reader is the 'other' . . . who consummates the discourse act" (341).

¹⁴ This quote is taken from line 38 of "Beatrice Signorini," a poem which was published along with the others in his collection *Asolando* on the day of Browning's death.

which emphasizes the discrepancy between the consciousness of the poet (or implied author) and the consciousness of the speaker.

Chapter Three focusses on issues of historical and "auto/biographical" representation in "Andrea del Sarto." Bakhtin's early theories of aesthetic activity, and his theories of speech genres, are once again called upon. Andrea is viewed as a "soul slave," as an individual or "character" who, like the Duke, is incapable of becoming anything more than he *already is*. Evidently, dialogic understanding is not high on the list of Andrea's priorities. His ideas, his response to those ideas, his whole attitude toward the future is pretty much finalized. By putting us in the position of having to free ourselves from his enclosed and stifling world, Browning effectively encourages us to see that any historical or biographical approach to art or to the life of an artist must be unfinalizable -- that ideas themselves will only degenerate and die if they do not enter into "genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas" (*PofDP* 87-8).

In Chapter Four, Fra Lippo Lippi, one of Browning's most highly entertaining "speakers" -- is viewed in light of Bakhtin's theories of laughter and the carnivalesque. "The importance of reaching, digging down to the creative nucleus of the personality"¹⁵ is stressed. As well, the discussion invokes Bakhtin's rather ambiguous concept of "polyphony" in an attempt to look at both the reader's and the author's position from a perspective different from that which is presented in the two preceding chapters. To put it simply, the chapter is an examination and a celebration of art and life as it is assimilated, represented, and anticipated in the work and voices of both Browning and his speaker.

¹⁵ In his essay *Methodology of the Human Sciences* Bakhtin points out that "in the creative nucleus the personality continues to live, that is, it is immortal" (*SG* 168).

Chapter Two

"The 'Depth and Passion' in an 'Earnest Glance'"

Nearly forty years have past since Robert Langbaum chose "My Last Duchess" as the poem best suited to illustrate his belief that the "genius of the dramatic monologue" lies in "the effect created by the tension between sympathy and judgment" (85). Although Langbaum's theories continue to be highly debated, most critics and readers still tend to support his view that the sympathetic draw of a first-person speaker (even one as reprehensible as the Duke) can have the effect of temporarily inhibiting the reader's judgment. And the majority still agree with Langbaum's assessment that "the utter outrageousness of the Duke's behaviour makes condemnation the least interesting response . . . [and that] what interests us more than the Duke's wickedness is his immense attractiveness" (83). What remains contentious is whether or not a further "understanding" of the Duke leads to our ultimate disapproval of his ways, or to a continued suspension of moral judgment. If Alan Sinfield is right to suggest that the more we "understand" the Duke the less appealing he becomes, "the less we like him" (6), if the Duke really is an ogre, why do so many sympathetic readings abound? Why is it that so many of us continue to empathize with the Duke long after we have discovered that his palatial gallery of artifacts reflects the artifice of his character? Are the Duke's rhetorical skills really so exceptional that we can't help but overlook our disapproval? Or is there something about the dynamics of the dramatic monologue itself that allows Browning to claim a certain kind of "authority" over the Duke that, in the end, manages to reduce the Duke's entire speech to

an expression of the Duke's own securities? And, if so, is our empathetic response to the Duke partially brought on by Browning's ability to reduce the Duke's entire utterance, his speech act, to the status of an object? "Should we," as W.J.T. Mitchell suggests, "think of Browning's poem and the readings it evokes, as something we might call "My Last Duke?" (20). To put this question in Bakhtinian terms, should we consider the possibility that the Duke's entire "world of being" is one which "is in principle consummated" ¹ by Browning?

According to Bakhtin, a hero who is consummated lives "within a world which derives its value, independently of the yet-to-be meaning of a lived life, purely from the concrete manifoldness of its already existing makeup" (*A&A* 12-13). Since the Duke comes across as the type of man who will do anything to preserve himself and his "nine-hundred-years-old name," as a man who has a great deal invested in *not becoming* anything other than what he *already is*, Bakhtin's definition seems quite appropriate. However, Bakhtin also defines the hero as one whose life is "enclosed on all sides, as if within a band, by the author's consummating consciousness" (*A&A* 13). As we shall see, this aptly describes, at least on one level, the relationship that exists between Browning and his hero. But Bakhtin's definition proves to be somewhat problematic when we take into account the poem's ending. At the same time that Browning leaves us with an image of a Duke who is very much alive and very much unconsummated, he also leaves us with an image of the Duke pointing to a very fixed and finalized image of art. The Duke may be captured in full movement, in complete control, heading "down" with

¹ The idea that the hero's "world of being" is one which "is in principle consummated" by the author is one which Bakhtin struggles to define throughout his essay "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (*A&A* 4-256).

the envoy, but his last words are "Notice Neptune, though, / Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity, / Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!" (54-6). Obviously, Browning is implying that the Duke's response to art reflects his power as a patron, and his need to "tame" and finalize others. But at the same time, Browning leaves open the question of what response the Duke has evoked in the envoy, as well as the question of whether the Duke has, in fact, finished all that he has to say. In doing so, Browning leaves the reader with an even bigger question: If the Duke's life is one that we are meant to see as "enclosed on all sides," why does he leave his portrait so incomplete?

One possible answer is that Browning wants to sustain the tension and discomfort we experience throughout our reading of the poem; he wants to leave our reading open to numerous possibilities -- to leave us in a state of anticipation. As this chapter will illustrate, this anticipatory state is, in part, predicated upon the tension that is created as we attempt to understand, simultaneously, the "consciousness" of the Duke and Browning's consciousness of that consciousness. In order to sustain this tension, it is absolutely necessary that the Duke appear before us as any natural person would. It is crucial that Browning uphold, to the very end, the illusion that the Duke is capable of living by his own experience and actions. It is by ostensibly providing the Duke with a consciousness and perspective all his own, and by further denying the Duke a certain amount of closure, that Browning implicates us in his own aesthetic project. He demands that we pay attention to the discrepancies between the speaker's perspective (which is generally quite limited) and the poet's (or the implied author's) perspective (which is generally much wider). He reminds us that the nature of our judgment of, and sympathy with, the Duke cannot be fully understood if we

choose to ignore what Langbaum himself described as a "consciousness, whether intellectual or historical, beyond what the speaker can lay claim to" (94).

This consciousness, which Langbaum further identifies as "the mark of the poet's projection into the poem" and "the pole which attracts our projection since we find it in the counterpart of our own consciousness" (94), is needless to say, rather inscrutable -- so inscrutable that Langbaum himself chose to disregard it in favour of emphasizing the reader's relationship to the dramatic speaker. This emphasis leads him to suggest, somewhat problematically, that "the difference between the dramatic monologue and other forms of dramatic literature is that the dramatic monologue does not allow moral judgment to determine the *amount* of sympathy we give to the speaker. We give him all our sympathy as a condition of reading the poem, since he is the only character there" (3).

In his essay, "Speaker, Listener, and Overhearer: The Reader in the Dramatic Monologue," John Maynard places a similar emphasis on the reader's relationship to the enclosed world of the speaker. Building upon Langbaum's theories, Maynard proposes that at first we are coerced into playing a role similar to the envoy's and are pleased "to sit" and listen. However, it is not long, Maynard suggests, before

the poor envoy from the Count virtually propels us by his moral inertia (and still he has not said a word) to move far away from his receptiveness; to be the adverse listener looking to take a Browningsque role of rescuer, or at least avenger of abused innocence. Yet the more we hear the more we are subject to the counter-pressure of the enthrallment to the Duke's rhetoric. We listen despite ourselves, and in listening are oppressed not so much by what lies in the closed heart of the Duke as by passive acceptance of the enormities we hear so magnificently presented. We are surprised not by sin, but by our own moral lethargy. And how much can we protest when we, like the envoy, are swept on (no matter how many times we read it) by the fast pace

of this duke of commercial persuasion and led down quickly past such beautiful emblems of enthrallment: 'Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though. / Taming a sea horse.' (110)

Maynard's point, of course, is that we cannot protest much -- especially if we allow ourselves to believe that we have been participating in a real life situation. The problem is that Browning wants us to understand that this is *not necessarily* the case. Furthermore, he wants to draw attention to the fact that the Duke's sense of self, his approach to life and to art, is clearly problematic. He wants us to question the Duke's "immense attractiveness."

I would suggest, then, that Maynard's theory needs to be expanded to account for the possibility that it doesn't take too many readings before the Duke's power to persuade us wears a little thin. Although our reading position on the tenth or one hundredth time around might well be defined as one of "protesting enthrallment" (Maynard 110), our enthrallment has as much to do with being fascinated by our own "moral lethargy" (which is but one of the poem's effects), as it does with our desire to understand what Browning is attempting to "make us see" through his interaction with his speaker, or hero.

In the same article, Maynard brilliantly defines the reader's role within the dramatic monologue as analogous to being "almost a kind of Wellesian third man, not immediately apparent, entirely reactive, yet ultimately central to the dramatic action of the poem" (111-12). "Much of the discomfort we feel when reading a dramatic monologue," Maynard argues,

is due to the fact that as overhearer rather than direct audience of the poem [we are] drawn into a position vis a vis the speaker by his evaluation of, or reaction to, the rhetorical relation to the listener in the poem . . . the listener in Browning's poems, offers not a fixed reference point but an unsettling vantage point which can attract the overhearer, repel him, or set him off in a

complicated arc as he seeks a listener position he feels comfortable with. (107-8)

What needs to be further emphasized in both Langbaum's and Maynard's rhetorical paradigm is Browning's constructive, interactive, and controlling role in the poem. As outlined in Chapter One, becoming responsible, or answerable, to what we have experienced in art involves acknowledging our own position in relation to the author's struggle to consummate the work as a whole. In order to appreciate and understand, more fully, our own discomfort, our own threshold experience, we must gain some sense of *all* the boundaries we are asked to negotiate. Once we are able to see the various ways in which Browning himself provides alternative "unsettling vantage points" which draw us "outside" the poem, it becomes a little easier to understand how we get caught betwixt and between varying perspectives. For if, as Bakhtin suggests, communication takes place on the boundaries, if understanding is dialogic, then we must acknowledge those places in the text where it is possible to imagine Browning struggling to maintain his *outsidedness*. We must acknowledge what Bakhtin would define as the "aesthetic consciousness . . . the consciousness of a consciousness: the author's (the *I*'s) consciousness of the hero's (the other's) consciousness" (*A&A* 89).

The nature of "aesthetic consciousness" is such that it must always remain somewhat unknowable. Nevertheless, Bakhtin's model of the author/hero relationship in aesthetic activity can shed some interesting light on how meaning is generated in the dramatic monologue. Even more importantly, it can enable us to better understand how Browning's approach to aesthetics illuminates that which is problematic about the Duke's whole approach to art and life.

For Bakhtin, the "aesthetic project always begins with the creation of a whole human being, a *second consciousness* in addition to the author's . . . What makes any work aesthetic is the degree to which this second consciousness has a logic and a dynamics of its own, with which the author interacts" (*CofP* 72). In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin conducts a lengthy investigation into the ethical and aesthetic relations between the self ("author") and the other ("hero"). Likening this relationship to that which exists between a mother and child or between lovers (*A&A* 51, 90), he suggests that it is essential for the author to love the hero "whatever he may be" (*A&A* 90). The author is obliged to act in good faith, to "surmount content" (which Bakhtin sees as belonging to the hero) with "loving form": "The author's activity is directed upon content (upon the hero's own tension in living his life): . . . the author gives form to this content and consummates it by using a particular material for this purpose (verbal material in our case²), and by subordinating this material to his artistic task" (*A&A* 192). Although Bakhtin understands form and content to be equally powerful generators of meaning, he insists that meaning is primarily constructed by the author (self) and bestowed as a gift upon the passive recipient other (the hero). Both meaning and a self-consciousness is generated in the "aesthetic event" which takes place between two "noncoinciding consciousnesses" (*A&A* 22). A single consciousness is in no position to generate a sense of self; this requires the awareness of another consciousness *outside* the self.

Bakhtin further insists that in order to continue to generate meaning the author/self must be in a constant state of flux, a perpetual state of becoming. In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," he argues that "the *author's*

² i.e., the case of a text.

consciousness, just like epistemological consciousness, is incapable of being consummated" (*A&A* 89). "In order to live and to act," he writes, "I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself -- at least in all the essential moments constituting my life, to be, for myself, someone who is axiologically yet-to-be, someone who does not coincide with his already existing makeup" (*A&A* 12-13). Bakhtin would later insist that it was possible to view the Dostoevskian-type hero as unconsummated, and unfinalizable, and he would state that it was possible for the author and hero to act as equal participants within a dialogic, novelistic whole (*PofDP* 297). Yet his first vision of the author/hero relationship was obviously far more limiting. Not only did he argue that the "author of a work is the bearer and sustainer of the intently active unity of a consummated whole (the whole of a hero and the whole of a work)," he insisted that the author "sees and knows something that is in principle inaccessible to his heroes." "It is," Bakhtin wrote, "precisely in this invariably determinate and stable *excess* of the author's seeing and knowing in relation to each hero that we find all those moments that bring about the consummation of the whole -- the whole of each hero as well as the whole of the event which constitutes their life and in which they jointly participate, i.e., the whole of the work" (*A&A* 12).

Given his reference to other heroes, Bakhtin obviously had the novel in mind when he wrote this. Yet much of what he said here is most applicable to the dramatic monologue. When reading a dramatic monologue it is always useful to keep in mind that the author "sees and knows *more*" than the hero. Although the hero "participates" in the event which is the whole of the work, his perception is always limited and controlled by a perspective much larger than his own. Because the hero of a dramatic monologue appears to be the primary speaking subject, and comes across very much as any other real

person would, it is all too easy to overlook the fact that he is never in a position to address the reader or respond to him or her, that he is never in a position where he can be affected by our response, our moral judgment or our experience. Most importantly, Bakhtin's ideas can serve to remind us that we are never *really* in a position to respond to the hero's utterance. We just think we are. In reality, what we are always responding to is the author's speech will, his speech plan.

To some extent, Bakhtin's thoughts help to explain why the hero of the dramatic monologue is so often incapable of resolving his or her own situation, of bringing it to some evaluative conclusion. A conclusion, however relative, is not the hero's to make. In fact, Browning's "excess of seeing" is perhaps one of the primary reasons we become so actively and empathetically involved as readers. By intentionally bestowing the "gift" of a limited perspective on his speaker, Browning presents us with a hero we can't trust to complete the whole -- let alone come to a better understanding of himself or his situation. That we should respond by wanting to compensate for what he has failed to observe by completing his understanding,³ and/or by consummating the whole of the discourse act, is only natural.

In the case of the Duke, Browning goes out of his way to create a hero whose limited perspective is driven by his need to eradicate the perspectives of others. As Maynard points out, this makes it that much easier to fall into a state of "moral lethargy." However, we can, to some degree, escape our own

³ As Langbaum points out, "The meaning of the dramatic monologue is in the disequilibrium with what the speaker reveals and understands. We understand the speaker's point of view not through his description of it but indirectly, through seeing what he sees while judging the limitations and distortions of what he sees. The result is that we understand, if not more, at least something other than the speaker understands, and the meaning is conveyed as much by what the speaker conceals and distorts as by what he reveals"(146).

conscientious apathy by paying particular attention to those moments in the poem when the Duke is consummated, however momentarily. This requires that we pay attention to those times when Browning reminds us of his own participatory role in the poem, to those times when we become acutely aware of the poet's "excess of seeing."

Bakhtin suggests that "all of the moments that actively consummate a hero render the hero passive, the way a part is passive in relation to the whole which encompasses and consummates it" (*A&A* 14). Since "wholeness, or consummation . . . is almost literally in the eye of the beholder" (*A&A* x), it follows that every time we acknowledge the moments of consummation, our position as reader shifts, our point of view changes. According to Bakhtin, it is in these moments where we recognize our own "reactions to reactions" in the work of art, our own response to an "other," that the text is transformed into an event and given meaning (*A&A* xxxi).

In his essay "The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms," Ralph Radar implies that such a "meaningful" event occurs for most readers even during, or at least upon completion of an initial reading:

. . . before any analytic reflection whatever, we are imaginatively aware of the Duke as held within and sustained by the poet's creative consciousness. If we ask ourselves whether in reading the poem we imaginatively hear the words of the poem as spoken by the Duke, we discover of course that we do. If we then ask if we hear the rhymes in the poem as part of the Duke's speech, we discover that we do not. (133)

What Radar fails to mention here is that Browning's "creative consciousness," his "surplus of vision" is evident right at the beginning of "My Last Duchess" -- or, depending on how one wants to look at it, before the poem even begins.

In poems such as "Andrea del Sarto `The Faultless Painter,'" "The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," "Fra Lippo Lippi," and "Pictor Ignotus," to name a few, Browning quite obviously claims the title as his own. To put it in Bakhtinian terms, we are clearly meant to see the title as a part of a whole that is temporarily consummated. In "My Last Duchess" Browning makes his presence as inobtrusive as possible. To put it another way, he seems to make a special point of underlining his absence. Unlike the majority of his poems, he makes it extremely easy for the reader to associate the title with the Duke's utterance rather than his own. But, if we really think about it, associating the title with the Duke's utterance only makes sense if we imagine him pointing to a plaque or inscription beneath the duchess's portrait, or announcing his own speech act -- two possibilities which seem highly unlikely. The possessive pronoun "my" may throw the reader off momentarily, but Browning still provides us with enough graphematic clues to suggest that we ought to at least consider the possibility that the utterance to which we are made answerable is Browning's own:

My Last Duchess

FERRARA

That's my last duchess painted on the wall,
 Looking as if she were alive. I call
 That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands
 Worked busily a day, and there she stands. (1-4)

By emphasizing the word FERRARA, and setting it apart on the page, the poet manages to underline the "dramatic" aspect of this "dramatic lyric" by opening with a possible stage direction. At the same time, Browning

manages to assign an epitaphic quality to the poem which subtly alerts the reader to the possibility that the poem will be historical -- to the possibility that Browning's grasp of the historical context will be wider than the Duke's.⁴ As we shall see, this epitaphic quality also serves to alert us to the Duke's potential consummation.

In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin argues that "of essential significance for accomplishing the aesthetic consummation of a human being is the anticipation of his death" (*A&A* 130). He further points out that "memory begins to act as a gathering and completing force from the very first moment of the hero's appearance; the hero is born in this memory (of his death), and the process of giving form to him is a process of commemoration (commemoration of the departed)" (*A&A* 131).

Certainly the possibility that Browning wants to prepare his reader for the commemoration or resurrection of a hero, the anticipation of his or her death, or both, is all too evident. The question is: "what hero?" The most obvious

⁴ The reader who is not already familiar with quattrocento Italian politics or early Renaissance palaces, will, of course, be at a some disadvantage when it comes to responding to the extraverbal context Browning presents us with in the single word "FERRARA." If we are familiar with Louis S. Friedland's research, or have done some of our own, we will know that Browning's model for the Duke was quite possibly Alfonso II of Ferrara, and that his prospective bride was the daughter of Ferdinand, Count of Tyrol. If we have read *Sordello* and *The Essay on Chatterton*, we will know Browning was aware that Alfonso II imprisoned the poet, Torquato Tasso, and that the precursor for Browning's Duke had more than a passing interest in both patronizing, and dominating, the forces of art. For further discussion of this idea, see Tucker (181). If our background includes some knowledge of Cortesi's 15th century treatise on the significance of quattrocento palaces, we may well anticipate, long before the Duke's utterance is complete, that his attitude toward art and aesthetics will be one which serves a need to maintain a position of power and control. In Kathleen Weil-Garris & John D'Amico's book, *The Cardinal's Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi's De Cardinalatu*, it becomes quite evident that the Duke shares an attitude toward art and aesthetics that was popular among the aristocratic order of the time. Certainly, it would not be difficult to imagine the Duke expressing Cortesi's belief that "beauty calms the citizens and persuades the unruly to seek order" -- that the "value of the palace," its "sumptuousness" ought to reflect a "high official station" (Weil-Garris 46-7).

answer is that Browning is preparing us for the Duke's commemoration of his "last duchess." The less obvious answer is that we are being set up to participate in Browning's act of resurrecting, or commemorating, the Duke. In point of fact, we are being prepared for both. He is setting his reader up to respond empathetically to both the Duke and his duchess. At the same time he is reminding his reader that he will be sustain the objective distance necessary to engage in aesthetic activity with the Duke.

Bakhtin would argue that the reason Browning is able to do this is that he avoids merging with his hero. In his discussion of "Impoverishing" theories, the philosopher points out that the typical response to another's sufferings, to another's limitations, is empathy, otherwise known as an attempt to see the world from the other's point of view. The problem with merging with another, Bakhtin posits, is that it requires the renouncing of one's own outsideness and surplus of vision -- a response which he views as wholly plausible but inevitably unproductive.⁵ Rather than empathy, Bakhtin suggests we need what he calls "live entering" or "living into" an "other." In "live entering," Bakhtin writes, "I *actively* enter as a living being into an individuality, and consequently do not, for a single moment, lose myself completely or lose my singular place outside that individuality. It's not the subject who unexpectedly takes possession of a passive me, but *I* who actively enter into him; *vzhivanie* [live entering] is *my* act, and only in it can

⁵ "In what way," Bakhtin asks, "would it enrich the event if I merged with the other, and instead of *two* there would now be only *one*? And what would I myself have to gain by the other's merging with me? If he did, he would see and know only what I already see and know myself; he would merely repeat in himself that want of any issue out of itself which characterizes my own life. Let him rather remain outside me" (*A&A* 87).

there be a productiveness and innovation" (*CofP* 54).⁶ As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson translate this model of interaction, the author's "'surplus of vision' or 'excess of seeing' is simultaneously 'exploited and renounced; one brings into interaction both perspectives simultaneously and creates an 'architectonics' of vision reducible to neither. It is this architectonics which produces new understanding" (*CofP* 54).

This model quite clearly complements Bakhtin's belief that empathy with an "other" cannot provide the objective form-giving perception necessary for creating a consciousness of a consciousness. Likewise, it supports his view that an author cannot give birth to a hero, cannot commemorate him, without removing himself, at least temporarily, from the center of the action.⁷

Nor can he consummate him. As Bakhtin perceives it, when an author and hero -- or as I see it, a reader and hero -- "coincide or when they find themselves standing next to one another in the face of a value they share or against one another as antagonists, the aesthetic event ends and an *ethical* event begins (polemical tract, manifesto, speech of accusation or of praise and gratitude, invective, confession as a self-accounting, etc.)" (*A&A* 22). In an ethical event there can be no 'dialogue' as Bakhtin understands the term. Consummation, on the other hand, is always an "aesthetic" act, an "*aesthetic* event;"⁸ it requires at least two autonomous consciousnesses, a "self" and an

⁶ In their book, *Mikhail Bakhtin Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson often summarize their own translation of *K filosofii postupka* [*Toward a Philosophy of the Act*]. For a more detailed discussion of these ideas see *PofA* 35-39.

⁷ This idea is a paraphrase of Henri Bergson who, according to Holquist (31), influenced Bakhtin a great deal.

⁸ In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin argues that "If there is only one unitary and unique participant, there can be no *aesthetic* event. An absolute consciousness, a consciousness that has nothing transgredient to itself, nothing situated outside itself and capable of delimiting it from outside -- such a consciousness cannot be "aestheticized"; one can commune in it, but it cannot be seen as a *whole* that is capable of

"other." It is always dialogic. Like the act of response, the act of consummation always bears witness to the need to respond, the need for further interaction; it is always anticipatory:

all the moments that can consummate us in the consciousness of the other lose their consummating power by being anticipated in our own consciousness, and as such they merely extend our consciousness in its own direction. Even if we succeeded in encompassing the whole of our consciousness as consummated in the other, this whole would not be able to take possession of us and really consummate us for ourselves: our consciousness would take that whole into account and would surmount it as just one of the moments in its own unity (which is not a unity that is *given* but a unity that is set as a *task* and, in its essentials, is *yet-to-be*). That last word, that is, would belong to our own consciousness rather than to the consciousness of another, and our own consciousness would never say to itself the word that would consummate it. After looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, we always return -- in life -- into ourselves again, and the final, or, as it were, recapitulative event takes place within ourselves in the categories of our own life.

(A&A 16-17)

In "My Last Duchess," the Duke speaks as if he is taking into account the possible consummating consciousnesses of others and surmounting them. The problem is that he is only capable of surmounting the consummating consciousnesses of others that exist within his enclosed world. He cannot possibly anticipate the moments when Browning effectively consummates him. Nor can he anticipate the reader's consummating consciousness. All of the points of support that Browning and the reader are able to access *outside* his consciousness, both in time and space are inaccessible to the Duke. And so his role within the dramatic monologue is ironically exposed as being

being consummated. An aesthetic event can take place only when there are two participants present; it presupposes two noncoinciding consciousnesses" (A&A 22).

insufficient and insignificant when placed against the background of a much larger, boundless universal picture of the world.

However much we are aware that the Duke's perspective will necessarily be limited, Browning makes it all too easy to forget that what we are being exposed to is a dialogized, hybridized utterance -- that Browning is in the background speaking through him, and "living into" him. Of course, the primary reason for this lies in our inability to imagine Browning actively participating in the conversation between the Duke and his interlocutor -- a conversation that is already in progress. We tend to assume that Browning is as much of an outsider in this scenario as we are. Since it is difficult for us to understand or entirely visualize the scene unfolding before us, we naturally assume that the poet's vision and understanding is similarly limited.

Paradoxically, our inability to construct fully the extra-verbal context in which the Duke speaks actually serves to remind us of Browning's "ever-present *excess* of seeing, knowing, and possessing" in relation to the Duke and his world (*A&A* 23). To put it another way, our inability to visualize the entire picture, underlines the Duke's isolation and enclosure. In one of his lesser known essays, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art,"⁹ Bakhtin suggests that

the *extraverbal context* of the utterance is comprised of three factors: (1) the *common spatial purview* of the interlocutors (the unity of the visible . . .), (2) the interlocutors' *common knowledge and understanding of the situation*, and (3) their *common evaluation* of that situation. (*FCS* 99)

⁹ This work is signed by Volosinov.

As we read the lines "That's my last duchess painted on the wall," we can't possibly know whether the Duke is pointing to a framed painting or a fresco. If this is our first reading, we won't even know whom the Duke is speaking to, let alone what his purpose is. We have no idea what duchess he is talking about. We have no idea whether he is interested in discussing the woman or the work of art. Whatever "common knowledge and understanding," whatever "common evaluation" of the situation the Duke and the envoy share remains a mystery to us. And it remains somewhat of an enigma each and every time we read the poem.

The more conscious we become of these circumstantial enigmas present within the Duke's speech, the more aware we become of Browning's struggle to consummate his hero, to consummate the whole of the work. The first time we read the words "Will't please you to sit and look at her? I said / 'Fra Pandolf' by design," we probably only concern ourselves with the question of whom the Duke is speaking to. The second or nth time around, we begin to think about Browning's apperceptive knowledge -- his surplus of vision. What does he know about the Duke's relationship to Fra Pandolf that we don't? How does he want us to perceive the envoy's position in relation to the Duke's? What did he, as poet (or implied author), intend to accomplish by speaking through the Duke in this particular way in this particular situation?

Obviously, no matter how many times we read the poem the question of what the Duke is up to continues to be of primary importance. However, the more aware we become of the active role both the author and the reader play in shaping the discourse, the more attention we find ourselves paying to the question of how meaning is generated through the various levels of communication going on in the text. For instance, once we know that the Duke's speech is directed at an emissary from the count, our curiosity about

the role the emissary plays in shaping the Duke's utterance is raised. We begin to wonder what the envoy knows that we don't, whether the Duke's words carry a slight tone of respect, condescension, or deference towards his listener. And as we struggle to determine the answers to these questions, the role we play as readers in shaping the utterance that is Browning's work as a whole becomes even more relevant. The more we attempt to reconcile Browning's perspective with the Duke's, the more we are able to see that *both* judgment and sympathy play an integral role in our reading process -- that judgment does not necessarily have to imply moral condemnation -- that judgment can, and should, imply our ability to discriminate and appreciate the consequences of "merging" with another. We are able to see that our understanding of the poem and the Duke is enhanced by, and dependent upon, freeing ourselves from the Duke's distorted, limited, and isolated vision of understanding.

In his essay "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin argues that "response prepares the ground for an active and engaged understanding. Understanding comes to fruition only in the response. Understanding and response are dialectically merged and mutually condition one another; one is impossible without the other" (*DI* 282). Bakhtin then goes on to suggest that the speaker of an utterance plays a role that is similar to that of the artist who steps back from his work to imagine how it might be perceived:

The speaker strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conceptual system of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system. The speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory, against his, the listener's, apperceptive background. (*DI* 282)

Throughout his speech, the Duke *appears* to be pre-occupied with these concerns. As he addresses the envoy it seems that, for the most part, he is anticipating the envoy's response, or at least assuming a responsive position toward him that is based on the previous response of other "strangers":

I said
 "Fra Pandolf" by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not
 Her husband's presence only, called that spot
 Of joy into the Duchess' cheek: perhaps
 Fra Pandolf chanced to say "Her mantle laps
 Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along her throat": (5-19)

Certainly as many assumptions and values are expressed in what is *not said* here, as in what is spoken. When we read the words "so, not the first / Are you to turn and ask thus," we can't help but wonder if the envoy has simply turned and pointed toward the "spot of joy" on the duchess' cheeks, turned and raised his eyebrows, or turned and uttered a word. Whether the latter is the case or not, Browning is clearly drawing attention to the fact that one of the primary roles of his constructed "hero" in this dramatic monologue is to play upon the conventions of speech communication. This is even more evident in the Duke's skillful internalization of Fra Pandolf's speech. As we question what it is Fra Pandolf "perhaps . . . chanced to say," as we hear his voice coming up in the Duke's, it is tempting to think that the Duke is actually concerned with the perspective of others. But it is important to remember that the Duke uses the artist's voice in order to defend himself and ease his

own uncertainty. In his essay, "The Problem of Speech Genres" Bakhtin suggests that,

Quite frequently within the boundaries of his own utterance the speaker (or writer) raises questions, answers them himself, raises objections to his own ideas, responds to his own objections and so on. But these phenomena are nothing other than a conventional playing out of speech communication and primary speech genres. (*Speech Genres* 72)

In the Duke's case, these "phenomena" work to hold the envoy's response, and possible condemnation, at bay. Most importantly, the Duke uses his own questions and objections in order to ease his own "guilt, or liability to blame" (*A&A* 1) and relieve himself of his own answerability. But in many ways his own self-questioning works to expose his uncertainty rather than alleviate it. Although the Duke would like to convey the message that he is a man who confronts no personal struggles and has made the choice "Never to stoop," he is not all that successful. In order to maintain his authority, the Duke appears to think it is necessary to stave off the interpretations or pre-suppositions of others. He speaks as if he fears that the perspective, the "looks" of others, will have the effect of finalizing him. And so he speaks for them, in an effort to control their point of view. This is most notable two-thirds of the way through the poem when he implies that the envoy, or anyone else in his situation, would naturally adopt his perspective if they too had to deal with a duchess who had "A heart --- how shall I say? --- too soon made glad."

She thanked men--good! but thanked
 Somehow --- I know not how --- as if she ranked
 My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name
 With anybody's gift. Who'd stoop to blame
 This sort of trifling? Even had you skill
 In speech --- (which I have not) --- to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one, and say, "Just this
 Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,
 Or there exceed the mark" (31-9)

If it weren't for the fact that the Duke's words seem to be imbued with meanings that reflect more than one context, the Duke would probably come across as being far more self-assured. The problem is that Browning charges the Duke's words and his utterance with enough emotionally expressive accentuation that the Duke manages to undermine his own argument. Herbert Tucker has suggested that Browning's frequent use of dashes mark points in the poem where the Duke's speech "begins to crack," thereby illustrating his inability to tolerate the "indeterminacy of intention within himself" (177-8). Certainly it is possible to read the pauses in the Duke's speech as "hesitant gestures" as mark of his weakness, as an "expression of a private struggle" (Tucker 178). But in order to do so, we must consider the possibility that Browning wants us to understand that the Duke is capable of allowing his response to the duchess' portrait, his experience of art, to effect his understanding of life. It is better, I think, to see these punctuation marks as tonal -- as pauses which may carry a different emotional accentuation for the Duke and envoy than Browning expects them to carry in his communication with the reader. However we choose to look at it, the pauses serve to greatly weaken the boundaries of the Duke's utterance by pointing to the creative consciousness that stands outside it.

For example, it is quite possible to read the dashes, the pauses in the lines, "She had / A heart --- how shall I say? --- too soon made glad" (21-2) . . . "She thanked men, good! but thanked / Somehow --- I know not how ---" (31-2) as moments in the poem when we are reminded of Browning's participatory role, as moments when Duke is temporarily consummated. As the Duke is rendered passive, it becomes possible for us to view his utterance a little more objectively, to see his "hesitant gestures" as a means by which

Browning draws attention to the fact that Duke's perspective is not only limited, but is clearly problematic.

Whenever we are able to take a stand outside the Duke and see his speech act as a "contrived representation,"¹⁰ our awareness of how and why we tend to regard the Duke from juxtaposed perspectives is heightened. For example, once we are able to see that the Duke's internalization of the speech of others is nothing more than a rhetorical strategy, it becomes possible to view this "internalization" as an act of appropriation, equal in many ways to his appropriation of the duchess. We can see that, rather than using Fra Pandolf's voice to look at himself through the artist's eyes to gain some insight into himself, he uses the artist voice to maintain some distance between himself and the work that stands before him -- and to convince himself that the artist is but an "other," who must remain in the same sphere of acquisition as the duchess.¹¹ We can see that the Duke is primarily interested in securing for himself a "position of mastery" -- that he is far more interested in asserting what he "knows" to be the truth, than questioning it. Just as the Duke *uses* Fra Pandolf's voice to "speak about" the artist, the Duke *uses* the rather ambiguous disclaimer "even had you skill / In speech---(which I have not)---"

¹⁰ In his book, *Browning and the Fictions of Identity*, Warwick Slinn points out that "the elements of artifice in a Browning monologue mean therefore that it is less a slice-of-life than a contrived representation of the contrivance of human reality" (3).

¹¹ This line of thinking has been heavily influenced by Trinh-Minh ha, who argues in her article "Cotton and Iron" that "without a certain act of displacement, 'speaking about' only partakes in the conservation of systems of binary opposition (subject/object; I/It; We/They) on which territorialized knowledge depends. It places a semantic distance between oneself and the work; oneself (the maker) and the receiver; oneself and the other. It secures for the speaker a position of mastery; I am in the midst of knowing, acquiring, deploying world--I appropriate, own, and demarcate my sovereign territory as I advance--while the 'other' remains in the sphere of acquisition" (12).

to maintain the distance between himself and his receiver -- that is, in order to deprive the Count's representative of the power to challenge him.

Of course, this distantiating is but another one of the generic conventions of the dramatic monologue -- one which raises the question of whether the Duke and the envoy are even capable of dialogic understanding. Certainly, Browning's representation leads us to believe that the Duke has a great deal invested in maintaining a monologic discourse, one which refuses to recognize its responsibility as addressee, and pretends to be the "last word." What the Duke can't possibly know is that with Browning's help, the reader is able to pick up certain emotional accentuations in his utterance and in his words that belie his attempts to preserve his image and his authority.

In his essay "The Problem of the Text" Bakhtin explains, to some degree, why a hero like the one Browning presents us with in the Duke has less control over the meaning and direction of his words than he might like. As if possessing a mind of its own, Bakhtin argues, the "word moves ever forward in search of responsive understanding . . . Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response and so forth *ad infinitum*" (SG 127). Similarly, the utterance itself has a way of taking on the meaning or expression of what it has come in contact with before and what it anticipates in the future:

The expression of an utterance can never be fully understood or explained if its thematic content is all that is taken into account. The expression of an utterance always *responds* to a greater or lesser degree, that is, it expresses the speaker's attitude toward others' utterances and not just his attitude toward the object of his utterance . . . However monological the utterance may be . . . however much it may concentrate on its own object, its own issue, it cannot but be, in some measure, a response to what has already been said about the given topic, on the given issue, even

though this responsiveness may not have assumed a clear-cut external expression. (SG 92)

Although the Duke assumes that the envoy will know that his words are meant to mean far more than he says, he still speaks as if his words were entirely unmediated, as if there was no question that his words were adequate to his intention. Like everything else in his life, it would seem that he would like language itself to act in an obedient and subservient fashion. This, as Bakhtin suggests, is an impossibility. The word is always "*the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*" (SG 86). The word is "never free of the aspirations and evaluations of others, uninhabited by others' voices" (SG 202). As Bakhtin would see it, whether "Fra Pandolf chanced to say 'Her mantle laps / Over her lady's wrist too much,'" or not, his words will always be a multi-sided act. They will always belong to the artist, to the Duke, to Browning and to the reader. Consequently, the Duke's words will always be "permeated with the intentions of others" (SG 202). They will always have the potential to express far more than he knows; their meaning will always be beyond his control.

In his essay, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art," Bakhtin explains why words always carry far greater meaning than can be attributed to any single context. Words always carry certain contextual "intonations" and "*Intonation always lies on the border of the verbal and the nonverbal, the said and the unsaid . . .* Almost any example of live intonation in emotionally charged behavioral speech proceeds as if it addressed, behind inanimate objects and phenomena, animate participants and agents in life: in other words, it has an inherent *tendency toward personification* " (FCS 102-3). Bakhtin further explains that a

Close kinship unites the intonational metaphor with the *gesticulatory metaphor* (indeed, words were themselves originally lingual gestures, constituting one component of a complex, omnicorporeal gesture) . . . just as intonation requires the choral support of surrounding persons; only in an atmosphere of sympathy is free and assured gesture possible. Furthermore, and again just as intonation, gesture makes an opening into the situation and introduces a third participant -- the hero.
(FCS 104)

Within the Duke's enclosed utterance the duchess's portrait is personified as a hero. She comes alive, albeit momentarily in the intonation that bespeaks not once, but twice, the "spot of joy" upon her cheeks, "the faint / half flush that dies along her throat," her "earnest glance," "her blush," her "smile." As a first-time reader we may not be able to determine whether the Duke's words bear the weight of a mutual appreciation of her "looks" or whether they are expressed in a cold calculating manner indicative of a possessive, jealous nature. We do, however, sense on a subliminal level, at least, that the Duke fails in his attempt to define and contain his own or the envoy's "impression" of the duchess, simply because his emotional accentuation concerning her countenance bears witness to her life -- and to all that was left unsaid:

she liked whate'er
She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.
Sir, 'twas all one! My favor at her breast,
The dropping of the daylight in the West,
The bough of cherries some officious fool
Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule
She rode with round the terrace --- all and each
Would draw from her the approving speech,
Or blush, at least. (23-31)

With no response on the part of the envoy, and no example provided of the duchess's "approving speech," we are left to assume that the Duke and the envoy share some common value judgments -- that the Duke expects his

listener to lend him a sympathetic ear when he speaks of her "infidelity." But this too is something Browning wants us to question. By not supplying the details, the poet forces us to wonder about the seriousness of her relationship with the "officious fool." Her whereabouts, her attitude toward the Duke, and the reason why she was confined to the terrace all become the subject of our interrogation.

Our inability to put all of the pieces together introduces, once again, the possibility that Browning is there, somewhere in the background, speaking through the Duke, drawing attention to the struggle the poet went through in constructing the whole of the work. As the reader attempts to negotiate the borders between what it is the Duke is trying to get across to the envoy, and what it is Browning is expressing through the utterance that is the work itself, we naturally get caught betwixt and between varying perspectives. Our discriminating judgment is called upon. And the more we question the intonation of the Duke's utterance, the more obvious it becomes that Browning uses this intonation to draw attention to the Duke's own subservient position as a hero within the unfolding event that is the poet's work.

In his essay, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art" Bakhtin states that:

Every instance of intonation is oriented in *two directions*: with respect to the listener as ally or witness and with respect to the object of the utterance as the third, living participant whom the intonation scolds or caresses, denigrates or magnifies . . . *any locution actually said aloud or written down for intelligible communication . . . is the expression and product of the social interaction of three participants: the speaker (author), the listener (reader), and the topic (the who or what) of speech (the hero).* (FCS 105)

Since "expressive intonation belongs to the utterance and not the word" (SG 86), and the dramatic monologue is a hybridized utterance, it follows that

what the Duke intones and gesticulates is necessarily oriented in more directions than two. The expression and product of the social interaction that takes place between the Duke, the envoy, and the portrait of the duchess cannot be limited to that enclosed world. This is because, on some level, most readers can sense, especially in subsequent readings, Browning's authorial response, his creative consciousness penetrating and encompassing the Duke's consciousness. We can sense the "author's reactions to the reaction of the hero" (*A&A* 218) intonationally expressed in the form of irony.

Whether we can read this ironic intonation into the Duke's utterance is another question entirely. Reading aloud, it is certainly possible to expose the Duke's fallibilities, his inadequacies, his inability to interpret his life simply by reading a certain amount of hesitation, compassion or haughty superciliousness into the poem. However we choose to read it, we are still left with the ever persistent question of what we are to make of the rather ambiguous ending, as well as the Duke's affectations of kindness toward the next duchess:

I repeat,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretense
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
 Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
 At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go
 Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!
 (48-56)

Because we are given no clue as to whether the Duke continues speaking as he heads down to "meet / The company below," (48) the question of whether he is warning his next duchess out of compassion or self-interest has

to remain as open-ended as the question of whether he is warning her at all.¹² Either way, it is important that the intonations in the Duke's words convey his distaste for anyone and anything that disturbs his equanimity -- that he come across as a man who couldn't care less about anyone other than himself, as a man who must maintain, at all costs, control over his life and his surroundings.

Interestingly, this kind of reading requires that we play a kind of supporting role, similar to that of the envoy's -- that we allow the Duke to carry on as if nothing outside his world is of any relevance, including our response. Our perspective does not matter. We read him as if he were a hero capable of constructing his own mask -- as if the only other self in the world he were capable of living alongside and identifying with were his own persona. We read him as a man who is incapable of taking a stand outside himself, as a man who is even unable to conceptualize living his life as someone who is "axiologically yet-to-be." In a way, by withholding or refusing to create a space for our own response, we take part in preserving his "nine-hundred-years-old name." We awaken ourselves to the fact that what we make of him afterwards is about as relevant to him as the response he has evoked in each and every visitor he has previously subjected to the unveiling of the duchess' portrait. He couldn't care less.

This awareness of the Duke's inability to act as a self in relation to any "other" outside his enclosed world draws attention to the irony which underlies his apparent ingenuousness. At the same time, it serves to remind

¹² Ralph Rader insists that "if the reader has registered the hints of purpose that have come all along the way and bears in mind the Duke's proud watchword, 'I choose never to stoop,' the truth will come to him as it must come to the envoy, with great and sudden impact: the Duke has all this time been warning his new wife without seeming to warn her, because to warn her would be to stoop when he chooses never to stoop" (138).

us that the Duke's repression of, and obliviousness to, all response reflects a singularly oppressive view of art and life itself. The Duke's inability to interact spontaneously with others, his penchant for relieving himself of any liability from guilt or blame, only serves to underline his own artifice, and alert us, once again, to Browning's consummating consciousness.

Although Browning certainly doesn't encourage us to read the poem in such a way that his *authoritative* presence, his aestheticizing consciousness is sustained, or predominant, an interesting phenomenon happens when we practice the Duke's philosophy of taking things to the extreme. In "My Last Duchess" the simplest way to overrule the Duke's perspective is to read the iambic pentameter rhyming couplets into the poem. Although "most readers" as Rader points out, "do not 'hear' the rhymes at all -- or at least not until the very end when Browning frees them from their muffled enjambment and allows them to chime as they ought" (139), what happens when we do force the end rhymes is really quite illuminating. The Duke's power to persuade, his "present" voice just about disappears. He really does become a "dead speaker" addressing a "dead interlocutor." His whole speech takes on a ghostlike, eerie quality. Pausing at each end rhyme has the strange effect of drawing attention to the grammatical and syntactical pauses within the poem -- all of which are calculated by Browning, or prompted by what Bakhtin would call "some external circumstance." When we force the rhyme "wall" and "call" in "That's my last duchess painted on the wall, / Looking as if she were alive. I call" we either stumble over the punctuation between "alive" and "I," or attempt to erase it or ignore it. Either way the mark is foregrounded. What we also notice is that the next line now reads as a couple of fragments: "That piece a wonder now: Fra Pandolf's hands." And a second fragment runs into yet another: "Worked busily a day and there she stands." The more

we read Browning's "hands" into the poem the more the Duke's whole ability to make his "will / Quite clear," his whole perspective, is thrown into question.

Browning's capacity to break down the Duke's speech becomes even more evident when we force the rhymes in the following lines:

Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew: I gave commands;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat, (43-8)

Chiming the words doubt/without, commands/stands and meet/repeat effectively disturbs the Duke's whole ability to exercise the temporal rights he appears to think are sanctioned by his "nine-hundred-years-old name." The fragments "Much the same smile," "This grew: I gave commands:" "As if Alive," "We'll meet," "Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without" are underlined to such an extent that Duke's rhetoric disintegrates before our very eyes. His need to control a future aspect of his life (the next duchess's response to him and to the world), becomes an expression of his own insecurities. His safe, enclosed world is thrown into a state of crisis -- a state of crisis which the Duke can never experience, and must, given his position within the dramatic monologue, always remain oblivious to.

Knowing that Browning has the power to reduce the Duke at any moment to a mere ghost of himself raises that ever-persistent question of why, in the end, he chooses to let his hero get away with murder, why "condemnation" is the "least interesting response" (Langbaum 83). The answer is simply that both the event and the meaning of the poem are enriched by Browning's

willingness to let "two truths," two points of view, reveal themselves in the ambivalent wholeness that is the work itself.

Throughout "My Last Duchess" Browning creates a threshold space for the reader that the Duke has no access to. He forces us to live in a state of crisis, to live on the boundaries betwixt and between varying perspectives. Our ability to discriminate between the poet's perspective and the Duke's own increases our understanding of the poem. At the same time, our inability to reconcile the two perspectives enables us to see that the Duke lives his life "un-consciously" -- that at any moment Browning has it within his power to impose "from outside" an aesthetic finalization of that life.

Ironically, the fact that Browning chooses to consummate the whole of the work and leave the Duke's future open to question suggests that, in the end, he has a far better approach to aesthetics, to art and to life, than his hero. While the Duke sees no alternative but to do away with a woman who celebrates life, who interacts and responds to others and finds beauty in the simplest things, Browning finds it in his heart to let the Duke think and to act as if he gets away with it. This final open-ended juxtaposition of perspectives leaves the reader hanging in a liminal position which demands that we see Browning's work for what it is: an aesthetic project, an event, which involves a "depth of passion," an "earnest glance" at what takes place "on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness" (*PofDP* 287).

Acknowledging the fact that, as long as we are alive, we share with the work the potential to generate meaning forever leads us to wonder if our sympathy for the Duke has less to do with him "being the only character there" (Langbaum 3), and more to do with his inability to appreciate the helplessness of his own situation. As despicable, as "outrageous as the

Duke's behaviour is," we can't help but feel empathy toward a hero who just doesn't understand that "life is very dialogic by its nature -- that to live means to engage in dialogue to question, to answer, to agree" (*PofDP* 293). We can't help but suspend our moral judgment when we know that he essentially has no more power over his life than the duchess did.

By actively consummating the Duke throughout the work, Browning draws us outside the poem, and calls upon our discriminatory judgment. He forces us to appreciate a way of looking at art that lies beyond the Duke's realm of comprehension. To put it in Bakhtin's words, Browning makes us see that "'the artistic' in its total integrity is not located in the artifact and not located in the separately considered psyches of creator and contemplator; it encompasses all three of these factors" (*FCS* 97). Browning's whole poem adumbrates one of Bakhtin's earliest and most essential concepts: that the "author-contemplator always encompasses the whole temporally -- that is, he is always *later*, and not just temporally later, but later *in meaning*" (*A&A* 118). And it serves to remind us that freedom and responsibility lie in the interpretive choice provided by new perspectives. By forcing his readers to respond and to live in the tension of the outside and inside, that distinguishes the *betwixt and between*, Browning creates for us a position which is always in flux, which is always active. He transforms us into contemplators, into both "the witness and the judge" (*SG* 137). As he does so, he underlines the fact that to live in a world "outside" the Duke's is to anticipate a future of ongoing dialogue.

Browning demands that we suspect and denounce the Duke for his inability to celebrate the joyful energy of the duchess, as it was expressed both in life and in art. But he also makes it impossible for us to condemn the Duke entirely for his actions. As long as we are able to recognize, even on a

subliminal level, that the Duke's inability to access the outside world is beyond his control, Browning's hero will continue to demand our sympathy. As we shall see in the case of Andrea del Sarto, it is especially difficult *not* to feel some kind of empathetic response toward a hero who must, however unself-consciously, remain a slave to his past, a "slave to his soul."¹³

¹³ This phrase, as outlined in the next chapter is one Bakhtin used in his early work, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" to describe people who "pass meaning by . . . or irresponsibly sneak meaning past existence" (*CofP* 180).

Chapter 3

Andrea del Sarto: A Slave to the Soul

Our environment seems most arbitrary and alien to us not when we create or perceive the wrong relationship with the world, but when we attempt to refuse to have any relationship with the world at all--when we live, that is, as if we had an alibi for being. But the fundamental fact of human existence is there can be no alibis for being. Nevertheless, people have devised ways to simulate them. (*CofP* 180)

Andrea del Sarto, "the faultless painter," has been called everything from a "cheat, a loser, a quitter, a man obsessed with money" (Maynard 110) to a self-defeating, self-indulgent, pathetic, manipulative martyr. Though some critics have been kind enough to emphasize his more "attractive" personality traits -- his self-awareness, his honesty, his sensitivity, his perfection, Andrea is generally considered to be a "poor artist," one who is incapable of surpassing his own limitations.¹ As Richard Altick aptly puts it,

Andrea's capacity for self-deception is tragically insufficient for even his own momentary comfort. [His] "condition" . . . is terrible beyond the reach of irony. Ordinarily in Browning's dramatic monologues we are superior to the speaker: we are able to see him as he does not, or at least we see more than he is aware of. But Andrea has an insight into himself that approaches our own, for he recognizes as soon as we do, perhaps earlier, the illusoriness of what he calls Lucrezia's love for him, and more than that, his moral inadequacy which is manifested both in his weakness as a man and in his failure as an artist. (18)

Though Altick goes on to admit that "incidental ironies abound in 'Andrea del Sarto,'" he argues that our response is "not governed by irony . . . our

¹ See Maynard (110), Garrett (119) and Healy (55).

response is chiefly one of pity, dictated not by the painter's ignorance but by his very lack of ignorance. [Andrea] knows himself too well to find solace; no soothing balm of deception can alleviate his stark awareness of his nature and present situation" (18-19).

Altick's point is a good one. However, I think the "incidental ironies" within the poem serve a far greater purpose than Altick allows for. To put it in Bakhtinian terms, the "incidental ironies" mark those moments in the poem when Andrea anticipates, struggles with, and all too often plays with the possibility of consummating himself: i.e., those points in the poem where he sees his "work and self" (45) as objectivized and finalized. The "incidental ironies" also mark those short-lived moments in the poem when Andrea hesitates, when he steps back enough from his need to "lose" himself in his obsession with Lucrezia that he temporarily "exploits his own surplus of vision" (*CofP* 54). As I will emphasize later in the chapter, one of Andrea's basic problems is that he is so willing to turn a blind eye to Lucrezia's lack of interest in him that he is unable to see himself from a position of outsideness. On the rare occasions when he does play with the idea of "renouncing his outsideness, his 'surplus of vision'" (*CofP* 53-4) he is so afraid of what he confronts that he chooses to overlook the potential to understand his life and his art in a meaningful and creative way. What Browning manages to do is put the reader in a position where it is difficult to overlook the "new understanding" that comes as a result of Browning's exploitation of Andrea's potential (*CofP* 53-4). What appear, on Andrea's part, to be nothing more than fumbled apologies actually serve to remind us of Browning's controlling and participatory role in the monologue itself -- to remind us that we are simultaneously responding to two voices within a single discourse. Andrea may appear to have an "insight into himself that approaches our own" (Altick

18), but Browning makes sure that we question this insight. Through a number of "incidental ironies" Browning manages to draw attention to that which is problematic about Andrea's whole approach to history, to art, and to life itself.

In the previous chapter, through a Bakhtian reading of "My Last Duchess" I emphasized just how much importance Browning placed on the need to be responsible for and responsive to what we have experienced in art and life.² I stressed, in particular, Bakhtin's idea that responsibility or "answerability" (*A&A* 2) involves acknowledging our own position in relation to the author's struggle to consummate the work as a whole. In the dramatic monologue, this means paying attention to the discrepancies between the speaker's perspective (which is generally quite limited) and the poet's (or implied author's) perspective (which is generally much wider). As readers, we cannot understand what Browning valued most in the relationship between art and life unless we gain some sense of *all* the boundaries we are asked to negotiate.

In "Andrea del Sarto," Browning presents us with a hero who appears to be so capable of authoring himself, of creating, negotiating, and responding to self-imposed boundaries, that Browning's struggle to consummate his hero generally goes unnoticed. Within Andrea's enclosed world, we get caught betwixt and between enough varying perspectives that it hardly seems necessary to concern ourselves with the way in which Browning provides alternative "unsettling vantage points" (Maynard 108) that draw us outside the poem. However, it becomes evident toward the end of the poem, if not

² This is a paraphrase of a passage from Bakhtin's short essay "Art and Answerability": "I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life" (*A&A* 1).

before, that there is something entirely problematic about the way in which Andrea responds to the alternative perspectives he presents. It becomes clear that he is not only a master of self-indictment, he is a master at avoiding the truth, a master at avoiding his fears. It also becomes clear that Browning intentionally provides Andrea with insight into himself in order to draw attention to the "elements of artifice" in his own (Browning's) monologue, to his own contrived representation. In Bakhtinian terms, Browning uses Andrea in order to draw attention to his own "aesthetic project," to his own "consciousness of a consciousness" (*A&A* 89).

Ironically, one of the primary ways Browning goes about forefronting his own "aesthetic project" is to underline how limited Andrea's consciousness of himself in relation to others really is. Andrea may *appear* to see and know as much, if not more, than we do as readers, but he is incapable of responding to his art or his life *creatively*. To put this in Bakhtinian terms, he seems to understand that "creative understanding continues creativity" (*SG* 142), but he is not particularly interested in doing anything about it. He is all too ready to accept the unity of his art and his life as a *given* rather than as a *project*-- to exist in a "world of inescapable actuality, and not in a world of contingent possibility" (*PofA* 44).³ As this chapter will illustrate, Andrea comes extremely close to meeting Bakhtin's definition of a "soul-slave" or "pretender" -- an interchangeable label the philosopher reserved for those people or heroes who devise ways of coming up with "alibis for being," of achieving some form of self-abdication. Like most people who live as "soul-

³ In "Art and Answerability," Bakhtin suggests that "Answerability," also understood as responsibility, is, in itself, an ongoing project. One must continually struggle to see oneself and one's art as it is seen from the "outside" -- as it is seen by others-- if one is to escape the possessive and enclosed state of "inspiration" which ignores life (*A&A* 1-3).

slaves," Andrea is all too content to "pass meaning by' . . . or 'irresponsibly sneak meaning past existence'" (*CofP* 180)⁴ -- to see each of his acts as merely a sort of "rough draft for a possible actualization, or an unsigned document that does not obligate anyone to do anything" (*PofA* 44).

Understanding how and why Andrea fits Bakhtin's definition of a soul-slave can help us to understand just what it is that Browning "sees and knows that is in principle inaccessible to his hero" (*A&A* 12). To paraphrase Bakhtin, it is "through the author's *excess* of seeing and knowing in relation to the hero, that we find all those moments that bring about the consummation of the whole -- the whole of the hero as well as the whole of the work" (*A&A* 12). As mentioned above, it is in these consummating moments that the "incidental ironies" in the poem become most evident.

In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin begins to look more closely at the way in which the design of a particular work of art or literature affects the relationship between an author and a hero. The hero who lives his life as if it were "all `given'" is defined as a "character." The hero who lives his life as if it is "always being `created'" is defined as a "personality." Morson and Emerson interpret the distinction Bakhtin makes between the two types of heroes:

A character's psychology may be immensely complex, but it is in essence something `objectivized' and finalized. By contrast a `personality' is a genuine other person, capable, as real people are, of changing his or her essential identity. To represent a hero as a personality is to portray him as truly unfinalizable.
(*CofP* 263)

⁴ Because Liapunov's translation of Bakhtin is often difficult to understand without a great deal of contextual background, I have used Morson and Emerson's translation and summary where it seems most appropriate. i.e., Liapunov's translation reads: "It is possible, after all, to pass around meaning and it is also possible to lead meaning irresponsibly past Being" (*AofP* 44).

One of the primary reasons Andrea proves to be such a frustrating "character" is that he appears to be more than aware of his potential to be a "personality." Throughout his speech, he comes across as a "genuine other person, capable, as real people are, of changing his identity." Yet he never succeeds. What Bakhtin can help us to understand is how Browning ensures that his representation of Andrea's self-representation functions as a form of objectivization and finalization. From a Bakhtinian perspective, it would appear that what Browning presents us with, in Andrea, is a fine example of a monologic hero:

In a monologic design, the hero is closed and his semantic boundaries strictly defined: he acts, experiences, thinks and is conscious within the limits of what he is, that is within the limits of his image defined as reality; he cannot cease to be himself, that is, he cannot exceed the limits of his own character, typicality or temperament without violating the author's monologic design concerning him. Such an image is constructed in the objective authorial world, objective in relation to the hero's consciousness; the construction of that authorial world with its points of view and finalizing definitions presupposes a fixed external position, a fixed authorial field of vision. The self-consciousness of the hero is inserted into this rigid framework, to which the hero has no access from within and which is part of the authorial consciousness defining and representing him--and is presented against the firm background of the external world. (PofDP 52)

Within his "enclosed" fictional world, Andrea wallows in the "limits of what he is" to such an extent that he ends up perpetuating his own stasis, his own objectification. Ironically, what Andrea cannot "cease to be" is a man who is caught between, and ultimately cannot "overcome," two antithetical conceptions of himself. On the one hand, he sees himself as a victim of fate, as a man who cannot take responsibility for his life, as a man who is incapable of *becoming* anything other than what he *already is*. On the other hand, he sees himself as a man who is capable of asserting his will, as a man

who exists in the realm of what is "yet-to-be" (*A&A* 16). As we shall see, Browning portrays him this way only to illustrate that both of these conceptions of self lead nowhere. Whichever way we look at it, Andrea cannot get beyond his basic inadequacies and the limits of his own characterization. He cannot "overcome" what *already is*.

Andrea also cannot "overcome" a type of self-representation, a kind of self-consciousness that Browning wants his reader to see is entirely problematic. What makes this dramatic monologue stand out from many others is the extent to which Browning ends up using *both* Andrea and Lucrezia to illustrate how impossible it really is to generate meaning and a sense of self within the limited constraints of a single consciousness. As emphasized in Chapter Two, a single consciousness is in no position to generate a sense of self; this requires the awareness of another consciousness *outside* the self. Despite the fact that Andrea has already told Lucrezia that "all shall happen as [she wishes]," he knows that for the duration of his speech act he needs her. And so, too, does Browning. As Bakhtin suggests, "addressivity, the quality of turning to someone, is a constitutive feature of the utterance; without it the utterance does not and cannot exist" (*SG* 99). In "Andrea del Sarto" Lucrezia would seem to appear to be just the other "consciousness" Andrea needs to help generate his sense of self. She is, as Altick so aptly puts it, more than just a "casual witness, a fortuitous occasion for the speaker's revelation: she is the central figure in his tragedy" (22).

Like most of Browning's interlocutors, she remains silent. But Browning ensures that her silence is made so conspicuous that we can't help but read a great deal into it -- much more than we read into the envoy's silence, and certainly, as we shall see in the last chapter, much more than we read into the silence of the guard in "Fra Lippo Lippi." To put this in Bakhtinian terms,

Browning ensures that his reader pays attention to the influence her silence has on both the unfolding of the aesthetic event that takes place between poet and reader and the unfolding event that takes place between her and Andrea. Within Andrea's enclosed fictional utterance her silence is the catalyst that enables Andrea to complain endlessly and to assign blame. It is also the catalyst that enables him to improve his self-image, to re-evaluate and reflect upon his reputation as an artist:

--- turn your head ---
 All that's behind us! You don't understand
 Nor care to understand about my art,
 But you can hear at least when people speak:
 And that cartoon, the second from the door
 --- It is the thing, Love! so such things should be ---
 Behold Madonna! --- I am bold to say.
 I can do with my pencil what I know
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep ---
 Do easily, too --- when I say, perfectly,
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
 And just as much they used to say in France.
 At any rate 't is easy, all of it!
 No sketches first, no studies, that's long past :
 I do what many dream of, all their lives,
 ---Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
 And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
 On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
 Who strive--you don't know how the others strive
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat ---
 (57-75)

Although it is hard to read these lines as anything less than self-indulgent rhetoric, Lucrezia's lack of response, even at this point in the poem, has to make us wonder if Andrea's wife is really all there. She may have "turned" her head, but we have to question whether this gesture is enough to convince us that the artist is speaking to "another consciousness" -- or whether, for Andrea, a "real other" is absent.

As Bakhtin outlines in his essay "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through an other, and with the help of an other. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*)" (*PofDP* 287). It is that which "takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*" that provides us with a sense of self (*PofDP* 287). Although Andrea *appears*, from beginning to end, to be involved in an "aesthetic event," in a dialogic exchange with Lucrezia, he is in fact hopelessly engaged in what Bakhtin would define as an "ethical event," in an act of "confession or self-accounting" (*A&A* 22).⁵ Though he is capable of naming that which *might* take place on the threshold between her consciousness and his own, he is most afraid of embracing it. As the opening lines attest, he has a great deal invested in not pushing things to the point where Lucrezia can openly challenge him. He needs to convince himself that he is worthy of a sympathetic response, as much, if not more, than he needs to convince Lucrezia.

But do not let us quarrel any more,
 No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
 Treat his own subject after his own way,
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it? Tenderly?
 Oh, I'll content him, --- but tomorrow, Love!
 I often am much wearier than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if --- forgive now --- should you let me sit

⁵ In "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin writes, "the aesthetic event can take place only when there are two participants present; it presupposes two noncoinciding consciousnesses" (*A&A* 22).

Here by the window with your hands in mine,
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through
 I might get up to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try. (1-19)

Any reader who comes to this poem for the second or nth time around will recognize how ironic Andrea's plea to sit "Both of one mind" truly is. But even the first time reader is provided with enough hints to suggest that Andrea is really only deceiving himself if he thinks he has the slightest chance of winning Lucrezia over to his way of thinking. Her restlessness, her discomfort -- even her silence -- all suggest that Lucrezia has been a victim of such confessions before. To borrow a Bakhtinian idea, Browning gives us every reason to believe that Lucrezia can sense "the developing whole of the utterance"⁶ -- that she has anticipated what Andrea "wishes to say" (SG 77) long before he finishes saying it. Even more importantly, Browning gives us plenty of reason to think that Lucrezia has absolutely no interest in participating in a dialogic exchange, in a "give-and-take," which might encourage Andrea to engage actively in a meaningful life.⁷

⁶ As Bakhtin points out, in the case of most utterances the listener is able to "embrace, understand, or sense the speaker's *speech will* or *speech plan* . . . what the speaker *wishes* to say" long before the utterance has been completed (SG 77). "This plan -- the subjective aspect of the utterance -- combines with the objective referentially semantic aspect, limiting the latter by relating it to a concrete (individual) situation of speech communication with all its individual circumstances, its personal participants, and the statement utterances that preceded it. Therefore, the immediate participants in communication, orienting themselves with respect to the situation and the preceding utterances, easily and quickly grasp the speaker's speech plan, his speech will. And from the very beginning of his words they sense the developing whole of the utterance" (SG 77-8).

⁷ According to Bakhtin, it is through dialogue that potentials are revealed, and it is through the process of dialogue that new potentials and new meaning is created. In order for someone to respond to life in a "meaningful" way one must respond open-endedly to one's addressivity in the world. As Bakhtin puts it in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, "In essence meaning is realized only in the process of active, responsive understanding" (103).

The opening three lines, which all end in pragmatic presuppositions,⁸ all serve to remind us that Andrea speaks in response to preceding utterances as well as in anticipation of Lucrezia's inevitable escape into the night.

Browning obviously wants to introduce the possibility that this is not the first time either one of them has engaged in the roles they are about to play. But he also wants to make us feel a little uncomfortable about "eavesdropping" on such an intimate situation. By having Andrea promise Lucrezia that "all shall happen" as she wishes, Browning puts us in the position of wondering what motivates Andrea's willingness to appease Lucrezia so readily. He also puts us in the position of wondering why she chooses to "bear" with him "for once" when everything Andrea says would seem to indicate that her usual response is to shut him down, walk out, or fight back. Of course, at the end of the poem we discover that Lucrezia's reasons are self-motivated: she wants money to pay off her Cousin's "gaming debt" (222), and "thirteen scudi for the ruff" (241). But long before this, we sense that she must have her own reasons for hearing Andrea out -- none of which have anything to do with wanting to be "both of one mind" (16).

Ironically, one of the messages Browning wants to convey to his reader is that true understanding *cannot* come from merging with another -- that true understanding cannot come from being of "one mind." As illustrated in Chapter Two, Browning seems to share Bakhtin's idea that new

⁸ i.e., "do not let us quarrel *any more* . . . bear with me *for once* . . . all shall happen *as you wish*"(1-3). Loy D. Martin develops this idea in his discussion of the "progressive aspect" in Browning's poems. Using Andrea's "But do not let us quarrel any more" as an example, Martin, quoting Bernard Comrie, suggests that the progressive "'looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation, since it can both look backwards towards the start of the situation, and look forwards to the end of the situation.'" Andrea, as he begins his monologue is inside the situation, he looks backward to a time when quarreling began, and he pleads for a future time when the process will end; the situation's 'internal structure' is his entire concern" (86).

understanding is not produced when we lose ourselves completely in an "other." We must "actively enter into an 'other' without allowing that 'other' to passively take possession of us" (*CofP* 54, 91). Paradoxically, in order to emphasize how problematic it is to adopt a single point of view, to merge with another, Browning presents Andrea as someone whose appeal for sympathy and need to be heard is not only valid but imperative. Browning puts his reader in the position of having to adopt an empathetic response. He puts us in a position of wanting to see things from Andrea's point of view.

As John Maynard points out, this is something we do easily. When we hear the words "You don't understand / Nor care to understand about my art / But you can hear at least when people speak" (54-6), we easily provide the "poor artist the intelligent and understanding ear he deserves" (Maynard 110).⁹ However, Maynard goes on to argue that "our short-lived adoption of [Andrea] ends not in our being seduced but in our betraying him too. We end up uneasily complicit with Lucrezia, trying to avoid recognition of where we fit in as readers" (110-11). I agree with Maynard that our position is to some degree one of "unwilling complicity" (110). However, I think Browning makes a point of wanting us to recognize where exactly it is "we fit in as readers." In fact, it is actually in the process of discovering our own position that we end up understanding the message Browning is attempting to convey to us in the utterance that is the work itself. Browning never allows us to "betray" Andrea completely, because the poet makes sure we are aware of how pathetically ironic Andrea's situation, and our position in relationship to him, is. To put this another way, Browning constantly asks us to think about what we have to gain by both merging and separating from his hero. Are we

⁹ Nor is it difficult to respond sympathetically to a man who lives with a woman who "carelessly" smears his paintings with her "robes afloat" (75).

better off maintaining a position of outsidership, insidership, or a position somewhere betwixt and between?¹⁰

One of the ways Browning perpetuates this form of questioning is to problematize Andrea's passivity. In his essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin insists that the author/self can be the "condition of possibility" in his "own life," but he cannot be its "valuable hero" (*A&A* 106).¹¹ The self "can be aesthetically active, but not aesthetically passive" (*A&A* 106). "In order to live and to act," the self needs to be "unconsummated" (*A&A* 13). In order to remain unconsummated the self must anticipate those moments that can consummate him in the consciousness of another and surmount them (*A&A* 16-17). In the case of Andrea, as in the case of the Duke, Browning presents us with a man who is more than capable of surmounting the consummating consciousnesses of others within his enclosed world. What is peculiar about Andrea is that he is all too willing to say to himself that "last word" which would consummate his own consciousness (*A&A* 16-17). He is all too willing to play with the idea of rendering himself, as well as his life as an artist and a husband, passive. As he puts it to Lucrezia,

¹⁰ Bakhtin raises many of these same questions in his essay, "The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity": He writes, "In what way would it enrich the event if I merged with the other, and instead of *two* there would now only be *one*? And what would I myself gain by the other's merging with me? If he did, he would see and know no more than what I see and know myself; he would merely repeat in himself that want of any issue out of itself which characterizes my own life. Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life" (87).

¹¹ Throughout "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" Bakhtin fluctuates back and forth between using the term "author" and "self." When he is speaking or referring to a self-confession, to an aesthetic or ethical event the terms become interchangeable. When he is referring to the author of a work he sticks to the term "author." What he is trying to emphasize in the quotes I have utilized above is that we are all "authors" of our own "consciousness"; we must all adopt a position of outsidership in order to avoid consummating ourselves.

A common greyness silvers everything, ---
 All in a twilight, you and I alike
 --- You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know), --- but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
 There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
 That length of convent-wall across the way
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
 The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
 And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
 Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
 As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was born to be and do,
 A twilight piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie! (34-51)

In describing his marriage and himself in "twilight" terms, Andrea comes as close as he possibly can to implying that his view of life is pretty much finalized. Still, he manages to retain enough of a detachment from his autumnal image to suggest that he hasn't given up entirely. As much as Andrea appears, in these lines, to have resigned himself to fate, the two simple words, "as if" speak volumes. As slight as this qualification is, it serves to keep the reader clinging to some hope that Andrea will adopt a more positive outlook. Even more importantly, these two simple words can serve to remind us that Browning must create a character who perpetuates his own self-consciousness enough that he comes across as a "real" person. In order to maintain a semblance of self, in order to perpetuate his own stasis, Andrea cannot consummate himself. In order to maintain his fictional position as the author of his own utterance, in order to generate meaning, Andrea must exist in a constant state of flux, in a perpetual state of becoming -- even if he only intends on "becoming" that which he already is.

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Ultimately, the heroes of all of Browning's dramatic monologues end up expressing this paradox in one form or another. Within their enclosed fictional worlds, Browning's speakers can never become anything other than what they already are; they can never "'cease to be' anything other than themselves; they can never exceed the limits of their own character, typicality or temperament" (*PofDP* 52). But in order to fulfill their role as "contrived representations," in order to create the illusion that their experience of the world is valid and "real," the future, however limited, must appear as if it is theirs to see. What makes Andrea unique is that Browning portrays him "as if" he were living to make a "work of art of himself"¹² -- "as if" his future were predetermined. As Andrea complains to Lucrezia in a vacillation that is all too typical, he would judge "the present by the future" (129) if he could, but he cannot:

Had the mouth there urged
 "God and the Glory! never care for gain.
 "The present by the future, what is that?
 "Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
 "Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
 I might have done it for you. So it seems:
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
 Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
 What wife had Rafael or has Agnolo?
 In this world, who can do a thing will not;
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
 Yet the will's somewhat --- somewhat, too, the power ---
 And thus we half-men struggle. (127-140)

¹² As Morson and Emerson point out, "people who live as soul-slaves frequently live so as to make a work of art of themselves" (*CofP* 181).

Of course, Andrea remains completely unaware that his words are being used to raise some of Browning's most fundamental aesthetic concerns. As Herbert Tucker points out, "Browning champions the imperfect as the definitive note of the human condition: a promissory note, as it were, furnishing an earnest of future work and progress. For Browning, if not for everyone, the sense of the future entails the sting of unrest in the present" (4). It is difficult for the reader to read the above lines without experiencing this "sting of unrest." Andrea shifts from one thought to another so quickly that it is all too obvious that he feels more than uncomfortable with his present situation. The sad thing is that he *cannot* and *will not* do anything about it. He will think about the changes that need to be made, even verbalize them, but he will not actively confront what is missing in the present, what is missing *now* -- either in his art or in his marriage. Though he begins the monologue by attempting to appease Lucrezia's anger and bids her "never fear," it is Andrea who obviously needs his fear and anger appeased.

As we get further into the monologue, it becomes even more obvious that Lucrezia plays a significant role in assuring that Andrea will never confront his fear or his anger in a meaningful way -- that, in one sense, her silence and her disinterest condemns him to his finalization. Andrea's question -- "Why do I need you?" -- may go unnoticed and unheard by Lucrezia, but it is so strategically placed it is difficult for the reader to ignore. Right in the midst of defining himself as a victim of fate ("All is as God over-rules") *and* as a man who is capable of choosing his own destiny ("the will's somewhat --- somewhat, too, the power ---") Andrea, and Browning through him, raises the question of how and why Andrea's conception of himself is constructed in relation to Lucrezia.

As Andrea continues to shift betwixt and between two antithetical conceptions of himself it becomes more and more clear that Lucrezia's silence is what enables him to avoid becoming "responsible for or answerable to" his own inadequacies. He may be a man who is not afraid to acknowledge what is lacking, he may be able to recognize his faults and knowingly interpret them, but he is entirely uninterested in occupying that threshold space which would enable him to get beyond his deeply rooted fears and his limited aesthetic vision. He is more than aware that in order to grow as an artist and as a person he must be able to separate himself from his work, to see it as others would see it, to allow the world and all its imperfections to enter into him and into his art and enrich it.¹³ He knows what it would take to become something other than what he is. Approximately one-third of the way through the monologue, Andrea makes it very evident that his lack of motivation is not driven by ignorance or naiveté:

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp
 Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey
 Placid and perfect with my art : the worse!
 I know both what I want and what I might gain,
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
 "Had I been two, another and myself,
 "Our head would have overlooked the world!"
 No doubt.
 Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
 The Urbinate who died five years ago.
 ('T is copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
 Above and through his art --- or it gives way;
 That arm is wrongly put --- and there again ---
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,

¹³ This is taken from Bakhtin's idea that "The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative perception of listeners and readers" (*DI* 254).

Andrea's need to blame Lucrezia for not having given him soul may, in the context of his fictional utterance, seem like a rather poor excuse for not becoming as great a Renaissance artist as Rafael, or Leonardo or Agnolo. But when these lines are read in the context of Bakhtin's early theories of aesthetics, an interesting light is shed on the contrast between Browning's approach to art and life and Andrea's. In "The Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin suggests that the "problem of the soul, from a methodological standpoint, is a problem of aesthetics . . . Self-reflection is incapable of engendering a soul; all it can engender is a spurious and disjected subjectivity" (*A&A* 100-101). The "soul experienced from within is spirit, and the spirit is extra-aesthetic" (*A&A* 110). Unlike the spirit, the soul is "finalizable." Morson and Emerson explain Bakhtin's theory:

Spirit describes I-for-myself, my experience of myself from within, and possesses no firm points of consummation. Consummation belongs to the soul, a consequence of I-for-others. Others must partake in the process of engendering soul out of me for themselves, which means that soul is inevitably partial and purposeful . . . [it] always responds to someone else's concrete need . . . [Bakhtin's] phrase *my soul* must therefore be seen as a sort of paradox or oxymoron, because it results from a complex process in which others finalize me and I incorporate their finalization of me. That is why my soul is simultaneously 'social' and 'individual.' (*CofP* 192-3)

When read in the context of Bakhtin's concept of spirit and soul, Andrea's complaint -- "Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul, / We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!" (118-119) -- serves to underline all that is problematic about his "perfect" approach to art, and all that is missing in his relationship with Lucrezia. From Bakhtin's perspective, we cannot receive the gift of a soul unless we have spirit. And we cannot receive this gift unless

we exist in relation to some other consciousness.¹⁴ In order to live our lives as spirits we have to live as if we are unfinalizable, non-coincident with ourselves, and always "yet-to-be" (*A&A* 16). Ironically, by blaming Lucrezia for not giving him soul, Andrea ends up indicating what is wrong with his own self-consciousness, with his own approach to art and life. Long before Andrea says the fateful words, "Because there's still Lucrezia, --- as I choose" (266), Browning implies through a subtle, but "incidental irony" that Andrea's choice of relationship has something to do with sustaining Andrea's limited consciousness and his limited aesthetic vision.

As Bakhtin would see it, Andrea's art and his life are lacking in soul, because he is never *really* entering into a dialogue with another active consciousness. Rather than fulfilling the role of an autonomous non-coinciding consciousness, Lucrezia acts as a mirror. She encourages his "self-abdication." Her silence enables Andrea to avoid ever really seeing himself as others would see him from the outside.¹⁵ If Lucrezia were to respond to him, if she were to offer him more than a "smile" or a turn of the head, Andrea might have to confront the meaninglessness of his life.¹⁶ As it

¹⁴ As Morson and Emerson summarize Bakhtin's theory: "My soul is a moment of my inner, open-ended task-oriented self (my spirit) that some other consciousness has temporarily stabilized, embodied, enclosed in boundaries, and returned to me 'as a gift.'" (*CofP* 193).

¹⁵ Morson and Emerson explain Bakhtin's theory of pretendership in the following way: ". . . there are several real-life ways to accomplish self-abdication, and one that Bakhtin dwells on at length concerns one's image in the mirror. Pretenders in effect identify with such images and overlook their peculiar falsity. When I look in the mirror, I never see what others see when they see me, because any authentic outer self requires the finalizing efforts of a *second* consciousness. The falsity therefore lies in confusing an I-for-others with an I-for-myself; and I-for-others requires that second, outside other, who in fact supplies that image of self. . . . Responding to my own face in a mirror--by talking, smiling, pretending to be a second consciousness--I can only play the role of an 'indeterminate potential other.' I cannot be a real other at all, but only a fraudulent 'soul-slave' without a place of its own, without a name and without a role" (*CofP* 181).

¹⁶ Andrea pretty much implies this himself when he states, "But had you - - oh, with the same perfect brow, / And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth, / . . . Had

is, he can go on and on about what it might have meant. He can continue to come up with all kinds of alibis for not having reached his creative potential. And none of it has to mean a thing -- at least in terms of changing his consciousness, his approach to art, or his approach to life.

What makes Andrea an especially frustrating character is that he is always on the threshold of responding creatively and meaningfully to his own utterance. He is always on the verge of confronting his real potential. He seems to know that a soul can only come to life when it is offered to another, when it is engaged in a dialogic, reciprocal reaction. The "Urbinate" is described by Andrea as "pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see, / Reaching, that heaven might replenish him / Above and through his art" (108-110). Andrea even points out that it is imperfection, the "fault to pardon in the drawing's lines" (113), that gives the image captured in Rafael's painting its soul. What he refuses to acknowledge openly is that Lucrezia's silence enables him to continue to avoid embracing his own hypocrisy. Likewise, he refuses to admit that her lack of interest actually enables him to avoid responding to the truth that lies behind his own self-recrimination. Certainly, we see how close he comes to confronting the truth about himself when he actually does imagine an encounter where the blame for his failure is not transferred but shared. If he could cling to those moments when his criticism of Lucrezia is suspended and he is left to deal with his own accusations, Andrea might actually be able to understand what he means by "I might have done it for you. So it seems: / Perhaps not" (132-3), or "Beside, incentives come from the soul's self" (134). As it is, his words come across to the

you, with these the same, but brought a mind!" (122-3, 126). What he doesn't emphasize, of course, is the fact that her beauty and her lack of intellectual stimulation enables him to avoid confronting his own weaknesses.

reader as fumbled apologies, as rhetorical mishaps which add nothing to the meaning of his life. He reminds us of what he reminds us of all too often. His mindset is such that he would if he could, but he can't so he won't. At the same time, these fumbled apologies serve to provide the reader with insight into what is lacking in Andrea's life. The possibilities that Andrea "incidentally" chooses to overlook are, "ironically," the possibilities and potential meanings that Browning wants his reader to seize hold of.

These "incidental ironies" not only serve to remind us of Browning's consummating consciousness, they serve to emphasize the importance of not losing ourselves in, or merging entirely with one perspective. Lucrezia may not speak, she may act as the mirror Andrea primps and consoles and "attitudinizes" before, but Browning never gives us any reason to believe that she might offer a point of view if given the chance. The problem is that turning to Lucrezia always leaves us somewhat wanting. She smiles, she turns her head, she smiles again, but she continues to give us nothing much in return, except the need to question what exactly it is she's giving Andrea. And we can only guess what this is. Of course, it is possible that her presence allows him to appease his anger over prostituting his art. It is even possible that her presence allows him to believe that he has momentarily asserted his will. But surely he can no more believe that he has successfully transferred the blame for his failing on to her than he can believe that Lucrezia has loved him "quite enough, it seems tonight" (257). He knows as well as she does she'll be gone when her cousin's whistle blows. And he probably knows full well that all of the guilt and blame -- the entire mess they have made of their lives -- still hangs heavily in the air between them. What is especially interesting is that Browning transfers this guilt and this blame onto his readers. He ensures that we try to make something out of what's

missing, that we deal with the tension, and that we become answerable to what we don't understand. Once again, Browning makes it hard to ignore the "incidental ironies" in the poem. At least, he makes it difficult to ignore the possibility that the "incidental ironies" play a very large role in manipulating our response to *both* Andrea and Lucrezia.

Nowhere does it become more clear that Browning is using Andrea's limited perspective to manipulate the reader's response than when Andrea recalls his "kingly days" (165) at Fountainbleau and his subsequent fall from wealth and fame. Here too Andrea attempts to shift the blame onto Lucrezia, and then quickly reconsiders:

And had you not grown restless . . . but I know ---
 'Tis done and past ; twas right, my instinct said;
 Too live the life grew, golden and not gray,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end any other way?
 You called me and I came home to your heart.
 (166-172)

Whether Lucrezia responds to Andrea's "had you not grown restless" with a raised brow or a turned face or no expression at all is left for the reader to guess. Certainly it is evident that Andrea possesses an insight into himself (and his relationship with Lucrezia) that is worth knowing. Something causes Andrea to pause and admit that he has participated in his own downfall. But just how significant a role he played and/or continues to play remains a mystery until the very end of the poem. Even then we have to wonder exactly what Andrea means by "The very wrong to Francis! --- it is true / I took his coin, was tempted and complied, / And built this house and sinned, and all is said" (249). Certainly, we realize that "all" is far from being "said." In fact Browning makes sure that Andrea provides just enough information that we

find ourselves asking what is only a rhetorical question for Andrea: "How could it end any other way?" Browning ensures that we struggle to give this event meaning. Even more importantly, he forces us to recognize that the poet's creative consciousness, his "excess of seeing" is at work. The ellipsis and the long dash which frame the words "but I know" are so prominent that Browning makes it hard to overlook what it is *we don't* know. He makes it hard to overlook his creative consciousness. He encourages us to seek answers *outside* the text.

As most readers are aware, or soon glean from footnotes, "What Browning knew of Andrea del Sarto came from Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*, the writings and conversations of Anna Brownell Jameson, his own experience of Andrea's paintings, and perhaps other incidental sources as well" (Dooley 39).¹⁷ Although Browning told Ruskin he would be most "disconcerted and apprehensive when the public, critics and all, begin to understand and approve me" (*Ruskin's Works* 36:31), he still expected his readers to be "cognizant of many out-of-the-way facts, ideas, and people . . . he was often mystified when readers and critics proved incompetent in, say, the history of medieval Florence or the workings of seventeenth-century canon law" (Dooley 46). He still expected his readers to go out and "ask the next perfumer" (Ruskin 36:31), to retrace the questions he himself confronted in constructing his poems.

In the case of "Andrea del Sarto," turning to Browning's sources helps us to appreciate just how much Browning enjoyed re-reading, re-writing and re-

¹⁷ Filippo Baldinucce's *Notizie* and de Musset's play *Andre del Sarto* have been suggested as other possible sources (Healy 56). Julia Markus draws some interesting comparisons between the American painter William Page and Andrea del Sarto, noting that Page and his soon-to-be estranged wife lived in the same building as the Brownings around the time that Andrea del Sarto was written (1-23).

interpreting the work of Andrea's biographers, and just how much he enjoyed bringing the voices of the past to life. For the reader, it has the effect of re-contextualizing Andrea's words so that we now hear them alongside those of Vasari and Jameson. It also has the effect of reminding us that we are responding to both Andrea and Browning's utterances simultaneously. In his essay, "Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*," Bakhtin points out that "the work cannot live in future centuries without having somehow absorbed past centuries as well. If it . . . belonged *entirely* to today (that is, were a product of its own time) and not a continuation of the past or essentially related to the past, it could not lie in the future. Everything that belongs only to the present dies along with the present" (SG 4). Turning to Browning's sources illustrates the importance the poet placed on the need to bring present, past and future together in the utterance that is the work itself. Being aware of Browning's active engagement with Andrea's biographers makes it that much more difficult for the reader to ignore Browning's consummating consciousness. Even more importantly, knowing that Browning made a point of interacting with the work of others, with previous utterances, can provide us with some insight into what influenced his ability to manipulate both our sympathy and our discriminating judgment.

Whether we turn to the first, or second edition of Vasari's *Lives*,¹⁸ we discover that Lucrezia is to blame for much of Andrea's downfall. She "delighted in trapping the hearts of men, and among others ensnared the

¹⁸ According to DeVane, Vasari's account is the "true background of the poem" (245). Though Browning may have read both the first (1550) and second (1568) versions of the *Lives*, it is generally agreed that the 1550 *Le Monnier* edition was his major source. Certainly, as Dooley illustrates, it is far more "venomous toward Lucrezia" (40). This in itself may be why it is assigned privileged status.

unlucky Andrea,"¹⁹ who was from then on "constantly vexed with jealousy and one thing and another."²⁰ Even when we read Jameson's account, written more than three hundred years later, we are told that from the moment he married Lucrezia, Andrea "never had a quiet heart, or home, or conscience" (213). Jameson further charges Lucrezia with "avarice and infidelity" -- both of which "added to [Andrea's] sufferings" (213-14). Following Vasari's lead, Jameson also blames Lucrezia for the appropriation and mishandling of King Francis' funds, and for Andrea's failure to return to his most favourable position in the King's court. In Jameson's words,

. . . on his arrival in Paris, [Francis] loaded him with favour and distinction; but after a time, his wife, finding she had no longer the same command over his purse or proceedings summoned him to return . . . the king gave him licence to depart, and even intrusted him with a large sum of money to be expended on certain specified objects.

¹⁹ This passage from the LeMonnier edition continues: ". . . whose immoderate love for her soon caused him to neglect the studies demanded by his art, and in great measure to discontinue the assistance which he had given to his parents . . . [W]ithout regard to the dignity of his art or the consideration due to his genius . . . Andrea took this Lucrezia . . . to be his wife; her beauty appearing to him to merit thus much at his hands, and his love for her having more influence over him than the glory and honour towards which he had begun to make such hopeful advances" (Dooley 40).

²⁰ In Elizabeth Seeley's 1850 translation of the second edition of Vasari's *Lives*, Lucrezia (though unnamed) is further blamed for Andrea's failure to achieve the fame and credit he deserved: ". . . he made for himself so great a name in the city that he was considered one of the finest painters, and although he had asked little for his works he found himself in a position to help his relatives. But falling in love with a young woman who was left a widow, he took her for his wife, and had enough to do all the rest of his life, and had to work harder than he had ever done before, for besides the duties and liabilities which belong to such a union, he took upon him many more troubles, being constantly vexed with jealousy and one thing and another. And all who knew his case felt compassion for him, and blamed the simplicity which had reduced him to such a condition. He had been much sought after by his friends before, but now he was avoided. For though his pupils stayed with him, hoping to learn something from him, there was not one, great or small, who did not suffer by her evil words or blows during the time he was there. Nevertheless, this torment seemed to him the highest pleasure. He never put a woman in any picture which he did not draw from her, for even if another sat to him, through seeing her constantly and having drawn her so often, and what is more, having her impressed on his mind, it always came about that the head resembled hers" (189-90).

Andrea hastened to Florence, and there under the influence of his infamous wife, he embezzled the money, which was wasted in his own and her extravagance; and he never returned to France to keep his oath and engagements. (215)

Knowing that Andrea had attained an honourable situation in France, that his work was highly praised by one of the most generous patrons and supporters of Italian Renaissance art, makes listening to self-indulgent rhetoric a little more tolerable. It also allows us to appreciate the extent to which Andrea's propensity for self-indulgent rhetoric was influenced by the sources Browning turned to. In fact, it would seem that the more aware we become of Browning's manipulation of his historical sources, the more we end up thinking about how our response to Andrea has been constructed. For instance, knowing that Andrea squandered all of the money Francis entrusted to him on "building and pleasures" (Dooley 40), helps us to understand why Andrea "dared not . . . leave home all day, / For fear of chancing on the Paris lords" (145-6). But it also makes us wonder whether we ought to judge this man for being so foolish or respond even more compassionately. Both Vasari and Jameson's accounts seem to confirm that Andrea was a victim of his own blind love for some time. It is difficult not to feel sorry for him, especially when we discover that the burden he speaks of having to "bear" in line 148 represents one of the most prominent "incidental ironies" in the poem. Although Andrea had, according to Vasari, surpassed Leonardo in the eyes of the King and gained Michaelangelo's respect, during the summer of 1518, at Fontainebleau, Andrea was indeed "upstaged by Raphael" (*Vasari* Dooley 43):

But they speak sometimes: I must bear it all.
Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,

In that humane great monarch's golden look,---
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,---
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
 This in the actual background, waiting on my work,
 To crown the issue with a last reward!
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
 (148-165)

Had Lucrezia not "grown restless" (166), Andrea insists he might have reached his "triumph." Had Raphael, the "Urbinate" not "died five years ago," del Sarto implies that he may have surpassed him. So many excuses. Yet, by turning to Vasari we discover what might have led Browning to portray Andrea as a man obsessed by his rivalry with Raphael, and why Browning's Andrea so easily deludes himself into thinking his excuses are warranted. When, in 1524, Andrea was given the opportunity to copy Raphael's work for the Duke of Mantua, he did indeed prove himself his equal -- at least in technical skill. According to Vasari, "Even Giulio Romano the painter, Raffaello's disciple did not perceive the thing, and would always have believed it to be from Raffaello's hand if Giorgio Vasari . . . had not discovered the matter to him" (*Lives* Seeley 192-4).²¹ Ironically, part of the

²¹ The quote in Seeley's translation of Vasari's *Lives* reads, "When Frederick II, Duke of Mantua, passed through Florence, going to pay homage to Pope Clement VII., he saw over a door in the Medici Palace that portrait of Pope Leo between Cardinal Giulio de' Medici and Cardinal de' Rossi, which was made by the great Raffaello da Urbino. Being extraordinarily pleased with it, he considered how he could make it his own, and when he was in Rome, choosing his time, he made request for it from Pope Clement . . . But the thing greatly displeased Ottaviano, who would not have Florence deprived of such a picture. He replied therefore that he would not fail to serve the duke, but that the frame of the picture being bad, he would have a new one made, and when it was gilded, he would send the picture securely to Mantua. Then Ottaviano, with the view, as we say, of saving both the goat and its fodder, sent secretly for Andrea and told him how matters stood, and that there was nothing else to be done but to have the picture copied . . ."

burden Andrea has to "bear" in the poem comes as a result of Vasari "speaking" both in the past and in the future, through his own mouth and through the mouth of others.

Though it is impossible to know exactly what biographer or what circumstance influenced Browning the most, it is clear that Browning's Andrea is constructed from several differing perspectives. As much as the biographical "facts" seem to support Andrea's story, we still can't ignore the fact that a gap, a discrepancy between Browning's historical consciousness and Andrea's exists. We have to recognize that Browning is guilty of reconstructing the past for his own narrative purposes. We have to realize that the "truth" of Andrea's story probably lies somewhere betwixt and between all these varying perspectives.

The gap between Browning's historical consciousness and Andrea's becomes even more pronounced when we trace the interpolation of Michel Agnolo's praise of Andrea's work. According to Alan Dooley, Vasari read about Michaelangelo's impression of Andrea in Bocchi's *Belleze di Firenze*. The anecdote subsequently found its way into a footnote of the Le Monnier edition of *La Vite*, which in turn found its way into Browning's poem (41). Dooley points out that Vasari's footnote "in free translation reads, 'Bocchi reported in his book *Belleze de Firenze* that Michelangelo, while discussing with Raphael the merit of eminent artists, said to him: 'In Florence there is a little guy [meaning Andrea] who, if he were employed in great projects as you

Octaviano himself, who understood these things well, did not know one from the other, Andrea having even copied some dirty stains that were on the original . . . Even Giulio Romano the painter, Raffaello's disciple, did not perceive the thing, and would always have believed it to be from Raffaello's hand if Giorgio Vasari (who being Ottaviano's favourite, had seen Andrea working at the picture) had not discovered the matter to him" (192-4).

are, would bring sweat to your brow.'"(41). Browning has Andrea elaborate somewhat on Vasari's translation, but it reads pretty much the same way:

Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in her because of it)
 "Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
 "Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
 "Who, were he set to plan and execute
 "As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 "Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
 (184-93)

Within Andrea's enclosed world, this "anecdotal" reference works to boost his ego and temporarily assuage what he perceives to be threatening him: his reputation as a faultless, but soulless, painter and Lucrezia's failing interest. But the anecdote is a strange one -- one which either suggests that Andrea has been eavesdropping on the competition, or is suffering from self-delusion on a grand scale. Even the reader who is completely unfamiliar with the influence Bocchi, Vasari, and Browning had on Andrea's words can't help but ask, "How does Andrea know this?" "How, for that matter, can anybody but Michaelangelo or Raphael know this?" Of course, it is always possible that Andrea has overheard someone talking, or has let his imagination run wild. However we choose to look at it, the interpolation of Agnolo's words points to some "extraverbal" or extrahistorical reality, to yet another "incidental irony." And this is precisely what Browning wants them to do.

Browning wants us to put us in the position of being caught betwixt and between various historical perspectives. He wants us to see that one of the reasons Andrea is incapable of surpassing his own limitations is that he refuses to see his own history creatively. Browning wants us to understand

that Andrea's basic problem is his tendency to respond to his own life, his own history by refusing to allow it to reflect any personal growth.

In order to grow as a personality, Bakhtin insists that we must be able to understand the "'fullness of time' . . . the inner connectedness of past, present and future" (*CofP* 413). We must understand that "actions and events at any moment respond to specific circumstances in which they take place, and create new circumstances which provide constraints and opportunities for future action" (*CofP* 414). Andrea just doesn't understand this -- or perhaps, more to the point, he doesn't want to understand this. As he puts it to Lucrezia, "I am grown peaceful as old age to-night. / I regret little, I would change still less. / Since there my past lies, why alter it?" (244-6). Of course, Browning wants us to see how truly ironic and paradoxical this statement is. In order sustain even the most limited self-consciousness, Andrea *must* continue to "alter" his past.²² What he doesn't have to do is recognize the impact this altered past might have on his present or future life. He can, in fact, choose to live in fear of a life grown "too live . . . golden and not gray"(69). He can live in fear of his own potential; he can even refuse to emerge along with the world -- to live the life of a "weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt / Out of the grange whose four walls make his world" (169-70).

But the reader can't help but sense that this is wrong. As Maynard observes, "Despite the promptings of our better selves we are in effect moved to join with Lucrezia and go along to our preferable various cousins" (111). Maynard is right. We can't help but feel drawn to the outside world that

²² In order to avoid altering his past, Andrea would have to consummate his own consciousness -- an act that would be similar to signing his own death certificate or pronouncing himself dead on arrival. As Bakhtin reminds us in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," "my own births and death are events which I am in principle incapable of experiencing; birth and death as mine are incapable of becoming events of my own life" (104).

Lucrezia is a part of -- its chaos, its unpredictability, its lack of closure, and most importantly, its imperfections. What he overlooks is the possibility that by hypothetically choosing to walk out the door with Lucrezia, we are, in effect, choosing to play a part in the role of rendering Andrea passive. We are playing a role in objectifying him and finalizing him. We are shutting the doors behind him.

The position is hardly a comfortable one. But it is one which Browning puts us in the position of adopting in order to understand and appreciate the alternatives. By ending up "uneasily complicit" with Lucrezia, we are forced, once again, to think about the role she plays in contributing to Andrea's abdication of self, and abdication of responsibility -- a role Browning makes a point of emphasizing in the last few lines of the poem:

You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
 This must suffice me here. What would one have?
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance ---
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover --- the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So --- still they overcome
 Because there's still Lucrezia, --- as I choose.
 (258-9)

As Andrea visualizes a future in heaven where he is defeated, where he is once again "overcome" by Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo, we are once again reminded that "self-reflection is incapable of engendering a soul" (*A&A* 101). We are reminded that Andrea's need to "pass meaning by, to irresponsibly sneak meaning past existence" (*CofP* 180), is far greater than his need to become answerable or responsible to his art or to his life. His fear of self-creation outweighs all fears. By "choosing Lucrezia" he can, to borrow a Bakhtinian phrase, remain "coincident" (*A&A* 16) with himself. He can avoid

becoming an "other" to himself, he can avoid opening up the discourse of himself to the discourse of another and consequently he can avoid understanding his life creatively. He can continue to respond to his life as if it were a *given* rather than a *project*. His final assertion of will, his final imperative, "Again the Cousin's whistle! Go my Love!," fools no one, except perhaps himself -- and even that is questionable.

Why then, we might ask, does Browning choose to end the poem this way? The answer, I think, lies, once again, in Browning's need to shift the responsibility of the meaning of the text onto the reader. Just as Browning finds it in his heart to let the Duke think he has gotten away with murder, so too he finds it in his heart to let Andrea fool himself into believing he has made the right choice, the only choice. By the same token, Browning lets his reader know that Lucrezia has indeed gotten her "wish," that she is free to go. In doing so, he reminds us that choosing Lucrezia is like making no choice at all. He reminds us, once again, that she acts as the mirror Andrea needs to reflect his past, to reflect his world. She is his alibi for being. And as Bakhtin points out, "Wherever the alibi becomes a prerequisite for creation and expression, there can be no responsibility, no seriousness, no meaning" (*A&A* 179).

Browning may leave us in a position of wanting to "join" Lucrezia, but he also makes it clear that if we make that choice, we are in a sense refusing to take what we have experienced in the text and learn from it. We are, theoretically, falling into the same trap as Andrea: we are choosing to abdicate our responsibility. This is perhaps what Maynard means when he says we end up "trying to avoid recognition of where we fit in as readers" (111). What we must realize, however, is that Browning does offer us a place to fit in, a position which ensures that we take what we have learned in

his art and make it part of our lives. He invites us to stay right where we are - - to occupy the liminal space we have occupied throughout our reading of the text.

In the final, most profound irony of the poem, Browning forces us to see that the main difference between his utterance and Andrea's lies in the poet's unwillingness to allow his work to act as a mirror for the world. Through his dramatic monologue he creates a work of art that interacts with the world, with the past, with the present and with the future -- a work of art that has, in turn, the potential to transform and enrich the meaning of the world for his future readers. Browning invites us, once again, to see his work for what it is: an event, an aesthetic project which always encompasses the "fullness of time" (*CofP* 413), which is always incomplete, always looking to a future dialogic exchange.

At the same time, Browning invites us to see that it is his creative consciousness which has been responsible for limiting Andrea's aesthetic vision, for representing him as a man who is always on the threshold of "becoming" nothing more than a slave to his own soul. Andrea's ability to express the helplessness of his situation may make it a little easier for us to understand why, even in the end, we feel a great deal of sympathy toward this man. But Browning still makes it clear that we are far better off *not* seeing things entirely from Andrea's point of view. He still leaves us to contemplate the question that plagues us throughout: "How could it end any other way?"

The answer, of course, is that it couldn't -- not unless Browning had been inclined to represent Andrea representing himself as if he were still on the threshold of "becoming" an entirely different personality. To have done so, Browning would have to have presented us with an artist who could understand that the "soul's self" simply cannot generate its own incentive

when it is incapable of incorporating the *unfinalizability* of the spirit into its future, into its work -- an artist who was willing to resist his own representation, to see himself as a "condition for potential" (*A&A* 105). He would have to have given us Fra Lippo Lippi, a hero who knows full well that a human being "experiencing life in the category of his own *I* is incapable of gathering himself into an outward whole that would be even 'relatively' finished" (*A&A* 34), a hero who understands that in order to avoid making oneself into a work of art, one must make one's body and soul the center of the *action* or *deed*.

Chapter 4

Fra Lippo Lippi: "A Laugh, a cry, the business of the world ---"

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. *Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically [emphasis mine]. (DI 23)*

In "My Last Duchess" and "Andrea del Sarto," Browning presents us with two speakers who, for various reasons, are unable to laugh at themselves or to get beyond their own representations. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," Browning takes, what is for him, an unprecedented risk by creating a speaker who is "so alive," and so resistant to "pigeon-holing," that he appears, at least, to free himself (in more ways than one), from the hand "that's fiddling away on [his] throat" (13). Although Fra Lippo is bound by the same generic frame as Andrea and the Duke, Browning alters his own position in relation to his speaker just enough to raise some rather profound questions concerning the limits of the dramatic monologue's form. The stage he sets for Fra Lippo as well as the audience he has his speaker perform for and with are also significantly different from those which the reader encounters in "My Last Duchess" and "Andrea del Sarto." Still, Fra Lippo is not unlike Andrea or the Duke in that he plays a role -- the role Browning has assigned to him. The main difference is that Fra Lippo embraces the world, its chaos, it

unpredictability, its lack of closure, and its contingent possibilities. Browning is still somewhere in the background, working alongside of him, delivering him into the "power of fate" (*A&A* 175-77), but both poet and speaker seem to agree that the monk's fate will remain an open-ended one. As Bakhtin would see it, Browning makes a point of representing his hero as one whose "consciousness of self lives by its unfinalizability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy" (*PofDP* 53). What Browning visualizes, in other words, is not simply Fra Lippo's self-consciousness, but the "inescapable open-endedness, the vicious circle of that self-consciousness" (*PofDP* 51).

A number of critics have suggested that among the reasons that Browning is able to capture, so vividly, Lippo's self-consciousness, is that the monk acts as the poet's own mouthpiece. Glen Oman takes this the furthest by suggesting that Fra Lippo is an "only slightly disguised *persona* for Browning himself. Not only does he express Browning's own ideas [the poet's intricate theory of art] but he also shares his creator's personality. His energy and vitality, his gusto for new experience, his vigorous speech are all characteristic of Browning himself and commonplaces of his poetry" (143). In a similar vein, Maisie Ward writes that "Lippo is surely Browning on canvas, striking out new ways of seeing and saying, doubted by his Prior as Browning was by his world" (230). And Herbert Tucker argues that it cannot "be disputed that Fra Lippo's aesthetic opinions are ultimately Browning's" (201). Other critics are not so quick to agree. Sonstroem, Healy, King, and Shaw all imply that Browning would hardly appreciate being defined as characteristically inconsistent, untrustworthy, immoral, vulgar, and just plain hypocritical.¹ A Bakhtinian reading can be especially useful because it leaves

¹ For a further discussion of this shared perspective, see Sonstroem (721).

room to explore both perspectives. It can enable us to see how Browning shares his aesthetic opinions with his reader without merging with his hero, or necessarily "sharing" all aspects of his personality.

In order to use Fra Lippo to express some of his most fundamental ideas concerning the relationship between art and life, Browning must maintain some distance between himself and his speaker -- to maintain some degree of "outsideness" with respect to his hero. The poet can break down the hierarchies that normally exist between speaker and audience, as well as those which typically exist between author, speaker, and reader -- but only to a degree. As Bakhtin would see it, a hero like Fra Lippo may act as a "mouthpiece" for Browning's ideas, but only on the condition that "accents of the hero's self-consciousness are really objectified and that the work itself observes a distance between the hero and author. If the umbilical cord uniting the hero to his creator is not cut, then what we have is not a work of art but a personal document" (*PofDP* 51).² However close Fra Lippo comes to expressing Browning's ideas, the poet must still allow Fra Lippo the freedom of expression he needs to survive as a separate and distinct speaking subject. To do so, Browning creates a situation for Lippo that places enough external pressure on him that the monk is put in a position of compromising and defending himself in the face of his interlocutors, while at the same time entertaining them. If Browning wants to use Fra Lippo to express his own belief that art must resist its own finalities, then it is important the monk is portrayed as someone for whom the "imperative of expectation demands that

² Bakhtin also suggests that "Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the construction of the hero's image, is by itself sufficient to break down the monologic unity of an artistic world -- but only on condition that the hero, as self-consciousness, is really represented and not merely expressed, that is, does not fuse with the author, does not become the mouthpiece for his voice" (*PofDP* 51).

the present always be found wanting" (Tucker 5). If Browning is to work within the constraints of the dramatic monologue form, and still present the reader with the possibility that the monk's fate will remain an open-ended one, a number of issues in Fra Lippo's own approach to art and life must be left unresolved. Browning must let a great deal of ambivalence and indeterminacy reign if he is to represent successfully his hero as "truly" unfinalizable.

There are a number of ways that Browning manages to accomplish this. He makes the collision of points of view an integral part of Fra Lippo's speech act. He leaves open the possibility of who constitutes the monk's audience, and he makes "surprise" and the potential of escape "part of his design"³ (*CofP* 257). It would even appear, on the surface, that Browning takes up the position of a polyphonic author, that he creates in Fra Lippo, a "polyphonic - hero" -- a "personality" rather than a "character." As I outlined in Chapter Three, Morson and Emerson summarize the distinction Bakhtin makes between the two types of heroes in the following way:

A character's psychology may be immensely complex, but it is in essence something 'objectivized' and finalized. By contrast a 'personality' is a genuine other person, capable, as real people are, of changing his or her essential identity. To represent a hero as a personality is to portray him as truly unfinalizable. 'Personality is not subordinate to (that is, it resists) objectified cognition and reveals itself only freely and dialogically (as *thou* for I) . . . However complexly drawn, a character is all 'given'; a personality is always being 'created.' (*CofP* 263)

³ As Morson and Emerson summarize Bakhtin's ideas, "the polyphonic author makes surprise part of his design so that it is supposed to be seen. He is genuinely caught unaware by his heroes responses, and the finished work retains that sense of unexpectedness" (*CofP* 257).

As I also illustrated in the previous chapter, it is not difficult to see how easily Andrea del Sarto conforms to Bakhtin's description of a monologic hero or "character." Throughout his speech, Andrea perpetuates his own stasis, his own objectification. Even though he comes across as a "genuine other person, capable, as real people are, of changing his identity," he never succeeds. We know that it is Browning, not Andrea, who has the final word, that Andrea never violates Browning's "monologic design concerning him."⁴ Andrea's self-consciousness may appear to be dominant, but it never "breaks down the monologic unity of the work" (*PofDP* 51). Even the Duke who, on one level, appears as though he will continue to get away with just about everything, still acts, experiences, thinks, and is conscious of himself "within the limits of what he is, that is, within the limits of his image defined as reality" (*PofDP* 52). Like Andrea, he "cannot exceed the limits of his own character, typicality, or temperament" (*PofDP* 52).

In Fra Lippo's case, Browning *appears* to be more interested in giving his hero the free range to discover himself and his possibilities than he is in defining him, or sentencing him to a "second-hand" truth. Fra Lippo seems to fit the definition of a polyphonic hero perfectly -- except in a few important aspects. According to Bakhtin, polyphonic "heroes are never described, they describe themselves . . . no authorial 'surplus' finalizes them. Strictly

⁴ In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin argues that "In a monologic design, the hero is closed and his semantic boundaries are strictly defined: he acts, experiences, thinks, and is conscious within the limits of what he is, that is, within the limits of his image defined as reality; he cannot cease to be himself, that is he cannot exceed the limits of his own character, typicality or temperament without violating the author's monologic design concerning him. Such an image is constructed in the objective authorial world, objective in relation to the hero's consciousness; the construction of that authorial world with its points of view and finalizing definitions presupposes a fixed external position, a fixed authorial field of vision. The self-consciousness of the hero is inserted into his rigid framework, to which the hero has no access from within and which is part of the authorial consciousness defining and representing him--and it is presented against the firm background of the external world" (*PofDP* 52).

speaking we do not see them at all; we see, instead, their self-conscious image of themselves. Whatever might require an external perspective to depict, whatever the hero could not himself be conscious of, we do not learn about" (*CofP* 264). Although Lippo is conscious of a great deal, and we get little sense of Browning's consciousness extending ironically beyond the artist/monk's, it is still very apparent that Browning's historical grasp is far wider than Fra Lippo's. Within the historical context in which he speaks, Fra Lippo can't possibly know how pertinent his remarks about his own work, and his response to ecclesiastical, two-dimensional painting will be to succeeding generations of artists.

It seems important to remember, then, that while there appears to be a *radical* change in Browning's position within this poem, the change is really not all that significant.⁵ His "surplus of vision" is, to some degree, still evident. And while it is a surplus of vision which doesn't seek to finalize, it is *never* "dialogically revealed" to the other that is the artist/monk. This, in itself, is inconsistent with at least one of Bakhtin's definitions of the polyphonic author. In his essay "The Hero in Dostoevsky's Art," he suggests that the polyphonic author

retains for himself, that is, for his exclusive field of vision, not a single essential definition, not a single trait, not the smallest feature of the hero: he enters it all into the field of vision of the hero himself, he casts it all into the crucible of the hero's self-consciousness . . . And thanks to this . . . all the concrete features of the hero, while remaining fundamentally unchanged in content, are transferred from one plane of representation to another, and thus acquire a completely different artistic significance; they can no longer finalize and close off a character, can no longer construct an integral image of him or

⁵ As Bakhtin writes in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, the issue in a polyphonic work is "not an absence of, but a *radical change in, the author's position.*" The new position a polyphonic author must take up is "considerably more difficult than the ordinary position and presupposes an enormous power of creativity" (*PofDP* 67).

provide an artistic answer to the question, 'Who is he?' We see not who he is, but *how* he is conscious of himself, our act of artistic visualization occurs not before the reality of the hero, but before a pure function of his awareness of that reality.
(*PofDP* 48-9)

Of course, illustrating *how*, and to what extent a speaker is conscious of himself is the point of *most* of Browning's dramatic monologues. Fra Lippo is not alone in that "at all the critical moments of his confession . . . he tries to anticipate the possible definition or evaluation others might make of him, to guess the sense and tone of that evaluation" (*PofDP* 52). Nor is he alone in that he "tries painstakingly to formulate these possible words about himself by others, interrupting his own speech with the imagined rejoinders of others" (*PofDP* 52).⁶ What distinguishes Fra Lippo from the Duke and Andrea is that Browning has the monk use the imagined rejoinders of others to question a way of looking at the world that is centripetal, past-oriented, official, finalizable and certainly monistic. Because Fra Lippo appears to be fundamentally aware that "truth" itself is only a matter of point of view, he does not seem to suffer from the same kind of self-delusion as Andrea and the Duke. He is able to anticipate a future because he is not afraid of embracing and confronting the unrest that is his present -- a present that consists of being caught between two worlds. Most importantly, he is able to laugh at his own actions, and play up his own uneasiness. His captors may think they "see a monk," but he is quick to let them know that they have also encountered a lively street urchin, a rogue, a "beast." Right from the beginning Browning suggests to his audience, the reader, that we are not to appreciate Lippo as one or the other, but both. In one quick breath the monk states, "And here you catch me at an alley's end / Where sportive ladies leave their doors / The

⁶ Certainly we see a number of these characteristics in both Andrea and the Duke.

Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up" (5-7). Shortly thereafter we learn that he is also "lodging with a highly respected public figure . . . how d'ye call? / Master --- a . . . Cosimo of the Medici" (16-17). Clearly Browning wants us to see that Fra Lippo is not someone who is going to be easily pinned down. He is encountered in the world at large. His audience may be one, or two or twenty.

Though Lippo asks the chief watchman to "bid" his "hangdogs go," we never really know whether the "watch" have headed off to "Drink out this quarter-florin to the health / Of the munificent House that harbours" (28-9) Fra Lippo, or whether they join him in sitting side by side, "hip to haunch." Fra Lippo implies that it is the "twinkle" in one man's "eye" (42), the "shake" of one man's "head" (76) that he is most concerned with. His appeal is directed primarily at the captain, the "one sir" who wishes to "make amends," once he hears that Lippo lodges with a one of the most prominent citizens and patrons in the city. Yet his desire to "interpret God to all of you" (311) would seem to suggest that he is speaking to a much larger audience than one. However many members of the watch Fra Lippo manages to capture as his audience, Browning makes it clear that they are there because they want to listen -- that they are free to go whenever they please. Because the monk speaks to a willing and interested audience, we automatically feel less "uncomfortable" about becoming part of the scene. In fact, Browning makes it difficult for the reader not to be drawn into the event. He sets it up so that we can't help but want to participate in the carnival atmosphere that Fra Lippo uses as his excuse for escape. As the monk puts it to the guard,

Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints

And saints again. I could not paint all night ---
 Ouf! I leaned out of the window for fresh air.
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
 A sweep of lute-strings, laughs and whiffs of song, ---
Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
Flower o' the quince,
I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
Flower o' the tyme --- and so on. Round they went. (45-57)

From a Bakhtinian perspective, what Browning manages to do here is bring the "spectacular," "sensuous character" and "strong element of play" (*R&HW* 7) commonly associated with carnival sounds and images to life. The "sweep of lute-strings, laughs, and whiffs of song" (53) that called Lippo from his mew provide everyone with an excuse for being there. As Bakhtin would see it, Browning has Lippo evoke a "carnival sense of the world" that is so difficult to resist that it becomes almost impossible *not* to embrace Lippo's life experience as well as his rather eccentric spirit. According to Bakhtin, the carnival does "not generally belong to the sphere of art. It belongs to the borderline between art and life . . . it is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people" (*R&HW* 7). To put this another way, Browning creates a scenario in which the "footlights" temporarily disappear.⁷ We may

⁷ In *Rabalais and His World*, Bakhtin suggests that a "carnival sense of the world . . . does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. Footlights would destroy a carnival, as the absence of footlights would destroy a theatrical performance. Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part" (*RHW* 7). He puts forth a similar argument in *The Problem of Doestoevsky's Poetics*, when he suggests that during carnival, the "hierarchical structure and all the forms of terror, reverence, piety, and etiquette connected with it--that is, everything resulting from socio-hierarchical inequality or any other form of inequality among people (including age)" is suspended. "All *distance* between people is suspended, and a special carnival category goes into effect: *free and familiar contact among people*" (123).

be aware that a "life exists outside" Lippo's, but there is nothing to suggest that this "outside" world is more attractive than his. We listen to the monk's escapade for pretty much the same reason as the watch and Fra Lippo himself do -- for the "laughter" and the "fun" of it. As he describes escaping from "three weeks shut within my mew" (47), the motivation for the monk's flight into the street is one that is meant to be shared and appreciated by all:

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

By reminding the watch that he, too, is only made of "flesh and blood," by opening himself up to their scrutiny, Fra Lippo further breaks down the hierarchy that might have existed between himself and his captors. In using the carnival as a backdrop for Lippo's escape, Browning also comes up with the perfect setting for exploring the limits of the relationships between actor and spectator, author, speaker, and reader within the dramatic monologue. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin suggests that

carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life . . . *Eccentricity* is a special category of familiar contact; it permits -- in concretely sensuous form -- the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves. (*PofDP* 123)

Lippo is at times offensive, and down-right vulgar. Yet his audience seems more than willing to allow the "latent side" of his human nature to reveal and express itself. Fra Lippo confesses the cardinal sin of indulging in fleshly lust, openly and without shame. He puts down the Prior and the clerical world which feeds and supports him. He expresses his distaste for the language of sacred text -- with no apparent expectation of censure or admonition. He goes so far as to parody his experience of divine "Love." And still he gets away with it.

Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
 Lord they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
Flower o' the clove,
All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love ! (108-11)

Of course, Lippo has been getting away with a great deal all his life. As the monk tells the watch,

I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shuck,
 Refuse and rubbish . . . (81-85)

This is one of the more obvious points in the poem where Browning allows ambiguity to reign. The poet intentionally leaves the question of how old Lippo was when his father died open in order that the monk can impress his audience with his uncanny ability to survive against incredible odds. Later, when Lippo stretches this period of his life to "eight years" spent in the gutter, "Watching folk's faces to know who will fling / The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires, / And who will curse or kick him for his pains --- " (114-16), the inconsistency in his story seems less significant than the emphasis

that is placed on what life in the real world has taught him. "Old Aunt Latachia" may have saved him in the nick of time by delivering his starving body into the hands of the Carmelite order, but "quitting this very miserable world" is no real option for Fra Lippo. To "renounce the world, its pride and greed" (98), in the interest of a "good bellyful" cannot wholly eliminate "a store" of images from Lippo's mind. He has been taught the "look of things" (125) which, like the "value and the significance of flesh," is impossible to "unlearn ten minutes afterwards" (269). As Fra Lippo himself states, he couldn't help but turn the various looks, "remarks" and responses he confronted in the streets "to use" (127-8). It is his challenging and "overabundant" experience in life that provides him with his rather odd perspective on mankind:

I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
 And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
 (129-35)

When Lippo moves from drawing simple caricatures to painting frescoes on "cloister-walls" he is "stopped" and reminded that a domestic scene, filled with lifelike people, is inappropriate material for making a "church up fine" (140). It is at this point in the monologue that we begin to realize that Lippo's speech might have as much, if not more, to do with Browning's need to express and defend his artistic sensibility as it does with Lippo's. Browning's intentions become exceedingly clear when he has Lippo call upon the Prior's response to his work, ironically capturing the indignant and reverential tones

of his superior's speech in order to emphasize the norms, the prohibitions and restrictions he is working against:

"How? what's here
 "Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
 "Faces, arms, legs and bodies like the true
 "As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!
 "Your business is not to catch men with show,
 "With homage to the perishable clay,
 "But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 "Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 "Your business is to paint the souls of men ---
 "Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
 "It's vapour done up like a new-born babe ---
 "(In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 "It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 "Give us no more of body than shows soul! (175-188)

Although the Prior's outburst could be attributed to Lippo's life-like rendering of the woman so like his "niece who comes / "To care about his asthma," it would seem that Browning also wants to set the Prior up as a voice within Lippo's world that is worth listening to and challenging. As prone to embellishment as Fra Lippo is, we are given no reason to believe that the Prior's response wasn't anything other than what the artist-monk says it is. We may question how Andrea came to hear Michaelangelo's praise of his work, or how the Duke could possibly know what Fra Pandolf said to his last duchess, but the attention drawn to the Prior's speech seems far from disingenuous on Browning's part. It would seem that Browning intentionally sets him up as an autonomous consciousness -- a consciousness who would certainly have a great deal invested in wanting Lippo to stick with tradition, to follow the rules, and demand little in the way of the viewer's imagination:

"Here 's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
 "That sets us praising, --- why not stop with him ?
 "Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
 "With wonder at lines, colours, and what not? (189-92)

The Prior's inability to understand that Fra Lippo possesses a gift for perceiving the soul as it is revealed in the "flesh" is what frustrates Lippo the most. A one-way "praise" of the Creator is, to Lippo, an all too oppressive way of appreciating and understanding the beauty and meaning of H/his work. The "beast" (270) in him knows that if the "soul" or self remains disengaged from the outside world, from the reality of passion and sense, then it misses truth -- at least the kind of disparate truth Browning wants his reader to value. As Lippo goes on to defend his own theory of art, and answer his own question -- "Now, is this sense I ask?" (198) -- Browning has the monk raise many of the same questions Browning asks of himself fifteen years later in *The Ring and the Book*:

Why take the artistic way to prove so much?
 Because Art remains the one way possible
 Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine at least

.....

--- but here's the plague
 That all this trouble comes of telling truth,
 Which truth, by when it reaches him, looks false,
 Seems to be just the thing it would supplant,
 Nor recognizable by whom it left:
 While falsehood would have done the work of truth.
 But Art, --- wherein man nowise speaks to men,
 Only to mankind, --- Art may tell a truth
 Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
 Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word,
 So may you paint your picture, twice show truth,
 Beyond mere imagery on the wall, ---
 So note by note, bring music from your mind,
 Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived, ---
 So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
 Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.

(*Works* VI: 841-3, 852-867)

Obviously, for Lippo, a great deal of "trouble comes of telling truth." What Browning uses the monk to illustrate is that even more "trouble" comes in

speaking about truth as if it were a *given*. Similarly, the poet uses Lippo to suggest that truth, by the time it reaches us, often "looks false" because truth is all too often equated with *a* meaning, rather than potential meaning. In a section of the poem that is worth quoting at some length, Lippo blatantly proposes to the watch that the point of art and painting, the point of "reproduction" itself, is to "twice show truth / Beyond mere imagery on the wall":⁸

. . . you've seen the world
 --- The beauty and the wonder and the power,
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
 Changes, surprises, --- and God made it all !
 --- For what ? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
 The mountain round it and the sky above,
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
 These are the frame to? What's it all about?
 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
 Wondered at? oh, this last of course! --- you say.
 But why not do as well as say, --- paint these
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
 God's works --- paint anyone, and count it crime
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
 "Are here already; nature is complete:
 "Suppose you reproduce her --- (which you can't)
 "There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
 For don't you mark? we're made so that we love
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
 And so they are better, painted --- better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though ! How much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth!
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good :
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink. (282-316)

⁸ As quoted above in *The Ring and the Book* (Works VI:862-3).

It is not so much meaning itself that nourishes Lippo, but the search for it. For him, meaning is born out of one's contact with the world -- a world which is messy, unstable, open and unpredictable. Responding to art, to knowledge, to "truth," he argues, is just as important to the learning process as the acquisition or mastery of knowledge itself. Lippo even seems to hint at the possibility that the production of art ought to be viewed as a collaborative effort rather than an individual one, that creative activity is meant to be reciprocal and interactive -- a philosophy Browning certainly reiterates in his lines "Art shall tell the truth / Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought."⁹

Like Bakhtin, both Browning and Fra Lippo seem to appreciate the fact that artistic thought "is born and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with other's thought" (SG 92). Although the monk clearly reacts against the Prior's sensibilities, he still seems to value his perspective. At least, he is able to see that in order to make the best of his life, and develop himself as an artist, he must actively respond to and encounter the consciousness of others. Rather than using the Prior's voice to ease his own insecurities, as is the case with the Duke's use of Fra Pandolf, Fra Lippo makes it quite clear that the Prior's opinions and ideas are ones which he has had to integrate into his life, and somehow make the best of. The "old grave eyes" (231) continue to peep over his shoulder, "The heads shake still" (231) and yet Lippo's response is hardly passive:

I swallow my rage,
Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
To please them --- sometimes do and sometimes don't;

⁹ As quoted above in *The Ring and the Book* (Works VI:859-60).

For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints ---
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world ---
 (*Flower o' the peach,*
Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 (242-251)

Unlike the Prior, Fra Lippo makes no attempt to hide his carnal sins, downplay life's temptations, or ignore hypocrisy. To him, one should not "count it crime / To let a truth slip" (295-6). But when the Prior gets caught doing just that, when he lets the "truth" concerning his lustful relationship with his "niece" slip, he demands that it all be rubbed out:

"Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 "Rub all out, try it a second time.
 "Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
 "She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say, ---
 "Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
 "Have it all out!" (193-98)

By painting an all too realistic portrait of the "Prior's niece" and subsequently resurrecting the Prior's response to it (or her), Lippo not only accentuates the point of view he is trying so hard to work against, he also draws attention to the various ways in which works of art, literature, and even scripture can be interpreted. By calling the "white smallish female with the breasts" . . . "Herodias," the Prior aligns himself, however inadvertently, with Antipas, the governor of Galilee who was censured by John the Baptist for divorcing his wife to marry his niece. Since it was not Herodias, but her daughter, Salome, who danced at Antipas' birthday celebration in exchange for John's head,¹⁰ it seems rather obvious that Fra Lippo is calling attention to

¹⁰ Although Goldfarb discusses this inaccuracy in Browning's research to some extent, my information was gleaned from the *Macmillan Encyclopaedia* (Isaacs 170).

the Prior's unwillingness to admit that he, too, is only human. Interestingly, it is not the Prior's actions or reasoning that Lippo questions, so much as the Prior's inability to laugh at his own hypocrisy. For the artist/monk hypocrisy is obviously an integral part of his life; it is part of his process. Unlike the Prior, he refuses to deny his lust. While he doesn't expect his audience to come right out and condone his whoring, he does expect it to accept his vulnerabilities. His attitude toward his audience seems to be: "If I'm willing to admit to these shenanigans, question them, and laugh at them, *you* too should be willing to embrace all that I cannot reconcile within myself."

Browning expects his readers to respond to Fra Lippo in a similar way. He wants us to celebrate Fra Lippo's ability to understand that life is marked by the movement of quest and question. As the following lines suggest, Browning also wants to underline the fact that the search for an answer often involves the ability to step outside oneself, and see oneself from another's perspective.

What would men have? Do they like grass or no ---
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled for ever one way. As it is
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
 I always see the garden and God there
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.
 (259-69)

It is as if, at this point in the poem, Browning goes out of his way to suggest that Lippo, like Andrea, is caught between two antithetical conceptions of himself. As much as he would like to resist all that the Prior has "taught" him, the monk admits that he has still managed to absorb some of his

instructions. As he tells the guard earlier, "the old schooling sticks" (231). Fortunately, as this rather bombastic bit of rhetoric illustrates, Lippo lives in fear of his own denial -- at least, he lives in fear of becoming, like the Prior, a man who is capable of "unlearn"ing "ten minutes afterward" the "value and significance of flesh." It could be said that Lippo's fear of the consummating power of the Prior-within is ultimately what drives the monk to produce works of art which are always a form of declaration, a sharing of a new idea.

As I emphasized in the three previous chapters, Bakhtin believes that in order to generate a sense of self, we must be able to anticipate those moments that can consummate us in the consciousness of others and surmount them (*A&A* 16-17). In many ways, Fra Lippo's entire speech seems to be an exercise in doing just that. Although we see the Duke and Andrea struggling with this to some degree in their monologues, it does not come across as the motivating factor behind their speeches. This is certainly not the case with the monk. His whole utterance is driven by a need to assert himself, to prove that he is capable of being his "own master" (226). As an artist who is trying to break new ground, Lippo has an interest in making his presence known. Like the speaker in "Old Pictures in Florence," he knows he can only "bring the invisible full into play" (xix, 151) if he continues to "paint man man, whatever the issue!" (xix, 148).¹¹

Of course, Browning knows this too. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," the poet uses several methods to bring "invisibility into play." The primary one is to put the reader in the precarious position of having to experience the tension that exists within the monk as he struggles to define a sense of self on the

¹¹ In his essay, "Browning and Painting," Leonee Ormond points out that "Characteristically," Browning "is most deeply concerned with two things. First, the way in which style reveals the man, and second, the relation of the painter's work to Browning's own belief in the artist's duty to 'paint man man, whatever the issue'" (186).

boundary, on the *threshold* between his self-consciousness and what he perceives to be the Prior's consummating consciousness. The monk understands that to paint "saints and saints / and saints again" (48-49) in the style of Fra Angelico and Fra Lorenzo is to perpetuate a symbolic representation of the world -- a vision of the world that lacks three dimensional perspective -- a vision of the world that lacks life. Still, he agrees to swallow his rage and "paint / To please" (243-44). At times he is successful. At times he is not. At all times he seems to resent the possibility that his work will only be sanctioned when he is no longer around to revel in the glory. As he puts it to the guard, "It makes me mad to see what men shall do / And we in our graves!" (312-13) If there is a fundamental difference between Andrea and Fra Lippo it is most emphatically expressed in these lines. Lippo's anger, his rage at not being appreciated, sustains him to the extent that he refuses to capitulate to doubt. Unlike Andrea, Lippo allows the turbulence in his life to propel him forward. Rather than wallowing in his own stasis, he wallows in his own ambivalence. He uses his own inadequacies to explore new and more meaningful approaches to life. He laughs at himself. He takes chances. Most importantly, he is willing to look at himself through the eyes of another, to explore ideas as they should be explored -- in varying contexts.

As mentioned above, the "truth" for both Lippo and Browning is related to the exploration of alternative ideas, to alternative ways of seeing and living. In his essay, "The Idea in Dostoevsky," Bakhtin comments on the "dialogic nature of human thought, the dialogic nature of the idea" (87) in a way which is most useful for understanding the way Browning represents Lippo's approach to art and life:

The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness -- if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of *others*. Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of living contact with another alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, that is, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse. At that point of contact between voice-consciousnesses the idea is born and lives . . . The idea is a *live event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses . . . Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood, and 'answered' by other voices from other positions. (*PofDP* 87-8)

The idea, in other words, questions as much as it answers; it seeks a response, as much as it responds. Like consciousness itself, its task is to remain forever unconsummated, forever alive. The same can be said for truth -- at least the kind of truth which "shall breed the thought."¹² As Bakhtin explains it,

It is quite possible to imagine and postulate a unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses. The monologic way of perceiving cognition and truth is only one of the possible ways. It arises only where consciousness is placed above existence, and where the unity of existence is transformed into the unity of consciousness. (*PofDP* 81)

When Lippo adopts the voice of another consciousness, when he momentarily steps outside himself, he allows himself to live in that tension between the inner and outer. He occupies a space similar to that of the reader's position within the dramatic monologue -- betwixt and between varying perspectives. He takes on the role of the witness, judge, and

¹² As quoted above in *The Ring and the Book* (*Works* VI:860).

messenger.¹³ In doing so, he takes responsibility for his actions, he acknowledges his guilt and his blame. He takes what he has experienced in his art and makes it effectual in his life, and vice versa. Unlike Andrea, Fra Lippo is portrayed as someone who refuses to live his life as if it were "washed from all sides by the waves of an endless, empty potentiality" (*CofP* 31). Fra Lippo understands that this "world's no blot for us / Nor blank" (313-14), that it "means intensely" (314). He understands that those who follow the monistic way of life have fundamentally devised ways to simulate "alibis for being" (*PofA* 44). Most importantly, he seems to understand that "wherever the alibi becomes a prerequisite for creation and expression, there can be no responsibility, no seriousness, no meaning" (*A&A* 179). What Browning wants his reader to understand is that Fra Lippo's primary method for resisting life's alibis is to confront them head on and laugh them into being. As Bakhtin would see it, laughter is one of the means by which Browning uses Fra Lippo to bring "invisibility full into play"¹⁴ -- to bring to light that which exists on the boundary between consciousnesses. Like Andrea, the monk has the uncanny ability to name life's little incidental ironies. The difference is that Fra Lippo is portrayed as someone who is able to seize hold of these ironies, laugh at them, and integrate them into his art in a meaningful way. Nowhere is this more evident than when the monk sings, "(*Flower o' the peach, / Death for us all, and his own life for each!*)" (238-9).

The very fact that Fra Lippo sings out and celebrates death as a part of life suggests that he is not afraid of his own vulnerability or his future. He is not

¹³ In his "Notes Made in 1970-71," Bakhtin uses the terms "witness and judge" to explore issues of self-awareness in relation to a "*supra-I*" (*SG* 137).

¹⁴ As noted above, this quote is from Browning's poem "Last Pictures in Florence" (xix, 151).

only able to laugh at his past, and his present circumstances, he is able to recognize that laughter is what will buy him a perspective on the future. As Bakhtin observes in *The Dialogic Imagination*, "death is inseparable from laughter" (196), because laughter buys us the freedom to confront death, to live our lives for death instead of in fear of it. Laughter, is "festive . . . universal in scope . . . [and] it is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (*R&HW* 11-12). Laughter has a way of juxtaposing differing perspectives, a way of engaging possibilities. Laughter always has a way of opening up to question that which has been silenced. It has a way of exposing varying truths, a way of giving life to the soul. As Bakhtin suggests, "laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him" (*SG* 134).

It would seem that Browning expressed this idea in his poetry, both through form and content, long before Bakhtin put it into words. Certainly the poet makes a point of not wanting this liberating quality of laughter to go unnoticed by his reader. The words "*death for us all*" are written in italics, and clearly meant to be sung. The fragment of song that the words are part of are framed between the lines -- "A laugh, a cry, the business of the world ---" (237) and "And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over, / The world and life's too big to pass for a dream" (250-1). The "song" is so strategically placed that it becomes difficult to ignore the fact that Browning's creative consciousness is at work in the poem, or to ignore the possibility that he too wants us to appreciate the possibility that life and death are inseparable -- that death itself is nothing to be feared. By once again resurrecting the carnival song, Browning also reminds his reader that we are being asked to participate in an event that perpetuates the "world's revival and renewal" (*R&HW* 7). Most importantly, Browning reminds us that laughter can free the form that

art or literature assumes and allow it to take on what Bakhtin defines as a "specific aesthetic relationship with reality" (*PofDP* 164).

In "Fra Lippo Lippi" laughter works two ways. It exposes the ambivalence that exists within the consciousness of the artist/monk. It also serves to remind us that we are simultaneously responding to Fra Lippo's consciousness and Browning's consciousness of that consciousness. By presenting Fra Lippo as a man who is capable of laughing at himself, Browning manages to take us from "outside" in. As we find ourselves laughing alongside the monk, his substance, his interior is exposed. But at the same time Browning puts us in the position of laughing along with Fra Lippo, he puts us in the position of having to laugh at him. To put this in Bakhtinian terms, Fra Lippo is free to laugh at himself and his life because Browning portrays him as someone who understands that "in all that is most essential" he does not "exist yet" (*A&A* 127). Unlike Andrea, Fra Lippo does not believe that what he is presenting to his audience is "*all of him*"; he refuses to accept the fact that he already exists "*in full*" (*A&A* 127); he refuses to "accept his factually given being."¹⁵ Of course, Browning wants his reader to celebrate this aspect of Lippo's personality. But, at the same time, he never wants to let us forget that Lippo is his fictional creation -- a hero who only *appears* to be capable of generating his own self-consciousness, of escaping his own representation.

¹⁵ In *Art and Answerability* Bakhtin argues that "What constitutes the organizing principle of my life from within myself (in my relationship to me myself) is solely my consciousness of the fact that in respect to all that is most essential I do not exist yet. The form of my life-from-within is conditioned by my rightful folly or insanity of *not coinciding* of not coinciding *in principle*--with myself as a given. I do not accept my factually given being; I believe insanely and inexpressibly in my own noncoincidence with this inner givenness of myself. I cannot count and add up all of myself, saying: this is *all* of me--there is *nothing more* anywhere else or in anything else; I already exist in full" (*A&A* 127).

The discrepancy that exists between Lippo's self-consciousness and Browning's consciousness of that consciousness becomes especially evident in the monk's final "plot to make amends" (343) -- a plot which is supposed to make up for his blasphemous response to his brethren's request that he paint for the "pity and religion" that "grow i' the crowd" (334). In keeping with the personality thus far presented, it is difficult to tell whether Lippo's promise to "paint a piece" (344) is meant to be taken as a bribe, an act of contrition, or is simply meant to be taken in jest. Certainly when we take into account Lippo's tendency to speak as he was "taught" in the streets, his cry of "Hang the fools!" (335) is as difficult to take seriously as his plea to the guards of "don't misreport me, now" (340). After all, he has virtually been free from the moment he mentions Cosimo de' Medici's name. Try as he might to come across as a poor penitent monk, who has "Spoke in a huff" (336), it doesn't take him long to make a mockery of his own promise to appease. As he begins to describe the piece which will come to be known as the *Coronation of the Virgin*,¹⁶ he tells his audience "I shall paint / God in the midst, Madonna and her babe" (348). But true to form Lippo cannot resist adding playfully: "Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood" (349). Nor can he resist literally painting himself into a corner. In the company of "a saint or two," and Job, another suffering artist who dealt with "real life" dilemmas, the monk envisions a resurrection of himself:

. . . up shall come
Out of a corner when you least expect,

¹⁶ Though Browning never specifically names the painting in his poem, most critics agree that this is the fresco to which he is referring. In a footnote to his essay, "Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi*, Vasari's Masaccio, and Mrs. Jameson," Johnstone Parr writes, "Although it is now disputed whether or not Lippo is represented in the picture, Browning certainly thought he was" (279).

As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!---
 Mazed motionless and moonstruck --- I'm the man
 Back I shrink --- what is this I see and hear?
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
 I, in this presence, this pure company!
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape? (360-69)

Lippo not only manages to make a parody of the ecclesiastical form itself, he blatantly announces his own ambiguous position of being caught betwixt and between heaven and earth, between what pleases others and what pleases himself, between varying perspectives. When he asks, "what is this I see and hear," it is as easy to imagine him speaking from outside the enclosed world of the painting as it is from within. The reader is overtly confronted with a question that surfaces in most dramatic monologues, a question Browning asks even more explicitly in the dialogic exchange between "*He*" and "*She*" in his poem "Flute Music with an Accompaniment": "What if all's appearance? / Is not outside seeming / Real as substance inside?" (185-7).

The answer "*He*" supplies to these questions, "Both are facts, so leave me dreaming" (188), seems like a response Fra Lippo himself would come up with if given the chance. Not only does Fra Lippo imagine his flesh, his soul, coming to life in the painting, he gives voice to angels, and envisions a life-like confrontation not unlike that which precipitated his monologue in the first place, and not unlike what the "real" future might hold for him:

"Not so fast!"
 ---Addresses the celestial presence, "nay ---
 "He made you and devised you, after all,
 "Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw ---
 "His camel-hair make up a painting-brush?
 "We come to brother Lippo for that,
 "*Iste perfecit opus!*" So, all smile ---
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
 Under the cover of a hundred wings
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay

And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
 The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go
 The palm of her, the little lily thing
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick
 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
 (371-87)

Joseph Dupras suggests that, "As the composition of the painting falls from the sublime to the ridiculous, Lippo hastens its figural destruction by maneuvering himself into it, putting himself in the flattering position of both its creative beginning and its thematic end" (118). But I would argue that self-adulation is not the point of this exercise -- that Lippo's position within the painting is far more equivocal than this. Lippo obviously plays with the idea of using the painting to bestow the gift of the soul, the gift of immortality upon himself. Since it was customary, at that time, for painters to introduce a portrait of oneself into one's own masterpiece, Lippo's scheme could hardly be considered unusual. The problem Browning has Lippo confront in imagining himself among the saints is similar to the autobiographical dilemma he has Andrea del Sarto struggle with in his monologue. The main difference is that Browning never places Fra Lippo in the position of speaking "as if" his present and future life were already pre-determined. What the poet has Lippo face in this imagined projection is the reality that any attempt to fix an image of himself in the painting is equivalent to consummating himself -- to rendering himself passive. Though he plays with the idea that he could always portray his soul in the "essentialized" orthodox Christian manner to which he is opposed, or portray himself as a saint among saints, we quickly get the sense that he doesn't want to be dismissed so easily. And it soon becomes evident that, for Lippo, to deny what and who he is, and what he

might become, would be to deny his vulnerabilities. It would be equivalent to accepting a spiritual death.

Certainly, Fra Lippo cannot be accused of possessing a soul which is lacking in vitality and spirit. He gets so caught up in his projected painting that like everything else in his life it becomes a game. If it weren't for the fact that he retains a certain degree of outsidership, a certain "surplus of vision" with respect to the image he projects of himself, Fra Lippo would be guilty of self-abdication. But throughout his description, we never get the sense that he merges entirely with the Fra Lippo who is the hero of his painting. He "lives into" the other, but he does not for a "single moment lose himself completely or lose his singular place outside that individuality" (*A&A* 87). It is as if Browning uses Fra Lippo to give life to his own position by having the monk name the tension that exists between the consciousness that is acting as the author-contemplator, and the consciousness that is engaged in play -- to remind the reader that Browning himself, "made" him and "devised" him "afterall."¹⁷

What Browning has Lippo confront in the anticipatory act of creating his self-portrait is what Bakhtin suggests all authors must experience when creating a work of art. Just as Browning must separate himself from his hero, so too must Lippo separate himself from the potential hero that is himself; "in [him]self he must come to see another and do so utterly" (*A&A* 17). Like all readers and viewers of a work of art, Fra Lippo experiences a splitting of the self. He anticipates his own implication in his work, and he sees that his own creative relation to his art is part of his own self-creation. As he is thrown

¹⁷ From a Bakhtinian perspective, what Browning manages to do here is present his reader with the question that persists throughout all his dramatic monologues: "In what way would it enrich the event if I merged with the other, and instead of *two* there would now only be *one*?" (*A&A* 87).

back on himself, we can only laugh at his conjecture: "And so all's saved for me, and for the church / A pretty picture gained" (388-389). We laugh because no matter how hard the monk tries, he cannot avoid merging the world and his work, his art and his life; he cannot avoid breaking down the barriers between the Creator and the created, to make the appreciation of God's work accessible and familiar to all.

In this, as in most of his monologues, Browning can't help but engage in a similar project. As is the case with Andrea, it is possible to read Fra Lippo as a victim of his own historical biographies. The difference is that Browning has Fra Lippo himself leave enough doors open, enough room for escape that everything he says can be thrown open to question. We never get the sense that the artist/monk is interested in shifting the blame for anything that has happened, or might happen, onto the uncontrollable circumstances of history. In two brief lines Browning has Lippo present enough varying truths to confuse even the most knowledgeable art historian. By simultaneously likening the "lily thing" who saves him "in the nick" of time, to the "Prior's niece" and "Saint Lucy" Lippo raises as many questions about the past and present as he does about the future.

It is generally accepted among Browning scholars that "Saint Lucy" refers to Lucretia de Francesco Buti, the novice "Madonna" Lippo had sit for him, whom he then seduced, abducted and later impregnated,¹⁸ and that the "babe"

¹⁸ According to Anna Jameson, and others, this story rests solely on the authority of Vasari, and its truth may be fairly doubted. "It is alleged that, being called upon to paint a Madonna for the convent of St. Margaret at Prato, he persuaded the sisterhood to allow a beautiful novice, whose name was Lucretia Buti, to sit to him for a model. In the end he seduced this girl, and carried her off from the convent, to the great scandal of the community and the inexpressible grief and horror of her father and family. It is said Cosimo de' Medici and Pope Eugenius . . . had endeavoured to legitimize the union between Filippo and Lucrezia de Francesco Buti, but the former refused, because he wished to be able to give full rein to his appetite" (Vasari, Vol II, 4, 7).

refers to their own illegitimate child," Fillipino Lippi -- a fine artist himself, one who "studied under Botticelli after his father's death, and went on to complete Massacio's fresco cycle in the Brancacci Chapel" (Isaacs 727). What any serious researcher soon discovers is that Lucretia is not represented in the painting at all. The Sant' Ambrogio's *Coronation of the Virgin* was completed in 1541-2, long before Lippo went to Prato in 1552 and met Lucretia. Nevertheless, the fact that Lucretia's "simple beauty" is somehow projected into the fresco cannot be argued. As Edward Strutt points out, it is in the *Coronation* that "the sad, pensive, yet sensual type of womanhood, which we shall meet so often in Fra Filippo's subsequent paintings, first makes its appearance, as if the charming figure of Lucrezia Buti already overshadowed the monk's imagination" (70).

Obviously, the present of Fra Lippo's imaginings not only anticipates, but captures the chaos, instability and unfinalizability of the future. Nothing he says suggests that what he is about to become, or what he is about to confront is in any way a *given*. The only *given* that the reader can cling to is a vision of a man who is incapable of reconciling the two sides of himself. For Fra Lippo, the equation of "outside" and "inside," of public and private is not one which *can* or, as Browning would like us to see it, *should* be resolved easily. In order to approach the world and his art realistically Fra Lippo must be able to paint both the spirit and the soul. In order to express the "simple beauty" he values so much, his art must reflect a dialogic interaction between that which is spiritual or divine and that which is of this world. As he puts it he's never seen "beauty with no soul at all ---" (215):

If you get simple beauty and nought else,
 You get about the best thing God invents:
 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks. (217-20)

By portraying Lippo as someone who believes that the gift of the soul is reciprocal, Browning manages to adumbrate Bakhtin's idea that the "soul is a gift that my spirit bestows upon the *other*" (*A&A* 132) -- that "the soul is spirit the way it looks from *outside*" (*A&A* 100).¹⁹

Through his representation of Fra Lippo, Browning expresses, once again, Bakhtin's belief that "the problem of the soul, from a methodological standpoint, is a problem of aesthetics" (*A&A* 100). The monk's insight speaks to the creative, aesthetic and rather paradoxical event that Bakhtin would claim, and Browning illustrates, is at the heart of every truly great work of art. In art, as in life, the struggle to consummate, to finalize, and to respond to the other is what enables us to keep both our spirit and our soul alive. As Bakhtin suggests, "After looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, we always return -- in life -- into ourselves again, and the final, or as it were, recapitulative event takes place within ourselves in the categories of our own life" (*A&A* 17). The task that confronts us all, when we respond to any work of art, to any utterance, is the ongoing task of self-creation -- a self-creation that must be built upon our own creative understanding.

It is a "fearful" task, and one which Browning wants his reader to experience through the discomfort and turbulence that is Lippo's life. In asking us to applaud the artist/monk for "laying-bare . . . conventionality," and for exposing "all that is vulgar and falsely stereotyped in human relationships" (*DI* 162), Browning is not asking us to applaud all that is vulgar or hypocritical about the monk. He is asking us, as he asks us in all his

¹⁹ Bakhtin also states that the "soul is the spirit-that-has-not-actualized-itself as it is reflected in the loving consciousness of another (another human being, God); it is that which I myself can do nothing with, that in which I am passive or receptive (from within itself, the soul can only be ashamed of itself; from without, it can be beautiful and naive)" (*A&A* 111).

dramatic monologues, to applaud his "contrived representation of the contrivance in human reality" (Slinn 3).

Like most of Browning's heroes, Lippo is far too self-centred, and far too interested in controlling his life and his surroundings, to understand the impact his monologue has on others. Within his enclosed world, he can never fully comprehend that it is not himself, but Browning, and Browning's future readers, who will always have the last laugh. Still, we cannot ignore the fact that Browning has created, in Fra Lippo, a personality who is engaged in a "dialogic means of seeking the truth" (*PofDP* 110), who is aware that a truth that is monologic or "ready made" is not a truth which is worth seeking.

Bakhtin argues that "Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (*PofDP* 110). He insists that the "dialogic sense of truth manifests unfinalizability by existing on the 'threshold' (*porog*) of several interacting consciousness, a 'plurality' of 'unmerged voices'" (*CofP* 236). He further insists that that which "takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*" (*PofDP* 287) is what provides us with a sense of self. What makes Fra Lippo different from the Duke or Andrea is his penchant for living his life on the "threshold," with a vision of the future in mind. As he heads off into the "grey beginning" (392), he may or may not have come to a more enlightened sense of self, a more enlightened view of self-consciousness. His position is still somewhat precarious. But so too is ours. If anything, this is what Browning's work demands that we celebrate. As a poet and an artist he is able to capture the "tension-filled encounter"²⁰ that lies at the heart of all

²⁰ In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin points out that "everything internal gravitates not toward itself but is turned to the outside and dialogized, every

communication, of all utterances. Just as he responds to the work, the utterances of others, he expects his work, his utterance, to be responded to in return. But it is also clear that Browning expects our understanding and/or misunderstanding of the text to supplement his own -- that he relies on this factor to keep his work alive, in the realm of what is yet-to-be. Without question, he would share one of Bakhtin's last thoughts: "that the multiplicity of a text is revealed through understanding, and supplemented by consciousness. Understanding supplements the text: it is active and also creative by nature. Creative understanding continues creativity, and multiplies the artistic wealth of humanity."²¹

internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another, and in this tensioned-filled encounter lies its entire essence" (*PofDP* 287).

²¹ This quote is partially a paraphrase and partially a direct quote of one of Bakhtin's more fragmented notes written in 1970 (*SG* 142).

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