

Reconsidering Robert Browning, Mikhail Bakhtin,
and Dramatic Monologues

Hearing Voices:
Reconsidering Robert Browning, Mikhail Bakhtin,
and Dramatic Monologues

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ABSTRACT

The thesis re-examines the dramatic monologues and criticism of Robert Browning. Browning's innovations to form have been the topic of several studies, beginning with William C. DeVane A Browning Handbook (1932) that provided a way of reading this new form. Later, Robert Langbaum's The Poetry of Experience (1957) and Park Honan's Browning's Characters (1961) further explored the insights provided by DeVane. The readings of the dramatic monologue that they developed studied the significance of the division between poet and speakers in Browning's poems. Langbaum and Honan, as well as Roma King, David Shaw and others, argued that the division defines the form by allowing Browning to state poetic meaning through another's voice, freeing him to speak "truth" without fear of criticism. In reconsidering definitions of poetic form, I intend to demonstrate an alternative model to Langbaum's and Honan's, in order both to study the shortcomings and contributions of their reading models, as well as to re-define how we approach Browning's poetry.

Building upon ideas first suggested by Robert Garratt in "Browning's Dramatic Monologues: The Strategy of

the Double Mask" (1974), and Loy Martin's Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post Romantic Subject (1985), I will demonstrate a reading of the dramatic monologue that studies the poetic voices in monologues. In particular, Garratt and Martin identify the voices of, at least, poetic speakers and internal auditors. Studying voices shifts the focus of interpretation away from simply appropriating poetic meaning from the speaker, to considering how the speaker's intentional (and unintentional) alterations of speech affect his statements of "meaning."

The theory that informs my thesis about the dramatic monologue is proposed in Mikhail Bakhtin's Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1929) and "The Discourse in the Novel" (1934). According to Bakhtin, narrators, primarily in Dostoevsky novels, use multiple voices to narrate themselves and their world. Bakhtin's theories argue that the multi-voiced narration undermines the narrator's attempt to present poetic meaning monologically. A single speaker's own "dialogical" utterances become a foundation for textual discourse in which meaning exists, but may never be completely known. To demonstrate Bakhtin's model of reading and how dialogism affects interpreting poetry, I will be studying Browning's "Fra Lippo Lippi" (1855), "An Epistle... of Karshish" (1855), and "Cleon" (1855).

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INTRODUCTION

Almost from the first appearance of criticism of his poetry, Robert Browning's name has been synonymous with the origins and development of the dramatic monologue. Although credit for this formal innovation may actually belong to Chaucer, Shakespeare, or Browning's contemporary, Alfred Lord Tennyson, few can dispute Browning's contribution to the development of this new poetic form. Just as Browning is partly responsible for developing the dramatic monologue, the dramatic monologues he wrote from 1842 until his death in 1889 are generally viewed as playing a large part in the successful development of his poetic career. After experiencing only minimal success as a playwright and lyrical poet, Browning began to write poems that are now commonly called "dramatic monologues." Although not all Victorian readers were sure of how to read this new kind of poem, Browning's audience grew during his transition from writing lyric and narrative poems like Pauline (1834) and Sordello, (1840) to soliloquies like "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1842), and eventually to dramatic monologues. With few exceptions, Browning continued to

write dramatic monologues throughout the duration of his career.

Despite Browning's apparent satisfaction with the dramatic monologue form, some of his contemporaries towards the middle and end of the Victorian period expressed their confusion in attempting to understand the poet and his speakers. Though unable to locate precise failures in Browning's poetics to explain their confusion, some prominent Victorians, including Arthur Hugh Clough, John Ruskin and William Morris, nevertheless disparaged the poet and his style of writing. In a 14 January 1856 letter to William Allingham, Clough wrote that the collection of monologues comprising Men and Women (1855) demonstrates a "most reckless, de-composite manner" (Erickson: 133). Ruskin complained to Browning that the same collection gave him a headache, adding, "You are worse than the worst Alpine Glacier I ever crossed. Bright, deep enough surely, but so full of clefts that half the journey has to be done with ladder and hatchet" (DeLaura: 326). Even Morris, who held Browning in high regard, admitted that Browning's poetry did nothing to change the Victorian public's perception of Browning as "a careless man, writing down anyhow anything that comes into his head" (Erickson: 133). A general reaction to Browning's poetry throughout the period was that

it was too enigmatic, and that interpreting it was too exhausting.

In more recent criticism, several scholars, including Robert Langbaum, Park Honan, W. David Shaw and Thomas J. Collins, have also experienced difficulties with misreading Browning and his handling of the dramatic monologue form. In attempting to explain the dramatic monologue, these critics have often focused on concepts that do little to demonstrate how these poems function. In addition to sharing the confusion some Victorians had with recognizing differences between Browning and his dramatically conceived speakers, some (including recent) critics have had difficulty understanding the fundamental characteristics that define this poetic form. Critics like Langbaum, Collins, and Shaw continue to focus their definitions primarily on Browning's speakers, while others concentrate on drawing a distinction between the poet and the speaker of the poem. Moreover, as Isobel Armstrong notes, "the dramatic nature of Victorian poetry was understood by its earliest critics, by W.J. Fox and Arthur Hallam, but seems to have been lost to later readers" (Armstrong: 13).

With the publication of W.C. DeVane's pivotal work, A Browning Handbook (1935), the treatment of Browning in

critical studies improved from the uncomprehending response of his earliest audiences. A partial explanation for this change in Browning's fortunes is that DeVane as well as the critics who followed him establish a new position to better interpret the poetics of Browning's dramatic monologues. That is, when Men and Women was first published, the dramatic monologue had little precedent beyond Browning's earlier experimentation with the form. As Carol T. Christ argues in Victorian and Modern Poetics (1984), Victorian audiences primarily associated the poetic voice with the consciousness of the poet (Christ: 157), and could not be blamed for failing to identify with what appeared to them to be the "schizophrenic" Browning of Men and Women. By presenting the characters of his speakers rather than his own, Browning was ahead of the critical methods of his contemporaries: specifically, one could argue that in his dramatic monologues, Browning introduces a new poetic understanding of subjectivity.

A Browning Handbook is one of the first studies of Browning to comment on the distinction between Browning and the characters he created. Unlike many Victorian critics, DeVane differentiates between the poems' speakers and Browning when he states that "Most of the poems are dramatic in Browning's characteristic manner... he has here created

some of his most famous characters" (DeVane: 209. Emphasis mine). In fact, DeVane identifies only the elementary principle of the dramatic monologue in this passage; his argument provides the foundation for a shift in the focus of studying both the dramatic monologue and the relationship of the speaker in the monologue to the poet that later critics like Robert Langbaum (1957), Park Honan (1961), Roma King (1968), W. David Shaw (1968), and others were to examine further. That is, DeVane introduces the necessity for differentiating between the poet and the speaker. Robert Langbaum later attempts to establish the autonomy of the speaker from the poet; however, while acknowledging a split, Langbaum still sees the speaker's voice as being appropriated by the poet. The focus in Browning studies thus far, then, can be seen as a shift from associating the poet with the speaker (many Victorian critics), to seeing the poet as distinct from the speaker (DeVane, Langbaum, and their tradition).

Following A Browning Handbook, Robert Langbaum's The Poetry of Experience (1957) was the next major advance in the study of Browning and the dramatic monologue. As Mary Ellis Gibson notes, "Langbaum's theory of reading has had a lasting influence and provided a standard by which later critics measure their work, however different it may be"

(Ellis Gibson: 9). In The Poetry of Experience, Langbaum goes beyond DeVane's work on the dramatic monologue. Using Browning's presentation of the poetic subject in Men and Women as his exemplum, Langbaum attempts to define the dramatic monologue in order to distinguish it from lyric poetry. He concludes that a dramatic monologue "originates when the Victorian poet writes a Romantic lyric of experience in the voice of a character separate from his own" (Langbaum: 157). Park Honan later echoes and develops Langbaum's claim when he argues that dramatic monologues are those poems which cause the reader to suspend his/her awareness of the writer's own presence and to imagine that someone else is speaking for the writer (Honan: 104-5). Honan complicates Langbaum's analysis by including the participation of the reader in the creation of the poem. Thus, a new definition of a relationship among speaker, poet, and reader emerges from Langbaum's and Honan's studies, and this relationship characterizes a new discursive object that they call the dramatic monologue. In essence, Langbaum and Honan argue that whenever a poem has a speaker who is identified as being a figure other than the poet, the poem conforms to a taxonomical category called "dramatic monologue."

Although critics like Langbaum and Honan have

revitalized the study of Browning's poetry by their understanding of the dramatic monologue, the credit that they deserve is not unequivocal. Browning studies have undeniably benefitted from efforts to define and characterize the dramatic monologue. Even the rudimentary concept of the dramatic monologue -- that the speaker and the poet are not necessarily the same figure -- is an idea that some Victorian readers had difficulty identifying. The work of Langbaum, Honan, and others rescues Browning from the uncharitable opinion of those Victorians who dismissed the poet because of the particular interests of their own interpretive strategies. However, while critics like Langbaum and his successors are credited with providing a new way to read what we now identify as dramatic monologues, they are also responsible for methods which now seem to limit interpretive strategies for reading Browning's dramatic monologues.

One could argue that a dissatisfaction with Langbaum's readings is, in part, responsible for the emergence of a shift in interpretive practices in contemporary scholars' readings of the dramatic monologue. Developing in reaction to the above critics' interest in establishing a category called "dramatic monologue" (which allows the critic to dismiss readings that do not observe

this categorizing of poetic forms), this new shift attempts to maximize interpretive possibilities. It recognizes, as Carol T. Christ argues, that, "no system of norms, standards, or conventions is merely given to us, that a complex of this kind proceeds from the questions we choose to direct to single works" (Christ: 157). In studying Browning's dramatic monologues, criticism comprising this shift employs earlier readings in order to rework both the understanding of Browning's poems and the critical approach that performs the exegetical work. These readings re-examine the critical assumptions of their predecessors by attempting to include, with questions about the critical methods of Langbaum's tradition, their own emergent presuppositions in order to establish a new understanding of Browning and the dramatic monologue.

The most significant critical problem that the third shift exposes is the "new" critics' notion that their predecessors produce a reductive category of "dramatic monologue." In describing the appeal of Browning's poetry, Herbert F. Tucker argues, "One good reason why the dramatic monologue is associated with Browning's name rather than Tennyson's... is that in Browning the lyrical flight from narrative, temporality, and identity appears through a characteristic, and characterizing, resistance to its

allure" (Tucker: 24). However, in establishing conventions of inquiry for interpreting post-Romantic poems, Langbaum and Honan concentrate instead on defining the dramatic monologue's generic characteristics. In the emerging critical approach, Langbaum's argument that a poem is a dramatic monologue whenever the poet writes in a voice "separate" from his own and Honan's assertion that dramatic monologues "cause" the reader to suspend awareness of the poet's presence appear to impose limitations. From this "new" perspective, although Langbaum and Honan point to a distinction between the voices of speakers and the poet, implicit in both critics' arguments is the assertion that the poet and the speaker are the only voices that are heard. That is, because their definitions of the reading process radically situate the subject, they unnecessarily privilege the poet's role in creating a poem's meaning. Readings like Langbaum's and Honan's presume that Browning is the only active force in his poems. Their readings contend that the poet alone controls his speakers' utterances and mediates their meanings for the reader. Thus, the process of understanding remains within the somewhat limited model of a writer communicating a meaning to his/her reader or readers.

The rise of critical theory has led to models of reading which challenge those whose sole foci are on

defining the poet's relationship to the speaker. Reader-response theory, for example, problematizes the assumption that speakers are controlled by the poet (or speak for the poet, as Honan claims), by suggesting that the speaker's voice is actually created by the reader through the act of reading. The speaker, therefore, is partially defined by the reader's experience. Deconstructive readings go further than re-defining the subject by insisting that any definition which situates the speaker's voice falsely claims its unequivocacy. Both types of reading attempt to go beyond situating the subject, and both acknowledge the presence of additional voices (as well as readings) which Langbaum's and Honan's models of dramatic monologue do not necessarily recognize.

In chapter one of the thesis, I will reconsider the dramatic monologue, in order to further consider the apparent limitations of Langbaum's readings and to expand the possible readings of Browning's poems. In this chapter I will discuss a theory of dialogism presented by Mikhail Bakhtin primarily in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1929) and "Discourse in the Novel" (1934), and consider its relationship to the dramatic monologue. While we have already encountered paradigms where the poet is the speaker, and where the poet stands in opposition to the speaker,

Bakhtin's theory recognizes the possibility of several textual voices. The new shift emerging from Bakhtin's theories introduces readings of poems that correlate potential poetic meanings with *heteroglossia* -- a discourse which occurs among textual voices. Several voices are present; potentially, poems can include, at least, the conscious and/or subconscious voices of poets, speakers, auditors and readers, and perhaps others in its discourse. The complexity of Browning's monologues arises from the many voices which, at times, make it difficult to determine what is being said and by whom.

In chapter two I will draw the theory developed in the previous chapter into a discussion of the existing critical interpretations of particular Browning dramatic monologues. I will attempt to push these critics' appreciations of the monologue's poetic form further by including Bakhtin's theory of dialogism with their emergent and emerging presuppositions. Although I will be surveying poems from throughout Browning's career, this chapter will primarily involve close reading of such poems as "Fra Lippo Lippi," "An Epistle... of Karshish," and "Cleon" to demonstrate the presence of several textual voices that engage in dialogical discourses.

In chapter three I will consider how the notion of

the dramatic monologue developed in the thesis addresses previous prevalent theories of interpretation. In particular, I will attempt to demonstrate how dialogism, with its focus on language as an epistemological system, changes perceptions of poetic meaning. Focusing on how language and meaning are modified through dialogical discourses will also allow me to treat Bakhtin's theory dialogically, by including the ways in which readings of Bakhtin are complicated and can be modified by Browning's monologues. In effect, I will demonstrate how applying Bakhtinian theories to dramatic monologues allows for a re-examination of both Browning's poetry and Bakhtin's theories.

CHAPTER ONE: Reconsidering Dramatic Monologues and Bakhtin

The relationship between speakers in monologues to the poet who creates them has been a common concern in many studies of Browning's dramatic monologues. Several critics following Langbaum have argued that, beyond simply being distinguishable from the poet, speakers of dramatic monologues establish "objective" perspectives for viewing Browning. According to Roma King, speakers of monologues become a "focusing artifice" that can potentially reveal the poet's subjectivity in his poems. King chronicles Browning's career and comments on what particular poems reveal about the poet's "concerns" and "preoccupations" (King: 67), as well as what they demonstrate about "some infinite Truth that defies apprehension" (166). Thomas J. Collins adds that, because they are deliberately constructed from the poet's subjectivity, speakers can be seen as mouthpieces for Browning's thoughts (Collins: 143). These critics argue that through the relationship between speaker and poet the dramatic monologue becomes a form that allows greater insight into poetic intention than most others. Unlike Romantic lyrics, where speakers are too closely

associated with their utterances, dramatic monologues may be seen as creating distance between speakers and utterances, thus providing an objective means for viewing a poet's intention.

While several other characteristics may also be considered in attempts to differentiate dramatic monologues from lyrics and soliloquies, many studies of Browning's use of the monologue form develop from arguments like King's and Collins's, that focus on relationships among the consciousnesses of the poet and his poem's speakers. Beginning with DeVane and Langbaum, several critics study differences among the form and speakers of dramatic monologues, lyrics and soliloquies. According to M. H. Abrams, Romantic lyrics are poems which typically

present a determinate speaker in a particularized and usually localized outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. (Abrams, 1965: 527)

Lyric speakers are defined by their self-consciousness in discussing concepts associated with existential philosophy or metaphysics. Unlike dramatic struggles between conflicting ideas that confront speakers of dramatic monologues, lyric speakers often present single points of

view and are assumed to be in control of their utterances. Again according to Abrams, "The majority of lyrics consist of thoughts and feelings uttered in the first person, and the one readily available character to whom these sentiments can be referred is the poet himself" (Abrams, 1958: 85).

In ways similar to those of lyrics, speakers of soliloquies present poems from a single point of view that affords little room for ironic expression. Soliloquies are typified by speakers who literally give voice to their thoughts. In soliloquies, as in lyrics, "we are imaginatively conflated with the speaker, understanding him from the inside out, seeing with his eyes and speaking with his voice as if on our own behalf" (Rader: 37). Unlike lyrics or soliloquies, which attempt to unite readers with speakers through imagination in order to demonstrate a poet's viewpoints, dramatic monologues, according to Langbaum, reveal the poet through a reader's process of either sympathizing with or judging a speaker's stated position in poems.

To help guide interpreters of dramatic monologues, Langbaum introduces "sympathy" and "judgment" as means for involving readers in the development of poetic "meaning." According to Langbaum, "we will not have arrived at meaning until we point out what can be substantiated by an appeal to

effect" (Langbaum: 82). Explaining how readers exegetically arrive at a monologue's meaning, Langbaum claims that the form creates a dramatic tension between sympathy and judgment. As part of their acts of reading, readers mediate this tension: Langbaum argues that sympathy is a condition of reading poetry, since we rely on a speaker's narration to experience poems; however, at the same time as being forced to sympathize with speakers, readers must also be aware of the sincerity of speakers to, at some point, be wholly accurate devices for reflecting Browning's aesthetic, political, and moral thought.

In terms of Browning's career, some differences among speakers of soliloquies and dramatic monologues are evident, even in comparing such poetic speakers as those in "Porphyria's Lover" (1836), "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" (1842), and "My Last Duchess" (1842). The performances of the speakers in the first two poems can, indeed, be characterized differently from that of the Duke in "My Last Duchess." The speakers of the first two poems reveal their consciousnesses by narrating their thoughts, either of past events ("Porphyria's Lover") or present sentiments ("Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister"). Although he appears to externalize his thoughts for an auditor, the speaker of "Porphyria's Lover" is quite clearly alone,

without, as he admits, even God for his auditor. Likewise, as he thinks of ways to condemn the soul of a man he hates, the perspective the speaker of "Soliloquy" provides is an unmediated view of his own personal thoughts. Since no one is present as a listening subject for either speaker to convince, the intentions of the speakers' utterances can be presumed to be sincere. As a consequence, readers can study the speakers' utterances in order to develop their interpretations of poetic meaning.

The speaker of "My Last Duchess," on the other hand, is a dramatic monologist, in part, because he removes his thoughts from the formal conventions of soliloquy and lyric when he vocalizes his thoughts and attempts to persuade an auditor to share them. That is, the presence in the poem of a dramatized auditor complicates the sincerity of the speaker's thoughts by transforming his/her utterances into external rhetoric that can be registered as acts of speech by the auditor in the poem, and from the reader's perspective outside the poems. To formulate poetic meanings, readers interpret, alongside considerations of what poems say, how speakers consciously or unconsciously shape the expression of their thoughts in order to convince their auditors. Although Langbaum's model of the dramatic monologue -- that speakers are distinct from poets -- is

partly valid, it ignores how auditors alter reading experiences: auditors provide internal examples of judging speakers that may assist readers in making their own judgments. Definitions of form must recognize if and how the presence of auditors affects the sincerity of a speaker's rhetoric, in order to distinguish whether a poem is a monologue, soliloquy, or lyric.

In attempting to justify studies which centre definitions of the monologue mainly on a division between speakers and poets, several critics (including Langbaum, King, and Collins) commonly point to a particular episode that they argue explains Browning's rejection of the lyric form and decision exclusively to write monologues. Describing the Victorians' general response to Browning's early work, Pauline, Susie Campbell writes that,

the general tenor of [John Stuart] Mill's comments, in addition to the denigrating remarks published in Fraser's Magazine, The Literary Gazette, and Tate's Edinburgh Magazine, were of sufficient force and abusiveness to make Browning somewhat hesitant to publish another such confusing, self-revealing work.
(Campbell: 17)

The failure of Pauline, or so many have argued, provided an impetus for Browning to seek out a new medium of poetic expression. Arguing that Browning was devastated by his early failures at writing Romantic poetry, critics like Langbaum and others explain Browning's creation of personae

as corresponding to a desire to disassociate himself from his own utterances. They maintain that in adapting the lives of sometimes real, historical figures as speakers of his dramatic monologues, Browning attempts to remove a personal element from his poetry and that by having words come from someone else, Browning succeeds in speaking his conscience without having to take responsibility for the subjectivity of his consciousness.

Like definitions of the dramatic monologue that are being re-examined, such explanations for why Browning writes dramatic monologues are equally complicated. The common argument, that personae free Browning to speak his conscience without fear of external repercussions, does not sufficiently explain the differences between speakers' and poet's viewpoints as they often appear at various points in poems. Few would argue that the speakers of "Soliloquy," "Porphyria's Lover," or "My Last Duchess" literally speak for Browning. For those who have suggested that Browning's previous failure as a poet provides a reason for his creation of the form, such psychoanalytical rationales -- attempting to argue that Browning speaks in an assumed voice because of his earlier failures -- are challenged by problems of reductiveness. Similarly, models of reading that are founded on such premises are also susceptible to

problems of false consciousness by asking readers to conflate models of dramatic monologues with preconceived meanings of the poems. In both instances, the result is a severely limited and arbitrarily skewed version of what constitutes the dramatic monologue.

Despite the appeal they have for critics like Langbaum and Honan who use them to found their models of the dramatic monologue, such explanations potentially limit ways to read dramatic monologues and are, therefore, inherently reductive. Proponents of Langbaum's model of interpretation cite evidence intended to explain a relationship between poet and speaker that Browning creates in developing dramatic personae. Despite their examples, these critics ultimately rely on little more than conjecture to assert that Browning needed to create the monologue form in order to speak his conscience. If negative reviews alone were the impetus for the creation of a new poetic genre, the dramatic monologue would have appeared much sooner in literary history than it did. The form likely has other characteristics which Browning found appealing.

Browning's own comments are of little help in resolving this particular matter. Although his decision after Pauline to adopt a new poetic medium was often criticized in Victorian periodicals, Browning never publicly

explained why he chose to begin writing what, in advertisements for almost every publication of poetry after 1842, he repeatedly called poems, "though often lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine" (1895: 163). With almost every publication, Browning did not escape reviewers' and critics' claims that he was continuing to be deliberately obscure, and they often called upon Browning to explain himself. Despite his public silence, Browning may have stated his reasons for changing forms, and what he hoped it would accomplish, in his prose work, "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley" (1852). The "Essay," appearing in response to some letters that were believed to have been Shelley's, is Browning's account of his own poetic theories.

The "Essay," demonstrates that rather than developing monologues to avoid criticism, Browning may have been seeking a new poetic form as a way to become a "whole poet." According to the "Essay," Browning saw an opportunity to unite the subjective aspects of Shelley, whom he admired, with a more objective style of poetry. He argues that poets see external reality more clearly, widely, and deeply than most others, but that subjective poets like Shelley have a fuller perception of nature and humanity.

Browning wanted to develop into a "whole poet," one who combines the qualities of "objective" poets, "whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external... with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men" (137), with those of subjective poets who are "impelled to embody," says Browning, "the supreme Intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth" (138). Like critics who later followed him, Browning also believed that speakers established objectivity in poems. For Browning, "In our approach to the poetry, we necessarily approach the poet; in apprehending it we apprehend him" (140). Thus, rather than causing his change of form, the critical response towards Browning's poetry may simply demonstrate that many of his contemporaries did not understand what he was doing. In fact, to some degree, as we shall later see, neither did Browning.

Whatever Browning's motivation for creating personae may have been, some interpretations of dramatic monologues continue to link definitions of form to the poet/speaker division, despite the fact that such poems as "Porphyria's Lover" and "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister" also have dramatically conceived speakers. As George T. Wright argues, an important aspect of Browning's speakers that

these definitions have also potentially overlooked is that, particularly in monologues:

The problem of personae is closely related to the problem of the nature of human personality. In one sense, surely, people are what they appear; in one sense, too, the poet is what he seems to be in his poems. In both instances the person *is* what he *does*; his actions define him. But as soon as we begin to interpret those actions, we begin to lose our objectivity in observing him. (Wright: 1)

In addition to demonstrating how "objectivity" may be an illusion that dissipates whenever interpretation begins, Wright makes two main assertions that are relevant to studies of dramatic monologues: he reminds us that how readers interpret speakers can be similar to how people interpret each other, and he stresses that speakers -- whether the poet or others -- are not only defined by what they say but also by their actions.

By studying and treating speakers as personalities rather than as fictional objects, they become more real and have a greater significance for readers. Though arguing that the speaker's voice is distinct from the poet's, Langbaum's, Honan's, and Collins's models of the monologue nevertheless often treat speakers as though they are mouthpieces for the poet's intentions. Models claiming that speakers' voices are distinct from the poet's -- without giving them full autonomy -- limit the possibilities of

criticism to interpretations which attempt to recapture what poets are trying to say through personae. For example, in his reading of "My Last Duchess," Langbaum argues that although the duke is an abominable creature, his appeal as a crafty and eloquent speaker elicits our sympathy. In praising the grotesque speaker, Langbaum minimizes (if not completely ignores) the duke's immorality by claiming that for Browning, "moral judgment does not figure importantly in our response to the duke, that we even identify ourselves with him" (Langbaum: 82). Langbaum's reading deliberately glosses over the significance of the duke's immorality. He objectifies the duke in order to prove his thesis that "What interests us more than the duke's wickedness is his immense attractiveness" (83), and he suppresses or ignores any indeterminacy that may detract from his reading. Rather than being the means to an objective telos intended to reveal the poet's subjectivity, speakers/personalities ought to be treated as ends in themselves and studied for their own subjectivities.

Attempting to defend his model, Langbaum looks to empiricism to provide foundations for poetic meaning. Discussing the dramatic monologue in The Poetry of Experience, Langbaum writes that, "We are dealing with, in other words, empiricism in literature. The pursuit of all

experience corresponds to the pursuit of all knowledge; while the sympathy that is a condition of the dramatic monologue corresponds to the scientific attitude of the mind" (96). Langbaum's argument depends upon a belief in the existence of a universal human experience or telos that can be discovered empirically and which may guide readers' sympathies or judgments through textual indeterminacies. Unfortunately, such universal, empirically understood human experiences and goals are often difficult to define. The empirical grounds that Langbaum identifies in order to establish his model of the dramatic monologue cannot accomplish the effect he desires, since, as many have argued, meaning is often individually determined. For example, Victor Frankl argues that individuals intuitively fill in narrative gaps in order to establish meaning.¹ As a general body of criticism, "deconstruction" gives textual indeterminacies primacy over attempts -- empirical or phenomenological -- to reveal telos, by arguing that there are no boundaries, not even minimal ones like Frankl's, to assist interpretive attempts to determine meaning.

In addition to problems posed by his attempt to found dramatic monologues on empiricism, Langbaum's distinctions between poets and speakers can also be seen as problematic. Studying the division of poets from speakers

provides only limited information that is primarily centred on determining the intention of the poet. In formulating poetic meaning, models like Langbaum's perceive speakers' words as monological utterances intended to guide readers towards "truth." But, as Herbert F. Tucker argues, the "Dramatic monologue in the Browning tradition is, in a word, anything but monological. It represents modern character as a quotient, a ratio of history and desire, a function of the division of the modern mind against itself" (Tucker: 25). An alternative for collecting further information to (re)formulate meaning must be sought.

Although Langbaum's readings may be partially redeemed, since they do identify many of the poetic elements that contribute to the development of meaning, his model links the formulation of poetic meaning to a discourse in which poets relate telos to readers through speakers' monological utterances. However, as Tucker argues, "In beginning our approach to a poem we must make some sort of tentative decision about who the speaker is, what his situation is, and *who he seems to be addressing*" (Tucker: 31. Emphasis is mine). Auditors -- particularly speakers' reactions to them -- must be included among the factors that define dramatic monologues. While most of the interplay that occurs in reading poetry occurs between speakers and

poets, Langbaum incorrectly assumes that these are the only voices existing in poems. Browning's dramatic monologues are interesting because of the presence of several voices that can be distinguished and studied in his poems. At various points these voices can -- but need not -- be in agreement with each other.

Though critics like Langbaum, Honan, King, and Collins include poetic auditors among the characteristics that define its form, none have explained the significance auditors have to the development of monologues. Several models of reading, from DeVane to the present, are centred so closely on studying the nature of speakers that auditors are often treated merely as passive listeners. Studying speakers more closely, however, it is possible to demonstrate that their function in monologues has greater significance (and signification) to the definition of poetic form; in spite of their silence, auditors have a "say" in creating dramatic monologues. Their "voices" become audible when speakers go beyond merely speaking to attempting to convince auditors.

Recalling Wright's statement about the human-like quality of personae, it appears that many of the critics fixed on studying relationships between poets and speakers often underestimate what dramatic monologues are capable of

saying about human personality. A new model for studying dramatic monologues must be developed, one that offers a method for reading how this poetic form relates information about personality. Several more recent critics, including Robert Garratt (1974), E. Warwick Slinn (1982), Loy Martin (1985), Mary Ellis Gibson (1992), Isobel Armstrong (1993), and Cheryl Walsh (1993) have developed models of dramatic monologues which study additional formal characteristics that go beyond the poet/speaker relationship. Included among these are textual voices of others represented by the speaker, particularly internal auditors. According to these models, "meanings" of monologues will often differ from reader to reader depending upon what information and which voices are recognized. That said, a poem's meaning can also be modified as a single reader learns more about particular textual voices embodied in dramatic monologues.

One of the first to study and theorize about the existence of multiple textual voices embodied in the same work was Russian theorist, Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Both Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics (1929) and "Discourse in the Novel" (1934) study a shift from monologism to dialogism in literature, with a primary focus on the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. In these essays, Bakhtin argues that authorial voices become more complicated in Dostoevsky's novels than

in previous works of literature. Dostoevsky, so Bakhtin argues, is among the first to write a multi-voiced narrative -- a technical innovation that purposely challenges a narrator's authority to present a story by placing it in a dialogical framework that foregrounds textual indeterminacies. Rather than perceiving a speaker's utterances as a stable position on which to monologically found "meaning," dialogism treats a speaker's utterances as one among many interacting perspectives embodied in a literary work. A speaker's perspective, then, is read as part of an interplay with "other" textual voices. The voices of others rework perceptions of speakers' utterances by revealing indeterminacies and causing meaning to become unstable and constantly subject to re-evaluation, re-configuration and re-definition.

Although Bakhtin's theories of dialogism have been accepted in discussions of the novel, they are still relatively new and are only beginning to be applied in studies of poetry. This may be partly due to one of Bakhtin's main assertions about dialogism: namely, that it is only possible in the novelistic genre. According to Bakhtin, poets intentionally construct and refine their language as monological, regardless of whether it is through the poet-as-speaker or a dramatically conceived speaker. It

is important to note that some of Bakhtin's statements may simply have been a product of the time in which they were written. Although Bakhtin only began writing well after Browning's death, there is little evidence to suggest that the Russian theorist was familiar with the innovative form that Browning had a part in developing.² Similarly, despite having published his theories in Russian as early as the late 1920s, Bakhtin's lack of prominence in previous studies of the dramatic monologue -- including those of Langbaum, Honan, and King -- is partially explained by recognizing that the first translation and publication of his works in English only occurred in the 1970s.

Bakhtin shifts interpretation from models of reading that study and generate meaning to ones that problematize epistemologies of literary works. In considering the differences among critical approaches, Bakhtin argues that dialogism repudiates previous critical practices where authorial voices dominate poetic discourses by stating thoughts monologically. In monological works, speakers are either the poet's spokespersons or are held in contrast to (and thereby subsumed in) the consciousness of the poet. For Bakhtin, however, the degree to which speakers represent the poet is a problem that eludes answers. Studying speakers for evidence of the poet's consciousness is

problematic since it is difficult to determine which of the speakers' expressions of thought are also the poet's. Dialogical texts refuse to turn the speaker into an object of the poet's consciousness by presenting the speaker as someone other than the poet, who states his/her perspective in exchanges with others (including the poet).

In re-defining interpretation, Bakhtin introduces new conceptions of speakers, narratives, and textual voices that can be applied to studies of Browning's dramatic monologues. Bakhtin argues that rather than speakers being the main subjects of study, his focus is the idea, or representation, of speakers narrating their self-consciousness. In addition to the attention traditionally devoted to studying what speakers say, speakers' narrative practices and rhetorical techniques must also be studied, since their discourses about themselves often merge with their discourses about the world -- a circumstance which "greatly increases the direct signifying power of a self-utterance," as well as "strengthens [a poem's] internal resistance to all sorts of external finalization (e.g. to that of the traditional monological authorial voice)" (Bakhtin, 1984: 79). Rather than attempting to eliminate indeterminacies, dialogism accentuates pluralities of texts.

Bakhtin's theory re-defines how language is

conceived: dialogism depends on language that accommodates more than purely referential speech. Language, particularly purely referential linguistics, is complicated by *heteroglossia*. Bakhtin states that "The authentic environment of an utterance, the environment in which it lives and takes shape, is dialogized *heteroglossia*, anonymous and social as language, but simultaneously concrete, filled with specific content and accented as an individual utterance" (Bakhtin, 1981: 272). According to Bakhtin, *heteroglossia* is

a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the sociopolitical purposes of the day, even the hour. (1981: 263)

These internally stratified speech types -- or socialized "languages" -- both allow different, socially diverse speech types to operate within the same language system at the same time, as well as provide a substantive way to distinguish different speech types. These "languages" or "dialects" identify themselves from others *polyphonically*, by language in use.

Because *heteroglossia* cannot be linguistically

signified, *polyphony* demonstrates *heteroglossia* semantically -- when language performs as acts of speech. As Bakhtin explains:

authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized) (1981: 263).

Although only demonstrated in acts of speech -- for example, when speakers employ such rhetorical strategies as changing tones or quoting the speech of others -- *heteroglossia* nevertheless demonstrates that language has the capacity to be dialogical. "A dialogic approach is possible toward any signifying part of an utterance, even toward an individual word, if that word is perceived not as the impersonal word of language but as a sign of someone else's semantic position, as the representative of another person's utterance; that is, if we hear in it someone else's voice" (1984: 186).

As its etymology indicates, *polyphony* means "many speech sounds," or voices. *Polyphony*, demonstrates various heteroglots that have been configured into a single utterance by revealing the intermingling of voices and speeches of others that shape a speaker's speech. Speakers attempting to deliver monologues will have their speeches

interrupted and/or contradicted by "dialogue" with others. In trying to communicate their subjectivities, speakers deliberately choose their words; however, whether intended consciously or not, included among speakers' choices of referents are signifiers that may ironically refer to others' speech.

According to Bakhtin, *polyphony* is demonstrated in "language differentiation and the clear-cut speech characterizations of characters" (1984: 182), as well as during attempts to communicate, when we "hear each other constantly, call back and forth to each other, and are reflected in one another" (75). In Browning, the speech of the duke in "My Last Duchess" is shaped polyphonically. The Duke of Ferrara's monologue embodies several different voices, or tones, that help shape the poem. Although in the monologue he speaks as a single subject who describes the character of his "last" duchess, the duke's speech fuses together several languages, such as those of a diplomat who bargains with the envoy, a jealous husband, an aesthetic critic, as well as a proud owner of a nine-hundred-years-old name.

Read polyphonically, the duke's voice embodies a plurality of speech sounds, so that his speech elides a single discourse when he says,

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,
 The Count your master's known munificence
 Is ample warrant that no just pretence
 Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Notice Neptune, though,
 Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
 Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!
 (45-56)

In The Poetry of Experience, Langbaum comments on the duke's speech, calling it gratuitous, and outrageous indiscretion on the part of a man who is making arrangements to be married. However, the duke's language also interweaves assertions of authority that can be perceived as a subtly expressed warning to the envoy of how the duke expects the next duchess to act. The duke alludes to the last duchess's fate, his courtship concerns, as well as boasts about his aesthetic expertise in the same speech, thereby layering his object of reference and complicating simple assertions about the intentional meaning of his monologue. For example, in addition to being another art object in his collection, the statue of Neptune may also signify an emblem of the duke's possessiveness ("taming"), be an ironic, self-revealing statement about his moral stature (sea-horse), perhaps as an ironic comment on the quality of his art collection (the garishness of the piece). Or it may be, as Ryals claims,

that, "In the end the duke turns to the statue of Neptune as a way of indicating to the envoy that he has really been talking about art all along but knowing that the envoy has well understood his message" (Ryals, 1983: 150).

Another aspect of *polyphony* is demonstrated in rhetorical situations that Bakhtin calls "double-voiced discourse." Particularly evident in the speeches of speakers of dramatic monologues, double-voicing occurs whenever a speaker alters his/her rhetoric in anticipation of another's speech. Double-voiced discourse "has a two-fold direction -- it is directed both toward the referential object of speech, as in ordinary discourse, and toward *another's discourse, toward someone else's speech*" (1981: 185). That is, double-voiced discourse simultaneously expresses a speaker's thoughts in a conventionally monological sense, as well as ironically representing speech of others in the speaker's own speech. Double-voiced discourse manifests itself both when speakers anticipate auditors' voices in their monologues, as at the end of "My Last Duchess," when the duke says, "Nay, we'll go / Together down, sir" (53-4), and also when speakers speak for characters who are not present, as when the duke speaks for Fra Pandolf. Quoting Pandolf, he says:

"Her mantle laps

Over my lady's wrist too much," or "Paint
 Must never hope to reproduce the faint
 Half-flush that dies along the throat:"
 (16-9)

In both instances, the duke steps out of his own narration, either to narrate the external situation or to partially construct the subjectivities of others. The same problems of criticism experienced by readers of monologues can be seen within the speaker's interpretation of auditors in his/her monologue: the duke's reconstruction of the Fra Pandolf's speech is selective and brief. Furthermore, because of his personal motivations, the duke may lack the ability to accurately represent Fra Pandolf's intentions.

Bakhtin believes that, as interpreters, we can distinguish the rhetorical delivery of the "speech of others" from a speaker's own referential language. If we could not, stylized and/or parodical speech would be perceived as though it were ordinary speech, and these phenomena would fail to be grasped in their essence.³ Dialogism depends upon irony in order to demonstrate multiple readings that problematize monological models of reading. A noticeable shortcoming of monologically oriented readings is that they often attempt to develop poetic meaning primarily by studying the referentiality of texts without giving much consideration to textual ironies.

However, irony transforms poems dialogically, by establishing indeterminacies between, at least, ironic and literal readings of poetic utterances. As Bakhtin explains:

The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (1981: 276)

Dialogism asserts that there are no pre-eminent approaches to reading texts and that textual pluralities and indeterminacies enrich works of literature.

CHAPTER TWO: Reconsidering Dramatic Monologues and Browning

Dialogical interpretation of Browning's monologues reveals that there is still more to be said about the poems. Recognizing that criticism, no matter how sophisticated and well developed, will likely never represent the full complexities of texts being interpreted, dialogism moves away from readings that produce particular meanings, and attempts to maintain the pluralistic integrity of texts being studied. While working towards a telos articulated in their theses, monological models of reading often intentionally or unwittingly configure texts to fit pre-determined meanings. Rather than arbitrarily forcing a choice at points of textual indeterminacy, dialogism treats indeterminacy as an interpretive problem that must be accommodated as part of reading. To demonstrate dialogical readings further, I will be studying "Fra Lippo Lippi," "An Epistle Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician," and "Cleon" from Browning's 1855 collection of dramatic monologues, Men and Women.

An example of a Browning monologue that demonstrates the confusion, frustration, and excitement of a discourse

among voices is "Fra Lippo Lippi." The poem is among those from Men and Women that troubled many Victorian readers.⁴

"Fra Lippo Lippi" is richly dramatic, full of irony and, as DeVane writes, "has always been accounted one of his most characteristic and successful dramatic monologue(s)"

(DeVane: 219). A reading of the poem demonstrates the difficulties of interpreting Browning's dramatic monologues according to Langbaum's and Honan's categories alone. The several voices embodied in the poem make its meaning appear indeterminate. When all the possible voices are considered, the poem makes several statements about subjects like religion, authority, hypocrisy, and art; the richness of the poem is possible because it can argue several statements -- some of which conflict with each other -- with equanimity.

Another reason why "Fra Lippo Lippi" is an excellent choice for studying the dramatic monologue is because several of the critics interested in categorizing the poem according to a poet/speaker split refer to this poem as their exemplum. In their readings, critics like DeVane and Langbaum focus their study on the relationship between Browning and the poem's speaker, arguing that Browning uses Lippo as part of a rhetorical strategy in which the speaker elucidates Browning's personal positions on religious, social and aesthetic issues. DeVane, for one, writes,

"Certainly the artistic creed which Browning ascribes to Fra Lippo Lippi is much more his own than Lippi's" (218).

Similarly, Thomas J. Collins writes that Lippi "serves as a mouthpiece for Browning's ideas on the nature of art" (Collins: 143), a belief repeated by several other like-minded readers of the poem. In "Fra Lippo Lippi," the presence of voices other than Browning's or Lippi's problematizes readings like DeVane's and Collins's by reminding us that the speaker is a complex figure whose voice is, in some ways, autonomous from the poet's.

An examination of prevalent readings of "Fra Lippo Lippi" demonstrates that several critics have claimed that, while the speaker and the poet are not the same figure, Lippo nevertheless expresses many of Browning's sentiments. Ignoring Browning's statement that the poems were "Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine" (1895: 163), several readings suggest that his sympathetic treatment of Lippo is evidence enough to demonstrate that the opposite is true. They point to a passage in which Browning appears to be using the speaker to promote his own poetic theories, when Browning has Lippo state:

For don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see things 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. (300-6)

Several readers argue that this passage could easily have come from "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley." In a passage where he discusses "objective" art, Browning states that an artist is "one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external... with an immediate reference, in every case, to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow men" (137). It is difficult to ignore the similarity in these two statements: both claim that art defamiliarizes the symbolic meaning of objects and images, and that the poet/artist's function is to reveal meaning to others.

The apparent sincerity⁵ of Fra Lippo's rhetoric is another major reason why several critics credit Lippo with articulating Browning's thoughts. John Ower states that, "Central to Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi' is the painter's struggle to maintain his spiritual and artistic integrity in a society dominated by false values" (Ower: 135). That is, when Lippo is confronted by his superiors who question the propriety of the subjects he paints, he is defending Browning's position on art. Both the speaker and the poet similarly favour individual artistic integrity against authorities who insist on conformity. In response to the

pressure to conform to the aesthetic values of his superiors, Lippo says:

Now is this sense, I ask?
A fine way to paint a soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse....

Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? (199-208)

Lippo's comments indicate that he recognizes the impossible ascetic/aesthetic ideals of the mediaeval Church. He is troubled by the separation of body and soul, feeling that those who think otherwise are morally confused and hypocritical.

In addition to statements explaining the artist's role and criticizing institutional/social conformity, Ower argues that Lippo is echoing Browning's more general philosophy of life. Browning's desire to embrace life appears to be reflected by Lippo's statement:

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. (312-5)

Some, including Ower, have claimed that in Lippo's articulation of his philosophy of life lies his expression and Browning's opinion about the artist's role. Just as he would like to "take breath and try to add life's flash, /

And then add soul and heighten them three-fold" (213-4) in his art, Lippo's words indicate that he wants to share his awareness of the world's significance. Again, according to critics like Langbaum, Browning's ability to express his philosophy is enhanced by his use of the speaker. Thus, in giving voice to Browning's ideals, Lippo expresses those ideals in and through his revelation of character.

In her reading of "Fra Lippo Lippi," Susie Campbell focuses on the reader's voice in the poetic process by placing it prominently alongside the speaker's and the poet's. She credits readers for doing the interpretive work that establishes meaning from what Lippo says. According to Campbell, dramatic monologues "place ultimate responsibility for the creative act of poetry on the reader himself; this enables the poet to speak publicly without self-betrayal" (Campbell: 6). According to Campbell, readers differentiate themselves from poetic speakers and auditors when they hear Lippo sing "*Flower o' the pine, / You keep your mist... manners, and I'll stick to mine*" (238-9). Lippo's unwitting slip indicates his sexual nature, seemingly countering DeVane's and Collins's suggestion that he is a complete expression of Browning's consciousness. In terms of how this slip affects the poem, there is also little evidence to suggest that the poem's internal auditor is aware of Lippo's

self-conscious alteration. This utterance, apparently only heard by readers, develops a satirical meaning in the poem. Although he reveals many of the hypocrisies of the world in which he lives, Lippo, like those around him, appears to be more of a hypocrite than Langbaum's or Honan's readings permit them to see. Campbell's discussion of the dramatic monologue does nothing to deny the presence of the speaker's and the poet's voices; she merely contends that meaning is developed by including the reader's activity along with others who create the poetic discourse.

In his essay "Browning's Dramatic Monologue: The Strategy of the Double-Mask" (1973), Robert Garratt discusses the possibility of Browning's poetry representing several poetic voices. Garratt presents a reading of "Fra Lippo Lippi" that examines Fra Lippo's dialogical strategy of using masks to narrate his story. His reading examines the shifts in Lippo's tone, treatment of the auditor, as well as looking at the poetic listener's reactions to Lippo. In the process of his reading, Garratt uncovers several voices that are often neglected in discussions of Browning monologues: namely, the internal auditors to whom speakers address their speeches and who are subject to speakers' rhetorical strategies. To say that Browning primarily identifies readers with the auditor is misguided: the

reader would then be responsible for constructing Lippo's subjectivity based on what Lippo recognizes as the reactions of the auditor. Garratt's reading also makes possible a study of voices of characters who are not physically present in the poem, but whose voices Lippo appropriates -- the Prior's niece, whom he loves, and the Prior, whom he hates, for example.

Garratt's reading demonstrates how speakers, whether they are poetic or not, use masks as a rhetorical strategy. These masks are designed to conceal some aspect of the individual's personality by replacing it with a more favourable appearance (Garratt: 115). According to Garratt, in "Fra Lippo Lippi," Lippo's voice changes throughout the poem depending on what he wants to say and how he interprets the reaction of his audience. The recognition of the dialogical strategies of speakers, and how this means that every utterance has multiple meanings, problematizes what we can assume to be a trustworthy source of information. Readings like Langbaum's, therefore, become increasingly difficult after reading how, in order to speak his conscience, Browning uses the persona of a speaker who is also using personae himself. Although Garratt complicates our reading of the poem, he is perfectly reasonable in suggesting that the speaker to whom Browning gives voice is

himself employing various personae to avoid being held responsible for the severity of his thoughts. As George T. Wright has observed, "Everyone assumes certain roles, which alter slightly as he moves from one situation to another or from one group to another. Our audience largely determines the face we shall put on" (Wright: 5). To develop this critique in a more linguistic sense, it is difficult, if not impossible, to make any unequivocal claims about ideas expressed in language.

Garratt's belief that Lippi dons his own dramatic mask is demonstrated in the poem as early as when Lippo is first apprehended by the authorities. He says to the officers that "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave! / You need not clap your torches to my face. / Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk!" (1-3). Fra Lippo's mask is immediately evident. He is defensive and seeks ways to get himself released. In his first public face, Lippo acts in a friendly manner toward the unknown police official; when he recognizes that this approach is not working, Lippo adopts a new rhetorical strategy by changing the tone of his speech, most notably when he swears ('zooks'). Already Lippo's character is complicated into a profusion of strategies of performing subjectivity; he appears simultaneously indignant to the poem's auditor and cunning

to the reader. Lippo is still not secure from the law until twelve lines later, when he stumbles upon an approach guaranteed to get the officer's attention:

Then, you'll take
Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
And please to know me likewise. Who am I?
Why, one, sir, who is lodging with a friend
Three streets off -- he's a certain... how d'ye call
Master -- a... Cosimo of the Medici. (12-7)

Thus, Lippo employs a variety of images of social positions and linguistic adoption/adaption in his attempt to construct the auditors' responses.

Lippo's persona shifts demonstrate his manipulation of language and his ability to recognize when he can act familiarly or must be more formal towards his listener. Such an approach creates the potential for a variety of interpretations. The context that occasions every word that Lippo speaks is important for exercising a nexus of interpretive strategies that can work in varying ways to establish meaning in the reader's experience of the creation of the speaker. For example, once he feels safe from the police, Lippo capitalizes on the trust he establishes to retell his personal history to the officer. Lippo's story is evocative; he elicits the sympathy of his listener. He says that his only crime is his humanity. "Zooks, sir, flesh and blood, / That's all I'm made of!" (60-1). As he continues,

Lippo's mask becomes one of self-proclaimed honesty and self-criticism. Garratt states:

Fra Lippo uses masks to arrive at the most fundamental and serious problem of his life: the dishonesty of his art. Once he has gained the confidence of the officer with the truth about his relationship with 'sportive ladies', Lippo uses the listener as an excuse for the verbalization of the dichotomy between personal and social art. (122)

Even when he is self-critical, Lippo's mask potentially leads, at least on a moderate scale, to irony. Thus, it becomes difficult to maintain a distinction between a pose of confidentiality and an admission of guilt. The effects of this difficulty can be seen in attempts to ascribe or discern the difference between Lippo's admission about his philandering and his aesthetic of artistic production. Lippo is always aware of, if not wholly conscious in, his constructions: his aesthetic then can be "read" as a making of his own mask.

To follow this logic through, the shifting personae of the double mask introduce the possibility of dramatizing voices in addition to Lippo's. Lippo's changes of persona are often a direct result of his reactions to his auditor. When Lippo grows frustrated with the mediaeval church authorities' demands on his painting he exclaims "Hang the fools!" (335); after this interjection, his immediately ensuing speech is markedly different. He says:

-- That is -- you'll not mistake an idle word
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me now.
 (336-40)

Here the aesthetic "confession" and the speaker's "construction" of the auditor's subjectivity are indistinguishable. Although the auditor says nothing in the poem, his possible response is still heard in the poetic discourse. Lippo, already proving that he does not want confrontations, realizes that he may have exposed himself too much, and so he modifies his speech to relieve the auditor's discomfort as well as his own. Whenever Lippo makes similarly uncomfortable shifts in his rhetoric it is often in response to his perception of the changing sympathies of his auditor.

Garratt's reading marks the recognition of other voices, similar to the auditor's, that are included in the poem. When Lippo impersonates the Prior to illustrate the unreasonable attitudes with which he must live, he ironically gives the Prior a voice in the poetic discourse. Quoting the Prior, Lippo says:

"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."
 (297-9)

Lippo has already established that his interpretation differs from the aesthetic views of the Prior; Lippo believes that reproducing nature in art adds to the perception of significance in things that are often taken for granted. It is possible to argue that Lippo refers to the Prior in order to privilege his own position in the poem's ongoing debates about religion, authority, and art, but in doing so he also preserves the Prior's voice, thereby partially legitimating it.

In light of the evidence suggesting that several voices are at work in the poem, it becomes difficult to draw firm conclusions about the issues Lippo raises based on what he actually says. The existence of many voices complicates efforts to know what the monk's speech ultimately means and challenges his authority as a reliable narrator. As we are listening for as many voices as possible -- while studying what has been said -- Lippo emerges as a character who both has many revealing insights about the oppressiveness of religion in his society, and who is satirized by his own speech. In a poem that includes a discourse on religious hypocrisy (of which Lippo claims to be a victim), Lippo's words reveal that he too is guilty of several unmonastic indiscretions. Monological readings, asserting that Lippo speaks for Browning, have little to say about the fact that

Lippo has been apprehended after a night of drinking and carousing with "sportive ladies," or other statements that call Lippo's integrity into question. For example, when he says, "Take the prettiest face, / The Prior's niece..." (209-10), Lippo's speech betrays what he later reveals is his illicit affair with the Prior's niece. Despite the relevance of his social criticism, Lippo's behaviour problematizes Langbaum's, Honan's, and others' suggestion that the speaker represents Browning's moral ideals.⁶

A further example of the same problem is that after his lengthy polemic, rhetorically devoted to criticizing the institutional imprisonment of monastic life, Lippo returns to the monastery at the end of the poem. In acclaiming this poem as representative of Browning's values, critics like DeVane and Collins have argued that Browning makes Lippo the ideal, "whole poet" discussed in "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley." While Lippo's defense of artistic integrity certainly makes this contention compelling, the difficulty with this argument is that it only listens to and privileges Lippo's voice. Lippo's return to the monastery signals that his words are merely that; given the opportunity to flee the monastery and be free to paint under the same circumstances that have been wasted on figures like Andrea del Sarto, for example, Lippo chooses to return to his monastic cloister.

Interpreted dialogically, it is possible to read Lippo's return to the monastery as being a stronger signal of what he ultimately believes than do his words.

A variation of self-dramatizing narratives like "Fra Lippo Lippi" is presented in the form of epistolary monologues like "An Epistle... of Karshish" and "Cleon." Although, like other Browning monologues, the speakers' representations of themselves in these poems are dialogically modified by textual voices, the epistolary form changes the possible ways in which speakers are able to construct their own subjectivities from what is experienced in monologues like "Fra Lippo Lippi." Because these monologues are delivered as letters rather than spoken utterances, there is less room for the spontaneous interaction among characters than in situations where auditors are physically present to listen and respond to the speakers' narrations of their subjectivities. Nevertheless, the auditors of "Epistle" and "Cleon" are specifically identified subjects to whom the speakers direct their utterances. Furthermore, like other Browning dramatic monologues, the speakers in both poems also partially construct voices that, in turn, dialogically interact with, and reshape, the speaker's monologue.

Similar to Langbaum's reading of "Fra Lippo Lippi,"

Ian Jack's interpretation of "An Epistle" argues that it is possible to determine meaning by studying the speaker's statements; that is, Jack views the character of Karshish as a vehicle for Browning to develop poetic meaning. In "An Epistle," according to Jack, "Browning is concerned to render living and vivid a part of the Bible story... rather than to present a particular character" (Jack: 155). The poem is wholly ironic in Jack's reading, since the figure Browning chooses to have re-tell and contemplate the story of Lazarus is a non-Christian scientist. However, he also gives Karshish credit; commenting on Karshish's report to Abib, Jack concludes that the speaker "has a speculative and wide-ranging intellect, and is particularly interested in the relations between the flesh and the soul" (234), as well as that he, "is a highly intelligent man with a passion for medical observation" (235). There is little differentiation between the image that Karshish intends to convey of himself to his mentor and the impression Jack forms of the speaker.

To substantiate his reading, Jack reflects on the information Karshish reports back to Abib. After stretching a salutation to Abib over twenty lines, a display of courtesy and respect that even Jack admits is "garrulous" (235), Karshish diligently informs Abib of his experiences since his last letter. Using more economical rhetoric,

Karshish reports the latest news -- including his most recent medical findings, rumours of invasion, his latest scare, his having been robbed twice, and other miscellaneous information -- until he finally begins to broach the story that likely occasioned the letter: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Still unsure of where or how to begin, Karshish continues to avoid telling the story by claiming that he is reluctant to trust the messenger. Finally, he writes:

Suppose I write what harms not, though he steal?
 I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
 What set me off a-writing first of all.
 An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang!
 For, be it this town's barrenness -- or else
 The Man had something in the look of him --
 His case has struck me far more than it is worth.
 (64-70)

Karshish simultaneously demonstrates both his desire and reluctance to re-tell Lazarus's story. Attempting to relieve his conflict, Karshish transfers his apprehensions about telling Abib the scientifically untenable story onto questions about his messenger's merit. Although Jack argues that Karshish is "burning" to share the experience with Abib, Karshish's deferral of tensions, deliberate stalling, and admitted "half-resolve" to speak about the extraordinary experience indicate that Jack is only partly right.

In writing the letter to Abib, Karshish attempts to

represent himself in a manner which he thinks his scientific mentor will approve. After initially demonstrating indecision about whether to even share the story, Karshish eventually composes himself (both literally and figuratively) to describe to Abib Lazarus's rising from the dead. He writes that,

Tis but a case of mania -- subinduced
 By epilepsy, at the turning point
 Of trance prolonged unduly some three days
 When, by the exhibition of some drug
 Or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art
 Unknown to me and which 'twere well to know,
 The evil thing out-breaking all at once
 Left the man whole and sound of body indeed. (79-86)

With little indication of his earlier reservations, he claims with confidence that the cause of Lazarus's condition was mental, a manifestation of some other physical ailment. Stating the case in his physician's voice, Karshish views Lazarus's claim in empirical terms like "mania," "epilepsy," and "trance." Admitting that he does not yet know the course of treatment that cured Lazarus, Karshish proceeds to study the case scientifically, looking for answers in reviewing causes and effects.

The images of scientist and student that Karshish tries to project for Abib (and upon which Jack bases his reading), are problematized by statements Karshish makes when trying to present the details of Lazarus's story in the

monological language of scientific inquiry. As he tries to offer further analysis in support of his hypothesis, Karshish unintentionally undermines the certainty of his early diagnosis by struggling and ultimately failing to explain what revived Lazarus. Having interviewed Lazarus in order to test his scientific explanation, Karshish is forced to repudiate his assertion that epilepsy caused Lazarus's "trance" when he sees that the man before him is "whole and sound of body" (86). Anticipating Abib's "question" about why he has not "Sought out the sage himself, the Nazarene / Who wrought this cure, inquiring at the source, / Conferring with the frankness it befits?" (244-6), Karshish explains that Christ died long ago. Confronted by a spiritual experience that defies scientific explanation, Karshish's subjective "scientific" identity, only partially constructed in the letter, begins to erode when he contemplates the "facts" of Lazarus's case. As he resigns himself to considering possible non-physical phenomena that explain the case, Karshish's voice of reason and science is muted.

As he begins entertaining alternative explanations of the incident, Karshish's voice -- so completely associated with the language of science -- begins to be contradicted. Karshish is challenged by an experience that seems to be at odds with a lifetime of beliefs about God and

the nature of death. Without any empirical experiences to help resolve this problem, his speech begins to sound like the words of someone who suffers from a crisis of faith. As Cheryl Walsh states in her article, "The Voices in Karshish: A Bakhtinian Reading of Robert Browning's 'Epistle'" (1993):

Karshish's inability to 'set in order [his] experiences' (l. 53) so that they conform to the expectations of science leads to the splintering of the monological framework in which the physician is accustomed to perceiving his cases. What results is a dialogue of separate but interacting points of view, a splitting of voice, so to speak. (217).

Because the physician's voice is inadequate for expressing the spiritual causes of physical effects, another voice emerges that responds to the physician's predicament. When he views the case of Lazarus in light of his existing methods, Karshish is unable to provide answers. His unyielding interest in discovering the cause that explains Lazarus's experience, forces Karshish to move beyond the empirical and scientific teachings of Abib, and to consider spiritual explanations; consequently, Karshish splits his voice. Rather than being analytical and reasoning, his "other" voice is speculative and metaphorical; in reconsidering the logical incongruities of Lazarus's experience in the language of his "new" subjective position, Karshish begins speaking about the condition of Lazarus's soul, rather than focusing solely on physical data.

The two voices of Karshish create a poetic debate in which they subtly contradict each other: as a physician (and student of Abib), Karshish diagnoses Lazarus as having been in a trance, rather than dead; in a speculative voice, he conjectures that "The just-returned and new-established soul / Hath gotten now so thoroughly by heart / That henceforth she will read or these or none" (94-6). In considering possible alternatives to Lazarus's claim of resurrection, Karshish portrays Lazarus's description of the event as a delusion of will. Prefiguring psychoanalysis, Karshish offers an explanation that is a compromise between his scientific values and the unthinkable claim of Lazarus: he suggests that Lazarus has convinced himself that the unlikely story of his being raised from the dead is the truth. To make this claim, however, Karshish dismisses his earlier scientific assertion that Lazarus was in a trance and ignores another occasion where he said, "the humbler for that pride, / Professedly the faultier that he knows / God's secret, while he holds the thread of life" (199-201) in assessing the legitimacy of Lazarus's voice. For Lazarus's "new established" soul to return to his body, it must have left him at some point, otherwise Karshish's theory makes the implausible assertion that Lazarus did not die, but that his soul did leave his body.

Aware of some of the contradictions created between his conflicting voices, Karshish tries to resolve the tension by reconsidering his theories about the nature of facts and interpretation. He defends his new found perspective when he anticipates Abib's potential objections to spiritual conjecture. Engaging Abib in the monologue, Karshish accuses his mentor of having philosophical blind spots. He writes:

Thou and the child have each a veil alike
 Thrown o'er your heads, from under which ye both
 Stretch your blind hands and trifle with a match
 Over a mine of Greek fire. (175-8)

Although he blames Abib for failing to warn him about the shortcomings of science, Karshish (as Abib's student) implicates himself in the accusation: like all scientists, he and Abib do not study such mysteries as the nature of life and death because they cannot be scientifically solved. That Karshish now recognizes this blind spot only became possible when he unwittingly discovered it during his inquiry into Lazarus's story.

In ways similar to the auditor of "Fra Lippo Lippi," Abib's voice can be heard in the poetic discourse. According to Walsh, "The 'voice' of Abib interposes when Karshish is faced with a professional judgment, a moment when he needs to provide an interpretation of data" (Walsh:

221). Although the two subjects would likely share similar views of Lazarus's case at the outset of the monologue, Abib's voice becomes distinct when the disruptive voice of Lazarus intrudes upon Karshish's consciousness. When considering how to respond to Lazarus's "firm conviction... / That he was dead and then restored to life" (97-9), Karshish imagines Abib stating that "'Such cases are diurnal'" (102), forcing Karshish to defend his interest in Lazarus and to explain why this is not an ordinary case. A similar example of Karshish's double-voiced representation of Abib's voice occurs when the speaker recounts physically examining Lazarus. Speaking as Abib, Karshish says:

I probed the sore as thy disciple should:
 "How beast," said I, "this stolid carelessness
 Suffice thee, when Rome is on her march
 To stamp out like a little spark thy town,
 Thy tribe, thy crazy tale and thee at once." (220-4)

Walsh describes some of the subtle differences that distinguish Karshish's voice from Abib's. She notes that "Abib's" tone is more condescending than Karshish's and that, "[Karshish] may call Lazarus a madman, but he still respects his humanity; he never refers to him as a 'beast'" (Walsh: 221). What the differences among voices demonstrate is that, although he respects Abib as a professional, Karshish has been changed enough by the experience of meeting Lazarus that he can no longer agree totally with his

mentor.

Although his interaction with Lazarus has changed him, Karshish is reluctant to listen to statements and explanations offered by Lazarus. To Karshish, Lazarus's voice poses an unwelcome intrusion. In stating revelations about life and death that unsettle Karshish's beliefs, Lazarus undermines the speaker's hope to be like Abib. Lazarus's voice proclaims religious "truths" that are at variance with Karshish's philosophies. Karshish's voice, marked by intonations of Lazarus, states:

This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As -- God forgive me! Who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world,
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
-- 'Sayeth that such an one was born and lived,
Taught, healed the sick, broke bread at his own
house. (267-82)

Despite not having reaffirmed his scientific faith, Karshish nevertheless has trouble repeating what he perceives are blasphemies. Although he has not resolved the conflict that threatens his speech with contradictions, he reaches a point where he feels secure in proclaiming that Lazarus is a madman. Unlike the tone of some of his earlier references to Lazarus as a madman, where Karshish's voice appears to be projecting the madness and anxiety Karshish himself feels about his own conflicted subjectivity, the tone of these later statements seems more sincere. Thus, convinced that

Lazarus is insane, Karshish dismisses Lazarus's speech -- including his accounts of Christ -- as the unreliable ramblings of a madman.

Despite Karshish's apparent readiness to forget about his experiences with Lazarus, "unduly dwelt on" (285), as well as his interest in continuing to practice and answer questions about medicine, his comments in the poem's concluding stanza -- the post-script of his letter -- fail to reach the sense of closure that he needs in order to move on. His language in the previous stanza indicates that he is ready to resume his former tasks: his speech assumes a scientific dialect, as he again begins relating observations and physical data to Abib. However, if his voice did not already appear to be contrived, Karshish states:

The very God! think, Abib; dost thou think?
 So the All-Great, were the All-Loving too --
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice
 Saying, "O heart I made, a heart beats here!
 Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
 Thou hast no power nor mayest conceive of mine,
 But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
 And thou must love me who have died for thee!"
 The madman saith He said so: it is strange.
 (304-12)

His relapse into contemplating and discussing Christian principles not only demonstrates that his attempts to ignore problematical statements will not make them disappear, but also that the subjectivity from which Karshish speaks has

been altered. It appears that the problems he experiences in trying to explain Lazarus are about to be dwarfed by the complex philosophical events that Lazarus's case prefigures. At the end of the monologue, Karshish still does not speak in his old voice and it appears that he will be occupied by asking and attempting to answer further difficult questions.

Perhaps the most complicated of the three monologues I wish to consider in this chapter, "Cleon," is both dialogical and problematizes dialogism by often seeming to make refined monological statements. It is a difficult poem that, unlike most monological works, resists, even defers, closure. As Cleon's consciousness emerges in the monologue, we find him making contradictory statements about his view of the world around him. In attempting to explain the nature of the universe and human existence to his king in the language of rational thought, Cleon unwittingly makes claims that undermine his philosophy and reveal his unsettled situation. The contradictions in his narration permit ironic readings of the poem. Although his statements of his philosophical views are dialogical, the dialogism is different from that experienced by speakers of other monologues, including "An Epistle," because he does not become aware of the contradictions in his position.

The monologue Cleon delivers is shaped not only by

the conventions of its epistolary form, but also by being a treatise in response to a specific request from the king. Cleon indicates to Protus that the monologue addresses the question that "Thou askest, if (my soul thus in men's hearts) / I must not be accounted to attain / The very crown and end of life?" (162-4). Because Cleon is an accomplished poet and philosopher whose works and name will likely endure, Protus has asked him to explain his perception of the nature and meaning of life and human happiness. The response Cleon provides in the monologue demonstrates that he is unreserved, even when analyzing the meaning of his material accomplishments to the figure-head of his materialist, hedonistic culture.

In order to establish himself as a reliable medium of "truth" for his auditor, Cleon enumerates the disciplines in which he has excelled. His list is in response to another of Protus's requests; in Cleon's account of the king's letter, he hears Protus asking him about his history as an artist, to which Cleon replies:

Thy letter's first requirement meets me here.
It is as thou hast heard: in one short life
I, Cleon, have effected all those things
Thou wonderingly dost enumerate. (43-6)

To establish the credibility of his narrative voice, Cleon goes on to list areas in which he has excelled -- art,

philosophy, music -- until he exclaims, "In brief all arts are mine" (61). Intended to affirm his position as a sage voice in Greek culture by appealing to his exceptional empirical knowledge, Cleon's presentation of his image of himself is also complicated by a tone that indicates his arrogance. The extent of his pride later becomes more apparent when he says to the king, "thou art worthy of hearing my whole mind" (181).

Both Cleon's insight and arrogance resonate through his speech and are given voice when he begins specifically to address Protus's questions about existence. Because he can be both arrogant and perceptive, it is difficult to interpret Cleon's sincerity. At one moment Cleon commends the king for seeking his counsel; at another, he strategically lets it be known that he is an advocate of the Greek hierarchical order (in which Protus is at the top). Even moments of apparently genuine praise are affected by the emergence of dialogical voices. Offering praise to Protus, Cleon expresses his "love for him whose song gives life its joy, / Thy recognition of the use of life" (21-2). The sincerity of Cleon's praise for the king can be interpreted dialogically; while paying dutiful homage to his political superior, Cleon also directs his speech to the, "Well-counselled king" (19) who seeks his insight.

Having cited empirical evidence to establish the credibility of his voice for Protus, Cleon commences his philosophical inquiry into the nature of human existence. Continuing to speak in language that compliments the king's position, as well as his own, Cleon states:

We of these latter days, with greater mind
 Than our forerunners, since more composite,
 Look not so great, beside their simple way,
 To a judge who only sees one way at one,
 One mind-point and no other at a time, --
 Compares the small part of a man of us
 With some great man of the heroic age,
 Great in his way -- not ours, nor meant for ours.
(64-71)

Having softened his auditor with compliments, Cleon asserts positivistic philosophies that, at their core, contend that his age and culture have progressively evolved beyond all others. He criticizes the inadequacies of past societies, claiming that they would be too simple and could not exist in his more "composite" age. Imagining what past thinkers might have to say about his own age, Cleon only partially constructs their voices, claiming, ironically, that because of the limitations of their thought, thinkers of the past would likely draw simple, reductive, culturally relative conclusions.

The development of Cleon's ironic voice demonstrates a problem about the nature of language when it is expressed as spoken word: eventually his irrational chauvinism mixes

with, and changes, the significance of his philosophical statements. When Cleon celebrates the many excellences and evolutionary progression that make Protus's Greek civilization superior to all other cultures, he also voices a subjective judgment. To complicate matters further, in proclaiming the philosophical superiority of his culture, Cleon employs the semantic tones ("heteroglots") of historical inquiry -- which is more tolerant of conjecture -- in a philosophical discourse. Although Cleon associates teleological meaning with evolution of culture and self -- his art improves on earlier art; wine is preferred to grapes (129-30); "one lyric lady," a slave, "refines upon the women of my youth" (135-7); the cultivated "suave plum" is better than the "savage-tasted drupe" (132) -- he offers nothing to give foundation to his claim that he has surpassed the thinkers of earlier ages. His comments about other civilizations, intended to demonstrate their relative inferiority and lack of progress, reflect back on Cleon, having an effect that is opposite to the end for which he had hoped.

When confronted by concepts and problems for which he has no language, Cleon's voice of despair becomes more substantial. The more difficult Cleon finds it is to express a problem in rational language, the more the poem

develops dialogically; that is, "The contradictions he analyses are seen to be the product of a further contradiction he cannot reach" (Armstrong: 305). Cleon's ironic voice increases, as the voice he uses to assert meaning is undermined by contradictory statements or is muted by indeterminacy. Both voices are heard in the poetic discourse when Cleon seeks answers to how "our soul, misknown, cries out to Zeus / To vindicate his purpose in our life: / Why stay we on earth unless to grow" (113-5). Aware of Protus's beliefs about their fate, Cleon gives voice to Protus in the monologue, by representing Protus's argument that:

"Thou leavest much behind, while I leave naught.
 Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
 The pictures men shall study; while my life,
 Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
 Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
 Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?"
 (169-74)

The argument "voiced" by Protus enters the poem's dialogical discourse as a thesis to which Cleon must respond. After considering Protus's opinions about all-encompassing aesthetics, Cleon responds, replying that he feels spiritual despair despite being considered among the greatest thinkers and poets of Greek society.

Having experienced growth both as an artist and philosopher of the arts, Cleon communicates to Protus that

he is unconvinced either will have any bearing on his immortality. In fact, despite his numerous accomplishments as an artist, Cleon considers that art and individual growth may have been a liability for happiness. Contemplating his aesthetic theories, Cleon questions the nature of meaning and being inherent in his works; he describes how although he has represented meanings like "action" or "youth" in his art, he has not acted, nor is he young. He feels that art has only given him increased awareness of the lack of meaning in the universe. Cleon turns to Protus to ask whether anyone cares:

If care -- where is the sign? I ask,
 And get no answer, and agree in sum,
 O king, with thy profound discouragement,
 Who seest wider but to sigh the more.
 Most progress is most failure: thou sayest well.
(268-72)

Cleon seeks a sign of salvation for existence through dialogue; however, because he hears no one reply to his voice, he feels nothing but profound discouragement. Although he attempts to create Zeus's voice through imagination, Cleon has no experience on which to base his construction of the voice.

Ironically, Protus and Cleon have had an opportunity to listen to someone who could address the spiritual void of existence that both have felt and shared. The voice of God,

delivered in the Word and spoken by Paul, speaks to humanity and provides the type of meaning for existence that Cleon and Protus seek. As part of his letter to Cleon, Protus has asked about Paul; however, Cleon dismisses Paul's message when he replies,

Thou canst not think a mere barbarian Jew,
As Paulus proves to be, one circumcised,
Hath access to a secret shut from us?
Thou wrongst our philosophy, O king
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all! (343-8)

Though his voices in the poetic discourse have already done a great deal to expose the inadequacies of his own philosophy, Cleon refuses to accept news of the Word. He collapses back to a position of cultural superiority when he dismisses the "Jew" and his followers by saying, "Their doctrine could be held by no sane man" (353). As a result of his refusal to consider a religious doctrine that elaborates a theology of meaning, he catapults himself back into the dialogical discourse among the various subjective positions that only defer meaning and closure.

In view of the different statements expressed in these dramatic monologues, the idea that Browning is in complete control of his speakers is increasingly difficult to accept, particularly when one tries to consider all the possible voices that undermine his speakers' voices. What

is most certain is that the study of dramatic monologues involves an awareness of the complex discourse in which speakers, poets and other voices embodied in poetry can be heard. Langbaum's belief that:

The dramatic monologue is a power structure, delicately balanced. On the one hand, it gives the speaker great authority by suppressing all other voices, even, nominally, the author's. But the author of a dramatic monologue is nonetheless omnipresent in it: he controls the speaker's manner and tone, and by ordering and patterning his utterance, continuously mediates between him and the reader, (Langbaum: 137)

is no longer the only credible model for studying dramatic monologues. Speakers do not have the autocratic power that Langbaum believes they do. At the very least, monologuists are accountable to their auditors: they modify their speech to interest their listeners and, in doing so, give auditors a voice. In addition to auditors, however, it is possible to hear others who affect the poetic discourse in monologues. A monologist's voice, therefore, is not univocal, cannot be privileged or isolated.

CHAPTER THREE: Reconsidering Dramatic Monologues and Theories of Interpretation

As Bakhtinian readings of Browning's dramatic monologues have demonstrated, new models of reading must be developed that do not limit studies of poetic meaning to what speakers state in their monologues. Although dialogism acknowledges that criticism, no matter how sophisticated and well developed, will likely never represent the full complexities of texts being interpreted, it perceives monological reading models as particularly limiting. Maintaining that poetic meaning can be isolated in texts -- either by privileging the speaker's voice, or by conflating the speaker's voice with the poet's -- monological readings threaten the integrity of Browning's poems by intentionally or unwittingly configuring texts to fit a meaning that has been pre-determined. The text's resistance to this procedure is particularly noticeable in studies of Browning and his monologues. Cleon, for example, expresses concern about his artistic achievements that:

I find much reason to conceive,
Intended to be viewed eventually
As a great whole, not analyzed to parts,
But each part having reference to all, --
How shall a certain part, pronounced complete,

Endure effacement by another part?
 Was the thing done? -- then, what's to do again?
 (75-81)

As Browning has shown, the development of meaning is not merely a question of listening for an authoritative voice, since *polyphonic* utterances and dialogized voices problematize meaning whenever thoughts are expressed in language.

Despite dialogism's questions which problematize theories that attempt to recover meaning, some critics still favour the reading practices of teleological models. In "Semiotics: Communication and Signification" (1981), however, Jonathan Culler challenges formalist and New Critical interpretive strategies, which he argues are dominated by practices that have been borrowed from the physical sciences. Whereas scientific inquiry presumes that the objects of investigation are presumed to have a finite, objective, stable, and ultimately knowable nature, Culler argues that semiotics have undermined the possibility of rigorously maintaining such terms as "subject," "object," and "finite closedness" -- and, by extension, the possibilities of absolute stability and knowability -- in textual studies. Culler's theories show that, although language is often treated as an objective tool for the purposes of communication, it is actually too unstable to be

objective. Language embodies an interesting, unscientific paradox: the same words that are necessary for expressing and communicating ideas are inherently flawed, and often fail speakers. Nowhere is this more evident than in Browning's monologues. The instability of language makes it difficult for words and utterances to signify a single meaning; thus, Culler studies the text's function in communication rather than attempting to identify its significance. That is, rather than treating texts as possessing finite boundaries that encompass the possible readings that explain indeterminacies, Culler appeals for work in "descriptive semiotics" where readings would elucidate the epistemological ways in which texts are produced and regulated.

The problems of closed textual readings that Culler describes can be seen in interpretations of Browning monologues by critics like Langbaum and Honan. An underlying presupposition in many of their readings is a belief in the existence of a fully determinate text, in which isolated stylistic features and formal patterns produce identifiable effects that, in turn, produce the meaning/gestalt of an organically unitary text. However, this unitary textual structure, with its organic wholeness of meaning, may perhaps be a creation of critics who write a

text with "unifying" pre-determined qualities in the process of their reading of it. For example, in the process of explaining "My Last Duchess," Langbaum has argued that we are compelled by irony to sympathize with the passionate nature of the duke. To prove his thesis, he reduces textual complexities -- including evidence that contradicts his case -- into constituent units that never equal the meaning/gestalt of Browning's poem. At one point, when he argues that the duke's language is "gratuitous," and therefore not important to the poem, Langbaum dismisses one of the speaker's main functions as means to his pre-determined telos of meaning. Readings like Langbaum's reveal that the practice of assigning meaning to formal and stylistic textual features may be untenable, simply because it is a readerly function being passed off as one inherent to the text.

Dialogism attempts to maintain the integrity of pluralistic texts by shifting the focus of interpretation away from (re)producing particular meanings. Texts, including Browning's monologues, assert that a distinction must be made between "meaning" and "significance." Critics in the field of semiotics, including theorists like Bakhtin, do not presuppose the priority and objectivity of the text that is used as a foundation for teleological readings;

instead, textual meaning is perceived as provisional and relational, a product of differences within conventionally defined, yet socially constructed, semantic fields. In "An Essay on Shelley," Browning seems to have partially understood the potential for dialogical semiotics when he writes, "The world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned" (140). As interpreters of Browning's art, we (re)formulate "meaning" every time we read his poems and discover a new voice or even a slightly different reading of the same textual voices. In this sense, "the origin of meaning... is a process of continual and continually approached deferral" (McConnell: 55), as texts are constituted by a series of conventional, and therefore potentially changing, rather than ontological recognitions on the part of the reader.

Although semiotics (including dialogical semiotics) are argued to be a condition of language, and therefore inherent to texts, there nevertheless are dangers to studying a text's system of signification rather than its "meaning." Whereas formalist and New Critical theories often subsume indeterminacies and narrative gaps that, among other things, remind us of the possibility of a universe without meaning, semiotics studies indeterminacies and gaps in order to both reveal their limits and to experiment with

the possible combinations for signifying "meaning." Rather than fabricating meaning in reaction to indeterminacy, semiological studies are fortified by their own epistemological frustrations.

Its celebration of textual indeterminacies, however, exposes another potential danger that threatens semiological studies of texts. Problematizing dialogical as well as "deconstructive" interpretations is that, while the reader's aversion to chaos can create readings that "produce" meaning, it can also motivate interpretations that recognize and study the potential for infinite textual incomprehension and incoherence. However, to make even elementary sense of a material and/or poetic cosmos, something must exist to prevent totally solipsistic reading experiences from dominating readings of the text. Textual meaning is obscured by intertextual and linguistic systems that always exist prior to the reader and inevitably exceed his/her competence. This prevents the reader from solipsistic actualization ("I know everything and I therefore know exactly what and all this text means") of the text that can result in the perception of meaning as a self-evident quality in the text. Instead, readers are always aware that the text has been read previously and that their readings can never actualize fully all of the text's communicative

potential.

While infinite semiosis is possible for a sign, it is curtailed by that sign's involvement in a text. The "sign" alone has the potential to mean almost anything; signs are limited only by the contexts which determine the semantic aspects relevant to their particular usage. As Culler explains, "total context is unmasterable, both in principle and in practice. Meaning is context bound, but context is boundless" (Pursuit, 1981: 123). "Deconstruction" argues that, as a whole, the interpretations of a text could presumably be enacted on infinite possible grounds and could thus engage in infinite semiosis. However, since the sign's interpretations are textually structured, infinite semiosis is checked by the textual voices that create the "text" that imposes parameters of response; that is, textual voices become a sign's functional context, while the voices that create texts are constructed in a convention-governed "universe of discourse" that determines the ways a sign's potential will be brought to determinacy. Readers, then, must cede their absolute interpretive freedom to see any given sign in any given context by recognizing it as a sign in combination with others, and thus, only a part of a textual discourse. Neither totally liberated by deconstruction, nor harnessed by formalism, the reader's

autonomy is relative to the text's capacity to regulate the suppression of its own infinite indeterminacy.

Texts are determinate, then, only by the inherent connections between words and the things they may represent, not because the author's or anyone else's voice guarantees any one potential meaning configuration among other, equally valid, configurations. To process textual signs, readers move to "single out hidden rules or regularities" (Eco, 1979: 26) within the text. As Bakhtin states, and as Browning's dramatic monologues demonstrate, the word enters a complex play of light and shadow and:

becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours. The way in which the word conceives of its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of socio-verbal intelligibility. And an artistic representation, an "image" of the object, may be penetrated by this dialogic play of verbal intentions that meet and are interwoven in it; such an image need not stifle these forces, but on the contrary may activate and organize them. (1981: 277)

Dialogism argues that there are boundaries to limit possible readings, but that these boundaries are moveable and inherent to language. In this manner, critics should not associate meaning with the recognition (if it is possible) of the reference stated by the author, nor should they divorce the author's voice from the poetic discourse.

Given the almost infinite recombability of

semantic fields, the construction of textual discourse(s) offers an unlimited possibility for interpretation, which dialogical semiotics argues may inevitably be found. It is the reader's drive towards coherence that allows a text to be resolved into a set of conceptual orders, and which motivates the vast elisions necessary to do so. When readers actualize parts of semantic utterances, a formation of connective paths facilitates the communication of a "meaning" in a text. The eliciting of "sense" from a text is carried out with the acknowledgment that it is only partial sense, as well as recognizing that additional readings may modify first impressions. Semiotic, as well as deconstructive interpretations both recognize this, though their treatments of it differ.

In terms of Bakhtin and Browning, dialogical semiotics demonstrates that readings invariably involve the impossible situation of deciding both/either between which textual voice to listen to and/or between a spoken word's literal and figurative meaning. Bakhtinian readings of Browning's dramatic monologues place readers in a position of considering how to deal with undecidability among possible readings. Although they force readers to, at least, partially construct the various subjectivities presented as voices in the poem, Browning's monologues still

demand that readers maintain their "objectivity." Thus, when readers are drawn to choose between calling Fra Lippo admirable for enduring oppressive hardships, or an immoral hypocrite, they may recognize that both readings can occur simultaneously. The continuity of poetic discourse keeps texts in motion without losing their integrity or plurality. A monological reading of "Fra Lippo Lippi" that supports Lippo's image of himself fails to do justice to those others -- such as the Prior -- for whom Lippo speaks. To claim that Lippo is the victim of an oppressive religion privileges his speech over those others whose voices Lippo has only partially represented in his own speech; yet, to call him a hypocrite ignores the apparent oppressiveness of a religious order that has raised him since he was eight years old. Although it is possible to state that a representation of the "truth" lies somewhere between Lippo's construction(s) and ironic deconstruction(s) of self, such a pragmatic approach is also problematized by its inability to conclude where; however, it is this lack of ability to conclude that makes interpretation interesting.

Reading Browning through critical models like DeVane's and Langbaum's, overemphasizes the poet's relationship to his poems; however, that does not mean to imply shifting to models that concentrate exclusively on the

reader's experience of the text. Browning attempts to engage readers in what he simultaneously demystifies: his monologues dramatize complex epistemological problems, such as Cleon's existential quest (and situation on the verge of solipsism), the deeply Christian aesthetic of a hedonistic Lippo, as well as the conflict of teleological meanings explored by Karshish. The monologue does not solve these speakers' problems but opens out their complexities. In reading each of these poems, one is left with a decision whether to leave indeterminacies in texts or to create problems by imposing structures of (mis)reading that solve them.

The appeal of monological readings and teleological models for reading Browning is obvious. In poems where epistemological uncertainties not only exist but also are expressed by many of the speakers, it is easy and comforting to construct binary oppositions -- such as Langbaum's sympathy versus judgment polarity -- for reading and interpreting the text. In such a universe, interpretation requires readers to formulate a thesis about what a poem says, then proceed to prove or disprove the thesis by close textual study. However, as E. Warwick Slinn writes, "As [Browning's speakers] confront the impositions of a world which would absorb them into its own shaping processes,

speakers are engaged in defence of their very existence as individuals, and they often retaliate through acts of verbal aggression which attempt instead to subsume the world into their web of understanding" (Slinn, x).

The point of dialogical readings is not to suggest an arbitrary and new way of interpretation; developing and applying dialogism to readings of Browning's monologues demonstrates a theory about language and the media in which it operates. Through textual voices, dramatic monologues present a situation that mimes communication processes in "reality." Among other things, the recognition that "Texts do not come from speakers, speakers come from texts" (Tucker, 33), challenges notions that studying speakers yields poetic meaning. To presume that a text proceeds from a dramatically situated speaker risks missing how the speaker is engendered in colliding modes of signification (dialogical discourse).

In the process of reconsidering the dramatic monologue, it becomes increasingly evident that the differences among shifts in interpretive strategies are more than minor. The differences are neither differences in teleological conclusions, nor are they opposing epistemological views of what occurs in the poems; the shift from models like Langbaum's to a Bakhtinian model of

dramatic monologues means a shift in thought from teleologically based interpretation to theories of epistemology. Telos -- the "truth", or "meaning" -- that speakers express is so muffled in monologues that all that can be heard are challenges to both the speaker's authority to speak and to calling his/her utterances meaningful. Browning's monologues dialogically undermine teleological interpretations by including voices which oppose, or deconstruct, the voices that "construct" textual meaning. As a form which discusses and is represented by ideas, the dramatic monologue "acquires the contradictory complexity and living multi-facedness of an idea-force, being born, living and acting in the great dialogue of the epoch and calling it back and forth to kindred ideas of other epochs" (Bakhtin, 1984: 89). Thrown into this continuous state of dialogism, no utterance is stable enough to reveal meaning, since all statements merely await a chorus of potentially undermining, other voices.

CONCLUSION

Although dialogism does not deny that meaning exists in poetry, readings of Browning's dramatic monologues demonstrate that the process of interpreting and articulating meaning is more complicated than critics like Langbaum, Honan, King, et al., have suggested. These critics argue that dramatic monologues present a more objective view of "truth" than lyrics, because dramatized speakers focus our attention on poetic meaning; however, as demonstrated in readings of the poems, dialogism includes additional voices that undermine the speaker's speech. The sincerity of a speaker's expression is challenged by his/her attempts to communicate thoughts to a dramatized auditor. In studying such speakers as Lippo, Karshish, or even others like Andrea del Sarto, Bishop Blougram, or Caliban, who modify their speech in order to gain the sympathies of their auditors, readers are able to partially construct the auditors' voices in the poetic discourses of meaning; and, in doing so, they create the potential for including their own personal voices as well.

Although it develops new readings of Browning's dramatic monologues, dialogical interpretation attempts to

add these "new" readings to existing ones. This approach to reading texts exposes a difference between Bakhtin's theory of dialogical voices and New Critical studies of voices of the lyric: while New Critics take lyric voices from their contexts in order to construct them into unities that reveal meaning, Bakhtin's theory allows us to view the dramatic monologue as a form that permits us to study voices as well as their contexts, without necessarily attempting to formulate textual meaning. His model allows readers to treat speakers as studies in humanity; just as people are not treated as means to an end, speakers do not represent a single meaning designed solely for the reader's edification. At the same time, poetic voices are substantive; we can listen as Browning discusses morality, religion, philosophy, as well as hypocrisy in his dramatic monologues, but these themes cannot be analyzed as single, isolated, and incontrovertible descriptive claims of "meaning." Meaning in Browning's dramatic monologues is formed in ways both formalism and deconstruction deny; it is often fleeting, unstable, and potential meaning.

In Bakhtinian readings of the dramatic monologues that I have discussed in the thesis, I have attempted to treat speakers as personalities rather than objects, by refusing to reduce them to means of revealing a telos that the poet supposedly intended. Among others, the voice of

the poet is treated as another that the speaker constructs to be considered and heard in the poetic discourse. Because s/he also develops the voices of others, it is difficult to know a speaker's full personality; thus, as Bakhtin demonstrates, we study the narrator's words and actions in order to consider what they might mean as part of a larger act of communication or discourse. Split voice -- either through irony, polyphony, or double-voiced speech -- experienced by Browning's monologuists, develops the monologue into a form in which ideas and perspectives of meaning are expressed dialogically in a poetic discourse.

In addition to "Fra Lippo Lippi," "An Epistle... of Karshish," and "Cleon," which I have analyzed, monologues in which dialogism can be demonstrated among discoursing voices of speakers, auditors, and others include: "Count Gismond" (1842), "'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'" (1855), "Bishop Blougram's Apology" (1855), "Andrea del Sarto" (1855), "Caliban Upon Setebos" (1864), and numerous others, including later works like The Ring and the Book (1868-9), "Balustion's Adventure" (1871), "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau: Saviour of Society" (1871), "Asolando" (1889). Despite the diversity among themes, subjects, and lengths of the poems, each of these works are dramatic monologues in that they have dramatized auditors who complicate our perception of the sincerity of the speakers' utterances by

their mere presence in the poems.

The difference this relationship creates among critical approaches can be demonstrated once again by reviewing Robert Langbaum's interpretation of The Ring and the Book. The poem tells the same story as narrated by eleven different speakers. Ironically, Langbaum recognizes and dismisses dialogical readings when he writes:

Such a method can be justified only on the relativist assumption that truth cannot be apprehended in itself but must be "induced" from particular points of view, and that there can be enough difference among the points of view to make each repetition interesting and important as a psychological fact. (Langbaum: 109)

Having stated that Browning's work "does not entirely succeed" (109), Langbaum reacts negatively at the prospect that poetry has only potential rather than actualized meaning. By searching for ways to conflate readers with speakers, critics like Langbaum reveal the limitations and inadequacies of their models of interpretation. Their judgments have closed them from reading a poem that asks readers to re-interpret, or, in Browning's words from "An Essay on Shelley," to revert to and relearn poetic meaning(s). In light of Bakhtin's theories, which guide as well as liberate readers to interpret, a response to Langbaum's and Honan's limited model, which can also be a thesis to begin new readings is that, "Their doctrine could be held by no sane man" ("Cleon": 353).

END NOTES

1. The general theory of logotherapy that I present here is from Victor Frankl's Man's Search For Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy. (New York: Pocket Books, 1965). Frankl presents a theory of phenomenology that he calls "will to meaning." In formulating meaning, Frankl argues that "will to meaning" intuitively configures any textual information that is available. Operating within a discourse between information/objects and educated (but subjective) conjecture, logotherapy allows meaning to be re-formulated whenever more objects are identified and/or become available.

2. It is most likely that the model of poetry on which Bakhtin bases his argument is the Romantic lyric in a Russian context. Whether or not Bakhtin was familiar with the conventions of English Romanticism, Russian Romanticism based itself partly on the lyrical form and poetic vision of its English counterpart, particularly Byron and Shelley.

3. Such is the case in linguistics, where "lexicology too remains essentially within the limits of a single monologic context, and recognizes only the direct and unmediated orientation of discourse toward its referential object, without taking into account anyone else's discourse or any second context" (Bakhtin, 1984: 186).

4. Boyd Litzenger and Donald Smalley have compiled reviews of Browning's poetry in Browning: The Critical Heritage. Among those who failed to comprehend Browning's work were Joseph Arnould, G. Brimley, Richard Simpson, Henry James, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and others. In one review, published in the 24 November 1855 Saturday Review, Joseph Arnould writes about Browning's Men and Women that, "It is high time that this sort of thing, if possible, be stopped. Here is another book of madness and mysticism -- another melancholy specimen of power wantonly wasted, and talent deliberately perverted -- another act of self-prostration before the demon of bad taste" (Litzenger: 158).

5. As I argued in chapter one, what I mean by "sincerity" is the ability of the speaker to, at some point, be a wholly accurate conduit for reflecting Browning's aesthetic,

political, and moral positions.

6. I am indebted to John Ferns who informs me that Donald Thomas indicates evidence that undermines the certainty of Browning's moral claims. In Robert Browning: A Life Within Life (1982), Thomas suggests that Browning and his son fathered several illegitimate children in France, where they often vacationed. The likelihood that Browning would publicly endorse illicit sexual behaviour, particularly in a spiritual (if not religious) man like Lippo, is a difficult proposition for critics who assert that Lippo speaks for Browning's morality in this matter.

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