

Considering poems  
or passages from  
longer poems discuss  
essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Look closely at the effects of language, imagery and verse form. Comment on how your chosen poem relates to other poems by Browning.

A dramatic monologue is a form of poetry where a speaker speaks to an often unspecified listener and portrays through what they say inner workings of their character, usually unintentionally. Browning uses this device often in his poems as it is an excellent way of 'telling a story' successfully, however, the writer must immediately establish the situation in the poem quickly and without seeming forced in order to effectively set the scene. The poem 'Andrea Del Sarto' is set on an Autumn evening in 1525, and the story is based heavily on Vasari's 'Lives of the Painters' where Vasari describes Andrea's failure, his obsession with a wife who ruins him, the theft from King Francis the first and his consequent fall from celebrity status. Browning was fascinated with Italian history and his portrayal of Andrea and the knowledge of events in his life. In Browning's 'Andrea Del Sarto' he fails to mention conclusively whom exactly the narrator of the poem is, however, because the poem's name is evidently a character, and no mention is made of who the narrator is, it seems Browning expects the reader to come to conclusion through the poem that Andrea is, in fact, the narrator.

Yet Browning instantly sets the mood of the poem, by having Andrea announce in the very first line, 'But do not let us quarrel any more, no, my Luciezia;' Although at this point the reader is not aware whom 'Luciezia' is, it is clear Andrea has been arguing with her and that due to his use of the possessive 'my' one presumes the relationship between them is one of husband and wife, this is then backed up when Andrea refers to couples minds as one, 'as married people use' and from this statement the reader

can understand the previous argument, apparently regarding Andrea being unwilling to paint a picture for his wife's "friend's friend", one can deduce then that the 'friend' is in fact Andrea's wife's lover, and her lover's friend is in need of money quickly to pay off some debts. Then in line fifteen the reader discovers where the poem is set, Fiesole, a small Italian town, later described as a 'Yonder, sober, pleasant Fiesole', indicating Andrea's apparent boredom of the town along with his description of its colour, 'A common greyness silvers everything', gradually allowing the reader into the mind of Andrea. In other poems, however, Browning is able to use a far more direct approach to setting the scene take, for example, 'Fra Lippo Lippi' in the very first line we have the name of the narrator, 'I am poor brother Lippo,' as opposed to Andrea, where the reader is never decisively told his name. The scene in total in Fra Lippo is much easier to decipher as well, we discover that 'tis past midnight' he is 'at an alley's end' near a brothel and he has been apprehended by the night watchmen one of whom has his hand clasped around Fra Lippo's throat all within a few lines. Whereas Andrea takes many lines before he tells the reader even the name of the town he lives in, let alone a slight description of it.

Similarly however, Browning introduces the two characters to the reader in the middle of a sentence, Andrea at the end of a confrontation with Lucreiza and Fra Lippo at the beginning of one with the night watchman; however, the true characters are displayed through Fra Lippo's ability to forget the quarrel and Andrea's inability to do the same. Browning's handling of a dramatic monologue is successful in the ways he is able to portray different characters in wholly different ways, Fra Lippo is a good example, both Andrea and Fra

Lippo are artists who both realise they will never be accepted as truly great artists, albeit for different reasons, yet their reactions to the way their lives have turned out are completely and utterly different. Another example is Browning's poem 'The Laboratory' a dramatic monologue on how a woman handles the thought that her lover is having an affair. A similar situation to Andrea and yet the woman in the poem acts entirely differently, she wishes to kill the woman her lover is attracted to, 'Which is the poison to poison her, prithee?' is asked on the sixth line of the poem, implying a proactive character, complete contrast to Andrea's slow moving monologue, only subtly hinting at his unhappiness of their marital situation, and quickly withdrawing any negative comments towards Lucrezia in fear of upsetting her.

The poem itself is a dramatic monologue written in iambic pentameter, which lends itself very easily to the narrative and natural conversation effect, however this is not regular, not every line is in iambic pentameter and some dashes are added at the beginnings of lines to throw the reader off rhythm to add to the feeling of Andrea's frustration with his station in life. 'I do what many dream of all their lives, - Dream? Strive to do, and agonise to do,' There are no clear rhymes either, to increase the effect of a conversational, natural poem. . The poem is also lacking in enjambment, it gives the impression the poem could be dramatised without an audience realising that it is, in fact poetry, this is also shown by Andrea's giving Lucrezia direction whilst talking to her, 'This chamber for example - turn your head - All that's behind us!' Clear cut lines, indicating where the reader must emphasise the words and enabling an obvious meaning to be deduced, the 'turn your head'

indicates action easily dramatised. The scheme differs to another dramatic monologue 'My last Duchess', although also written in iambic pentameter there is a definite rhyming couplet scheme, however the rhyming is unobtrusive due to Browning's use of enjambment, so the reader does not necessarily initially realise the rhyme, therefore it does not interfere with the conversational aspect of the poem. 'But to myself they turned (since none puts by The curtain I have drawn for you but I) As there is no real rhyme or rhythm to the poem, it (as previously stated) is extremely conversational, but in a very sincere, melancholy way.

This is an immense contrast once again between the language of fellow painter Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea, Fra Lippo intersperses his speech with bursts of song and the occasional colloquial 'Zooks!' revealing his laid back, casually character by using language someone like Andrea would never even consider using. However, Andrea does occasionally let his emotions through and laces his words with resentment, evidently dieing to blame Lucrezia, but feels he is unable to, for example, 'To paint a little thing like that you smeared', 'smeared' being a word that emphasises the bittersweet antipathy towards his wife, despite him at the same time complimenting himself on his abilities as a painter. In any dramatic monologue the narrative voice betrays his or her character through the often subtle nuances of the language they use, in Andrea Del Sarto, the audience is Andrea's wife and model Lucrezia who wants Andrea to paint her a picture to sell to get money for her 'secret' lover's friend, in Fra Lippo Lippi, the audience is the captain of the Night Watch and in 'My Last Duchess' the audience is the ambassador from some great count whose daughter the Duke is now seeking to marry.

Lucrezia comes across in the poem as someone Andrea is evidently almost blindly in love with, aware of her faults, certainly, but unwilling to accuse her directly of any wrongdoings. For example when he implies that his wife is unfaithful, 'oh so sweet-My face, my moon, my everybody's moon' Obviously suggesting his wife belongs to 'everybody' and is therefore unfaithful, but somehow by using moon related imagery Andrea manages to convince himself and perhaps also the reader that what his wife is doing is almost beautiful. The poem uses beautiful yet melancholy language and flows gently when reading it, emphasising Andrea's despair, for example, one of the greatest lines of the poem is, Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, Or what's a heaven for?' The line epitomises Andrea's attitude towards life and the beauty of the language mingled with an overwhelming sense of despair and hopelessness.

Abigail Newman or Brown University claims that Andrea's language is so downcast because he is seeking Lucrezia's approval; 'To Lucrezia, he is not a brilliant and talented artist, but merely her husband, and he tries to appeal to her on this level, particularly since he feels that he is slipping in her love. He mentions that their house, which was intended to be "gay", is now quite "melancholy"' This appears to be true, Andrea constantly appeals to Lucrezia in the hope that she may at least appreciate him, 'You don't understand Nor care to understand about my art, But you can hear at least when people speak' Abigail Newman also states based on the lines above, 'Del Sarto desperately wants to believe that he is truly talented and self-inspired, but he is insecure about his abilities, and he worries that he is dependent on Lucrezia in a way that other brilliant artists were not

dependent on anyone. Does Del Sarto seem to think that he compromises the integrity and genius of his art somehow by loving Lucrezia so much?' Once again, what Abigail Newman writes seems plausible, Andrea constantly needs Lucrezia by his side, he claims that if Lucrezia would simply let him sit with her, hand in hand by the window, then he shall be refreshed and able to paint well the next morning. Yet he also seems resentful of the fact that he needs her, 'Why do I need you? What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo? Andrea's dependency on Lucrezia is his downfall, yet he is unable to admit directly that this is the case. The poem is incredibly beautiful, and it showcases extremely well Browning's extraordinary talent with dramatic monologues, Andrea's character and his wife's actions are revealed slowly as the poem continues without once giving away the entire story at once and only getting Andrea's true, snide opinion of his wife's lover when he calmly tells Lucrezia at the end when her lover calls, 'Again the Cousin's whistle! Go my love' Andrea holds on to the end still calling Lucrezia his love whilst knowing she is off to visit her lover. In my judgement, the poem's mixture of gorgeous language and imagery make it one of Browning's finest character portrayals, despite Andrea being a man in the depths of despair.