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**The Role of the Interlocutor
in
Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologues**

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ABSTRACT

Throughout the twentieth century, critics of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, with some exceptions, have discussed the poems on the basis of Cartesian idealist tenets regarding subjectivity. Thus, although critics regard the interlocutor as a key feature of the genre, they tend to focus their attention primarily on monologue speakers who, as a result of idealist assumptions held by commentators, emerge from the readings as discrete and autonomous consciousnesses, unaffected by those at whom they address their utterances — their interlocutors — and by their social contexts. Post-Hegelian philosophical theories challenge Descartes' subjective idealism as, I argue, do dramatic monologues: both suggest that subjects do not exist in psychological isolation, but are products of a series of encounters with others, in relation to whom they constantly attempt to gain a sense of their own identity. Post-Hegelian intersubjective and discursive theories can help to explain the psychological significance of the interlocutor for dramatic monologue speakers.

In Chapter One I trace the development of dramatic monologue criticism, showing how theoretical assumptions have affected readings of monologues and in particular our understanding of the function of interlocutors. In Chapter Two I outline the philosophical and psychoanalytical theories of Hegel, Kojève, Lacan and the Bakhtin School. These provide alternative, but closely related ways of conceptualizing the intersubjective and discursive processes at play in monologues and enable me to show how speakers and interlocutors are not simply mutually influencing individuals. Rather, speakers and interlocutors are constantly in the process of constructing, and of being constructed by, each other. In Chapters Three, Four, Five and Six I discuss "Porphyria's Lover," "Andrea del Sarto," "Mr Sludge, 'The Medium'" and "Caliban upon Setebos" respectively, in order to show how the interlocutor's presence (whether actual or notional) is inevitably inscribed in the speaker's utterance to the extent that the speaker is inseparable from the interlocutor. These readings of Browning's

monologues shift critical and theoretical emphasis from Cartesian idealism to dialogism and discursive process.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: Dramatic Monologue Criticism	10
CHAPTER TWO: Intersubjective and Discursive Theories	43
CHAPTER THREE: Porphyria's Lover's Interlocutor	80
CHAPTER FOUR: Andrea's Struggle for Lucrezia	94
CHAPTER FIVE: Speaking for Horsefall: Mr Sludge, the Medium	133
CHAPTER SIX: Caliban's Dialogic Monologue	166
WORKS CITED	192

INTRODUCTION

This thesis deals with the role of the interlocutor in a selection of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. Although early-twentieth-century, formalist discussions identified the presence of an interlocutor in monologues as a key feature of the genre, the significance of the interlocutor to the speaker's utterance has not been discussed in terms of modern critical theories. Formalists attempting to define the genre, which is generally considered to have been most effectively used by Browning, tended to follow his claim that he wished to represent "Action in Character rather than Character in Action" (Browning, *Strafford* 9). Such a statement encourages the perception of monologues as representations of one character's speech, and as illustrations of his psychological processes. (In this thesis I use the male pronoun for the speaker because all poems discussed here are spoken by males.) By definition, the monologue form prohibits interlocutors from speaking, although one early critic has suggested that on occasion dialogue may be introduced without endangering certain texts' inclusion in the genre (Curry 42). This thesis is not intended as an attempt to redefine the genre. However, it does challenge the ways in which early formalist definitions have continued to influence criticism, in particular with regard to idealist notions which informed them, and to their general (but not exclusive) tendency to view the interlocutor as a secondary feature of the monologue form.

The notion that monologues are the products of an independent speaker's conscious attempts to express his thoughts is based on idealism, the predominant philosophy sustaining early discussions. Idealism posits subjects as fixed entities who exist for themselves, discretely and autonomously, in a binary opposition to the world, to their human others and to objects. Monologue critics whose readings endorse idealism posit subjects — speakers, interlocutors, readers and poets alike — whose essential, true consciousnesses can be located and determined by analyses of the texts. Thus, discussions informed by idealism focus on the ways in which speakers reveal themselves to their readers and, in some cases, to their interlocutors; they understand

"character" as conclusively revealed to readers (and interlocutors) through a speaker's psychological action.

Because the presence of a monologist in the poem is unquestionable, while the interlocutor only appears to enter the poem through the speaker's utterance, both early and recent discussions of monologues, with few exceptions, focus their attention on the speaker. Discussing his psychological processes, they tend to regard the source of these as existing in a realm beyond the poem and quite apart from the interlocutor. While this study also attends to the dramatization of monologists' subjectivities, it does so by investigating the roles played by their interlocutors. Thus, whereas established monologue criticism has tended to view the speaker and the interlocutor as discrete and autonomous entities, and has tended to privilege the speaker over the interlocutor, this study shows how monologues can be read as products of a dialogic interrelationship between the personae in the poems.

While formalist definitions of the genre subordinated the role of the interlocutor, they by no means discounted it. As early as 1908, S. S. Curry identified five categories (speaker, hearer, place or situation, time and connection, and argument) which he considered vital components of dramatic monologues. If, as can reasonably be assumed, he proceeded by order of importance, he views the interlocutor as the second most significant feature in monologues, preceded only by the speaker. In various ways and to differing degrees, Curry's categories became the benchmark against which other critics measured their own. For example, in 1947 Ina Beth Sessions reduced Curry's five monologue elements to three (speaker, audience, and occasion), and added four of her own, one of which was the "continuous interplay between speaker and audience" (Sessions 503). In sub-classifying the genre into perfect, imperfect, formal or approximate categories (508), she retained the speaker as the only consistent element. One year later, when suggesting a categorization of the form on the basis of five criteria (objectivity, internal drama, oral realism, auditor-focus and

psychological self-revelation), Benjamin Willis Fuson claimed that even an auditor was not vital to the form (11, 20).

Each of these formalists discusses the interlocutor. However, each also places more emphasis on the the way in which speakers reveal themselves as they speak, whether to an external interlocutor, or to the reader, and each views the interlocutor as a secondary, if not unnecessary feature. Setting the stage for further discussions of dramatic monologues, the notions held by these formalists — that monologues are primarily concerned with speakers' psyches, that interlocutors are of limited significance, and that speakers, interlocutors, readers and poets are independent, autonomous and intentional subjects — still continue to influence monologue criticism.

Robert Langbaum's seminal *Poetry of Experience* (1957) marked a break away from attempts to establish prescriptive categories according to which monologues should be assessed. Langbaum suggested instead that readers look inside each poem, consider its effects and its way of meaning, and place it into its historical context (77). His early reader-response discussion of dramatic monologues and related forms partially undermined idealist assumptions about speakers made by his predecessors, although it continued to discuss the interlocutor as at most secondary. Yet despite Langbaum's shift of focus (from the character in the poem to the poem's reader), the criteria put forward by formalist discussions, as well as the implicit idealism which informed these, have continued to influence monologue criticism.

However, in the past fifteen to twenty years some critics have moved away from the idealist assumptions made by their predecessors. Herbert F. Tucker, for example, uses deconstructive models of reading as a means of subverting the autonomy previously ascribed to speakers. Similarly, Loy D. Martin takes a stand against conventional views of monologuists, maintaining that they disrupt the temporal boundaries and the exclusive autonomy of the idealist Cartesian subject (28, 158). E. Warwick Slinn discusses the dialectical process of subjects' coming into being on the basis of Hegel's and Derrida's writings. In a move similar to Tucker's, he suggests that speakers' subjectivities are inhabited by otherness, and monologuists (unwittingly)

subsume that otherness as their own (*Discourse* 36). In these three critics' views, the other which monologuists confront tends to remain primarily the world at large, or the world as represented in discourse, rather than the interlocutor.

Tucker's, Martin's and Slinn's discussions resist essentialist readings which posit subjects engaged in dramatic monologues as fixed, autonomous beings, including not only speakers and interlocutors, but also readers and poets. For these critics, speakers come into existence as the result of discursive processes at play in their utterances; thus, their readings of Browning monologues represent contemporary emphasis on speakers as no longer essential, fixed entities, but as representations produced in and by discourse. In Chapter One I shall investigate the ways in which twentieth-century literary critical thought has informed discussions of dramatic monologues. Focusing on "My Last Duchess," possibly Browning's most widely discussed monologue, I shall further show how critics' views of the interlocutor are marked by their particular critical biases, finally providing an alternative reading which emphasizes the role of the interlocutor.

Although many critics mention the presence or absence of an interlocutor in the poems they discuss, the interlocutor's function in the constitution of the speaker's psyche has generally been underestimated. Further, recent discussions have recognized the need to re-read monologues in terms of modern critical theories; Tucker, Martin and Slinn agree in principle that rather than presenting readers with revelations of monologuists' minds, dramatic monologues represent speakers' attempts to construct themselves in language and within particular social and cultural contexts. Yet the extent to which subjects also construct their interlocutors has been overlooked. Building on the discursive models presented by these readings, but focusing particularly on the role of the interlocutor, I wish to show how speakers construct themselves dialogically as they interact with their interlocutors.

To read interlocutors as part of an intersubjective and discursive process is to read them as others through whom speakers construct themselves but who are also

constructed by their speakers. "Intersubjectivity" is understood here in a specialized discursive sense and not, as it has sometimes been used, as simply a reciprocal process of influence between two or more discrete and autonomous consciousnesses. In my reading, intersubjectivity is the very condition of speech, not an enterprise undertaken at will by authoring subjects. All speech assumes an interlocutor (or as Curry so beautifully puts it, "Every Dooley demands a listener" [43]).¹ When we speak, we have an other in mind, either consciously or unconsciously, and our notion of that other will necessarily participate in the construction of our utterance, and of our construction of self through the utterance. Although we might desire to establish a self "as a viable centre in which to locate value and meaning" (Slinn, *Discourse 2*), the self which emerges from our utterance always and necessarily incorporates the other, and is therefore divided between self and other in the text. As Slinn puts it, "discourse is a public enterprise and monologues are inevitably dialogic. . . . intrasubjective perception is also an intersubjective structure" (*Discourse 7*).

Dramatic monologues provide us with specialized examples of intersubjectively produced subjects. In monologues, speakers speak to others, notional or actual, and construct themselves through them. However, because we hear only the speaker's voice, the other at whom the utterance is directed is always already constructed by the speaker, and therefore need not necessarily be actual or present. Because we can only ever hear that one voice which constructs the speaker and the interlocutor simultaneously, we should not assume that speakers and their interlocutors exist independently, as separate consciousnesses. Rather, they both come into existence simultaneously in the text. Further, as Tucker has pointed out, speakers continually construct themselves anew, in an ongoing process of becoming. Because the speaker and the interlocutor emerge from the speaker's discourse, we must focus on the text in

¹Curry's reference is to Mr. Dooley, the speaker in a series of articles (or dialogues) by journalist Finley Peter Dunne. The "Dooley" articles were syndicated and appeared in a number of newspapers in the United States from 1893 until around 1905. Notably, the collection *Mr. Dooley at his Best* is dedicated to Dooley's interlocutor: "To the Hennesseys of the World Who Suffer and are Silent" (ed. Elmer Ellis [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938] v).

order to investigate the processes by which speakers attempt to construct themselves and their others, and by which they are in turn constructed.

The notion, evident in many critical discussions, that monologists persuade, convince and coerce their interlocutors, while nevertheless existing independently, reflects Cartesian ideas about the nature of the subject. Gradually, however, post-Cartesian theories have eroded Descartes' discrete and autonomous subject. New methods for reading monologues are provided, for example, in Hegel's theory and Kojève's later re-reading of Hegel's work. Both insisted that subjects come into being as the result of an interaction with others, from whom they distinguish themselves by negation. More recently, following Hegel and Kojève, Lacan and the Bakhtin School emphasize the discursive processes of subject-construction which they believe always and only occurs in relation to others. Lacan's description of the analytical situation allows for a detailed investigation of the dynamics which effect the speaker's narrative about himself, constructed in the act of speaking to his other, in this case the analyst. Bakhtin and members of his school posit a model in which any utterance is necessarily dialogic, thus accounting for discursive processes not only in monologues in which an interlocutor is obviously addressed, but also in those in which no interlocutor is overtly present. In conjunction, all four theories encourage new readings of dramatic monologues which are more in keeping with the post-Cartesian critical climate. Chapter Two outlines these four theorists' work. Further, using "My Last Duchess" as my standard reference, I shall show how the theories of Hegel, Kojève, Lacan and the Bakhtin School allow for a more subtle investigation of the complex processes at play in the poem.

The relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor is complex, and requires a detailed reading of the speaker's utterance, his way of speaking, the shifts and contradictions in his utterance, and his means of dealing with conflicting discourses which inevitably confront him. Consequently, rather than attempting a broad generic description or redefinition, this thesis investigates the role of the interlocutor in four

selected examples, all by Robert Browning: "Porphyria's Lover," "Andrea del Sarto," "Mr Sludge, 'The Medium'," and "Caliban upon Setebos." Since genre definitions are not an issue, these poems have been selected on the basis that — with the exception perhaps of "Porphyria's Lover" — they are generally accepted as indisputable examples of the dramatic monologue form. Further, I have chosen poems which have been dealt with reasonably extensively in order to contrast my own readings with earlier ones.

The roles played by the interlocutors in each of these poems differ considerably from one another. "Porphyria's Lover" is discussed in Chapter Three as a test-case of what many see as a marginal dramatic monologue. In this poem there is no obvious interlocutor. Even before he begins to speak, the lover has murdered the only other human present in his cottage on the evening he describes. Yet if we read the poem dialogically, we can identify an interlocutor, emerging as a social voice, who implicitly informs the speaker's narrative and consequently his construction of himself.

In "Andrea del Sarto" the interlocutor, Lucrezia, and the context of the poem are comparatively well-defined. Lucrezia's presence precedes the speaker's utterance, and she leaves, we presume, only after Andrea has concluded his speech. In this monologue, the speaker attempts to manipulate his interlocutor into accepting roles which he defines for her. He wishes to take up corresponding roles which would provide him with social status and a sense of self-worth, but he is disappointed primarily because his interlocutor fails to support his self-constructions. Andrea does not insist on persevering with each role once it has been rejected. Rather, he continually backs down, preferring to shift to alternative versions of himself and of Lucrezia as a means of eliciting her confirmation. The ways in which Andrea attempts to gain his interlocutor's approval, and the effects which her refusals to confirm his narrative have on him, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Mr Sludge is typical of Browning's casuists; in fact, some critics consider him to be Browning's most objectionable monologist. His attempts to coerce and persuade his interlocutor suggest that he presumes he might control his situation and his interlocutor. Consequently, of the monologists discussed in this thesis, Mr Sludge is

by far the most aware of his own rhetorical processes, and he seems to believe he can stand unaffected by his antagonist, Hiram H. Horsefall. However, my reading in Chapter Five will show that Sludge's utterance attests to his ultimate inability to separate himself from his other. His final outburst, rather than representing the "true" Sludge posited by earlier discussions, shows merely another Sludge, no less dependent on his interlocutor than the Sludges who speak in Horsefall's presence.

"Caliban upon Setebos" is a later monologue in which no interlocutor can clearly be ascertained. Yet unlike the speaker in "Porphyria's Lover," Caliban seems to recognize the need for an interlocutor, for he initially proposes to speak to himself. Indeed, Caliban's assumed isolation forms the very basis of his utterance: speaking only to himself, he believes himself to have total control over his speech, having excluded from it all voices which are potentially subversive, and which he fears. Yet despite his conscious wish to exclude Setebos, Prospero and the island's other inhabitants, Caliban unwittingly constructs them and their views as a means of examining his own subjectivity. In Chapter Six, a close analysis of "Caliban upon Setebos" will investigate the extent to which Caliban contends with others' voices, and the extent to which these can be considered as his interlocutors.

So far I have somewhat indiscriminately used a variety of terms to describe the monologue character who does not speak. This is partly due to definitions used by other critics, who refer to "listeners," "auditors," "audiences," "hearers," "addressees," and, less often, "interlocutors." The wide-spread use of the terms "listener," of its Latinate equivalents "auditor" and (the collective) "audience," and of the term "hearer" is indicative of the role these characters have been given in most established readings. I strongly oppose the term "audience" because it blurs the distinction between the interlocutor in the poem and the poem's readers. Such is the case, for example, in Lee Erickson's study *Robert Browning: His Poetry and His Audiences*, where "audience" confuses the distinction between Browning's reception by his Victorian peers and the relationship between speakers and interlocutors in the poems themselves. In my

understanding, the terms "hearer" and "listener," as well as the terms "audience" and "auditor" (from the Latin "*audire*," to listen), imply passivity on the part of the character addressed, suggesting that these terms support the Cartesian notion of autonomous subjectivity. The term "addressee," while not emphasizing activity, does not entirely discount it. Yet the aim of this study is to demonstrate precisely the dialogic nature of the relationship between speakers and interlocutors. Therefore, the most appropriate term for my purposes is "interlocutor."

"Inter" (between or among) appropriately suggests the process whereby consciousness arises from the relationship between the speaker and his other. Further, it allows for the notion of fluidity: as the participants in the discourse shift their positions, the gap between them also shifts in a constantly deferred attempt to fix that which can never be fixed. "*Locutor*," derived from the Latin "*locutio*" (an utterance) and "*loqui*" (to speak), allows for the possibility of an active response from the other. Further, "interlocutor," connoting "*inter-locus*" (literally, the space between), suggests that consciousness is produced not independently, but in the textual (or discursive) space between speaker and interlocutor. Undoubtedly, these considerations provoked a number of translators of the Bakhtin School's writings to favour the term "interlocutor." In this thesis "interlocutor" is used to describe the character(s) at whom speakers address their monologues, whether these are actual or notional, except where discussions of other critics' work necessitates use of their terms.

CHAPTER ONE

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE CRITICISM

I The Monologue in the Twentieth Century

This chapter describes the context of twentieth-century dramatic monologue criticism. In the first section I shall outline the ways in which dramatic monologues have been discussed in the past. In the second I shall focus specifically on ways in which critics have accounted for monologue interlocutors. The third section will draw attention to discussions of Browning's "My Last Duchess" in order to exemplify ways in which the interlocutor has been dealt with in what some consider the most successful dramatic monologue ever written. Finally, I shall provide an interpretation of the role of the interlocutor in "My Last Duchess," pointing the direction of the more detailed investigations which will constitute subsequent chapters.

There has been a considerable shift in literary critical theory since the nineteenth century. This development has altered the ways in which we read literature and is characterized primarily by the way we allocate meaning to texts. In general, critical theory over the past 150 years, but particularly this century, marks a gradual shift away from privileging the author as the source of meaning to focusing on the discursive processes of the text itself. Modern critical theory no longer holds that texts are fixed, immutable products of a poet's or author's intentions. Texts have become potential sites of meaning, constantly in the process of being redefined by readers and by the language which constitutes them.

Dramatic monologues are specialized literary texts. Both in content and form they tentatively challenge philosophical and literary traditions which precede them. Although a product of Romanticism, monologues dramatize a sense of doubt with regard to the autonomy of the subject and the fixity of language (Slinn, *Discourse 2*). However, the subversive nature of the dramatic monologue form has only come to the fore in critical discussions in recent decades, during which a number of commentators have shown monologues to be particularly relevant markers of a fundamental change in

philosophical and literary critical thought. During Browning's own time, many critics dispensed with his poetry, claiming it was too obscure, and indeed, his poetry continued to have a mixed reception in the early-twentieth century. S. S. Curry indicated his belief that Browning's monologues had been overlooked when he entitled his discussion of them *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue: Nature and Interpretation of an Overlooked Form of Literature* (1908). Further, Roma A. King notes that despite its best intentions, the London Browning Society caused the generation which succeeded it largely to avoid Browning's work. The Society's emphasis on aspects of faith, spirituality, and optimism in Browning's work (achieved, according to King, by reading lines and passages from his work out of context) failed to strike a chord with those "less certain than their seniors concerning the whereabouts of God and the rightness of the world" (King, *The Bow and the Lyre* 4).

Since Curry's remarkably astute attempt to provide the early-twentieth-century reader with an "adequate discussion of [Browning's] dramatic form, its nature, and the influence it has exerted upon modern poetry" (Curry 2), and despite the effects of the Browning Society, discussion of Browning's monologues has proliferated during this century. And it is precisely due to their implicit resistance to fixed and definitive interpretations that his poems have been able to survive the often radical shifts twentieth-century literary criticism has experienced. As Morse Peckham has noted, although Browning critics passionately disagree with each other, "the monologues themselves always survive triumphantly this critical battering" (117).

The development of more recent critical theory in the twentieth century marks a shift of emphasis from the poet to the reader and finally to the text. The following sections will investigate how some critics have discussed dramatic monologues. Tracing the development of literary theory, these sections are ordered on the basis of the various features in monologues privileged by critics. Because I have grouped discussions according to their literary critical foci, the readings are not discussed in strict chronological order from section to section, although I have generally observed the chronological order within individual sections. Further, while a generally

sequential trend can be traced in critical theory, the extent to which critics have incorporated newer views into their discussions varies considerably. In fact, in monologue criticism there appears to be an overemphasis on the notion that the poet is the primary source of the poems' meanings. Surprisingly, this view is not confined to early monologue criticism; as will be shown, some contemporary critics still cling to the now generally rejected "intentional fallacy."

a. Privileging the Poet

In the nineteenth century, critics viewed it as their task to uncover the true meaning of literary texts. Meaning was believed to reside permanently within the poem, unadulterated despite cultural, temporal and societal changes. Referring to secondary texts such as letters, autobiographies, biographies, essays and comments by the writer's contemporaries, the Victorian reader believed herself able to reconstrue the poet's or author's intentions, which were also believed to constitute the literary texts' truths. Thus, the literary text was regarded as a permanent record of the intended meaning which the writer or poet desired to communicate to all readers of all times. As a consequence, discussions of monologues which follow this view focus their attention on what they believe to be the poet's (often implicitly didactic) intention, and on the ways he is perceived to address his readers through his speakers.

Yet Victorian and subsequent critics who approach monologues in this manner nevertheless agree that the "dramatic" aspect of monologues must in some way be accounted for. Unlike lyrical poems, dramatic monologues tend to resist claims that the poet is the speaker in any straightforward manner; indeed, based on comments made by Browning in his prose writings, one of the most consistent features of definitions of dramatic monologues has been the notion that the speaker is *not* the poet. Consequently, critics who attempt to locate the poet's intention in or behind his work often discuss the poems in terms of a dramatic tension between his view and that of his speakers. Critics who subscribe to this traditional humanist view of texts and their authors frequently

believe themselves capable, and indeed proceed according to that belief, of separating those ideas which they claim belong to the poet, from those which they assume belong to the speaker.

Many late-twentieth-century critics still investigate the poems as a means of locating the poet's voice. Betty S. Flowers and Alan Sinfield do so by distinguishing between subjective and objective states of being. Flowers' *Browning and the Modern Tradition* (1976) locates the poet firmly within his poems. Basing her reading on Browning's *Essay on Shelley*, she suggests that monologues represent the merging of subjective and objective modes of being. In monologues, claims Flowers, speakers produce versions of themselves which allow them to present themselves as favourably as possible to their auditors. Speakers construct subjective masks behind which they hide their true, objective selves. It is the reader's task to "analyse the bias of the speaker so that objective fact can be separated from subjective interpretation" (56). Later, however, Flowers suggests that the subjective and objective modes are inherent characteristics of the poet: "In the poetic mask the subjective and objective meet; the personal voice of the poet animates the fictional character, a character who may represent the poet himself" (118-19). This double definition of subjective and objective elements as constituting both speaker and poet leads to Flowers' claim that ultimately the poet shares the mask with his speaker: "The mask is an artifact; yet, paradoxically, it is also live, for the creator is within, animating it" (115). Consequently, although Flowers indicates that Browning saw his characters as fictions, she also implies that she is able to distinguish between poems in which he donned the mask and those in which he threw it away (113). Thus, Flowers implicitly undermines Peckham's earlier (1970) and in my view more perceptive, claim that although we tend to think that the speaker must be a mask for the poet, in fact, behind the speaker "is everything, and nothing. . . . The mask is human existence; hence men's fascination with masks, which goes back so many years that it seems that the invention of the mask must be coeval with the inception of human self-definition" (Peckham 118).

Sinfield (1977) claims that the monologist is often used as a "mouthpiece, more or less indirectly, for the poet's views" (13); however, he also provides a model which appears more flexible than that claim might suggest. Sinfield's discussion is based on his construction of a continuum between first-person lyric and third-person narrative, along which, he argues, any dramatic monologue can be located. He suggests that monologue writers appropriate a "feint" (a term borrowed from Käte Hamburger's *The Logic of Literature*): they claim a first-person lyrical stance while simultaneously setting up a fictional speaker (25). Sinfield provides his readers with concrete ways of locating each monologue on the continuum:

If there is a heavy apparatus of circumstantial detail which establishes for the speaker a world which we know is not the poet's, then the feint begins to approximate to fiction. If, alternatively, the speaker is relatively unlocated in time and place . . . then the feint is closer to the poet's 'I'. (25)

Thus, Sinfield identifies and challenges what he describes as the "subjective-objective dichotomy" of earlier critics (55), producing his continuum in an attempt to avoid either/or models in which the terms are dualistically separated. Similarly, Carol Christ (1984) explains the tensions in Browning's monologues in terms of a felicitous coexistence of "the subjective nature of perception" and "an objectivity . . . [which] the voice of the poet no longer seems to offer." Christ suggests that because the dramatic monologue "portrays an individual speaking at the same time that it composes a dramatic event, it can mediate between the subjective and the objective" (25).

An alternative way of locating Browning in his work is to demonstrate parallels between the poet and his contemporary audience. E. D. H. Johnson, Lee Erickson, and to a lesser extent Dorothy Mermin proceed in this manner. Johnson's *Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (1952) regards Browning, Tennyson and Arnold as torn between the demands of their Victorian audiences and their own "creative impulse" (xvi). In Johnson's view, dramatic monologues allowed Browning to present his own private insights in a form which was acceptable to his reading public: "By motivating the actors in his dramas with his own ideas and impulses, Browning could speak out with

greater originality and boldness than would ever have been possible in his own person" (92).

Johnson's work appears to have provided the basis of Erickson's *Robert Browning: His Poetry and His Audience* (1984). (Although Erickson acknowledges his debt to Johnson, Langbaum, and J. Hillis Miller [16], in my view his reading echoes Johnson's most clearly.) Erickson shows how Browning's poetry represents a search for an ideal audience, "one that both loves and is loved," which, according to Erickson, Browning found temporarily in Elizabeth Barrett (18). Erickson focuses specifically on the audience in the poem (the interlocutor) "with an eye toward explicating the poems and toward understanding Browning's view of the poet's private and public position in the world" (19). Yet as I have already suggested in my Introduction, Erickson's use of the term "audience" conflates the interlocutor with contemporary Victorian society, allowing him to claim that for Browning, "it is the dramatic recognition of others, especially in the form of love, that gives his speakers their sense of self" (20). Similarly, one year earlier (in 1983), Dorothy Mermin had reached the conclusion that the failures of Browning's speakers to elicit their auditors' understanding and sympathy (in *Men and Women*), "reflect Browning's concern about his own relation to his readers" (Mermin *Audience* 53).

Another group of critics link Browning to his poetry by induction. Inductive readings, in some aspects similar to Erickson's but generally more flexible, attempt to find evidence of Browning's philosophical thought in his poetry, usually in order to demonstrate its radical and novel nature in comparison to that of his predecessors. J. Hillis Miller, W. David Shaw, and Clyde de L. Ryals provide examples of inductive readings. In his *Disappearance of God* (1963), Miller suggests that Browning's poetry expresses the poet's religious consciousness, a consciousness quite different from that evident in traditional Christian dogma. Informed by evolutionism, and by metaphysical and psychological problems (84, 90), Browning describes a God more aligned to chaos than to order. Miller takes issue with the view (suggested by Johnson) that dramatic

monologues hide the facts of the poet's private life; but Miller still sees the poems as a means of concealment:

Browning's excessive desire for privacy, as well as his decision to write dramatic monologues, may be not so much an attempt to hide the positive facts of his private life as an attempt to keep hidden his secret failure to have the kind of definite, solid self he sees in other people, and feels it is normal to have. (104)

Thus, in Miller's reading, the poems represent direct expressions of the poet's doubts regarding his own self.

Shaw's *Dialectical Temper* (1968) and Ryals' *Becoming Browning* (1983) discuss Browning's poems in order to demonstrate dialectical processes at play within them. Shaw's dialectic is that of a progressive movement through Kierkegaard's aesthetic, ethical, and religious stages of development. According to Shaw, each monologist characterizes a different state or a combination of states, while Browning himself was constantly progressing through these stages to a higher realm. Shaw's dialectic is essentially didactic: playing out points of view different from his own by creating a series of characters, Browning was able to attain a better understanding of himself and of the world. The poet's moral growth reached its height in *The Ring and the Book*, according to Shaw, because in that text it becomes evident that though "only God comprehends the total truth, Browning can approximate absolute knowledge by multiplying his points of view" (316).

Ryals' dialectic model differs from Shaw's not so much in its conclusions as in its theoretical foundation. Ryals bases his reading on Schlegel's philosophical irony. His discussion is also didactic, proposing that Browning saw "a growth of consciousness resulting from the dialectic interplay that allows the individual and the race to evolve into ever higher spiritual, moral, and artistic states or conditions" (5). Discussing "My Last Duchess," Ryals suggests that monologues represent a combination of the subjective and objective modes, and places Browning firmly within the poem: "The poet is present . . . to remind us that [the speaker's words] are, after all, but words put into [his] mouth by the poet" (153).

In a category of his own, Ralph W. Rader takes issue with the general tendency in modern critical thought to avoid the intentional fallacy. In his "Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms" (1976), Rader suggests that while in theory modern critics reject the notion that the poet's intention is an important aspect of analysis, in practice they nevertheless "make use of the idea that these poems have a quite definite relationship to the poet and the real world" (131). Claiming that this contradiction stems from critics' erroneous views that the poet resides in a realm beyond the poem, Rader claims that "the poet's presence in the poem is a fundamental aspect of its form, not something we know from outside the poem, but something inseparable from our experience of it" (133-34). Rader thus provides a convincing argument for the notion that the poet is not entirely dead, but merely redefined (as Roland Barthes had suggested).

So far I have discussed the work of critics who attempt to locate the poet as a controlling, or at least present force behind his speakers. I shall now turn my attention to critics who emphasize the reader's interpretive role.

b. The Reader's Response to Monologues

American New Criticism of the mid-twentieth century placed itself in opposition to the notion that the poem's meaning resided in a realm above, beyond or outside the poem, that is, in other written sources or in the poet's intention. Critics who follow the general tendencies of New Criticism regard each poem as autonomous, and consequently they undertake to focus their critical attention exclusively on the text. However, despite their radical rejection of poetic intention, many New Critics ostensibly took the submerged presence of the poet behind the text for granted. As Anthony Easthope points out, "New Criticism threw the author out of the front door only to sneak him or her in round the back" (6).

King's *The Bow and the Lyre* (1957) provides an exemplary New Critical reading of Browning's poetry. Drawing attention at the outset to the critical

methodology he intends to employ, King proposes to take the poem itself as object of his study, dispensing with the mind of the poet and the poem's "possible social, moral, and psychological effect upon the reader" (8). Rather, King regards each poem as "dramatic, each speaker providing a possible perspective, by no means necessarily Browning's own, from which a philosophical, moral, or aesthetic problem is viewed," adding that, in general, he will "not identify the speaker with the poet, but interpret him as a part of the world provided within the poem" (9). Nevertheless, towards the end of his discussion, King opens the back door and welcomes Browning in. Suggesting that Browning preferred to "speak through characters who may or may not express [his] own view," King claims that Browning's technique gave "scope and magnitude to what Browning has to say about any subject. Browning's multiple vision (implicit in his choice of materials, his skeptical attitude, and his objective technique) increases the potentiality of his work for stimulating aesthetic response" — presumably from the reader (134-35).

Critics who subscribe to reader-response theory focus their attention on the poems and on their own reactions to them. They regard the dramatic aspect of monologues as a consequence of their own interpretive responses, and their discussions therefore deal with the relationship between themselves as readers and the poems as texts. However, the reader-response methodology often puts critics in danger of simply relocating interpretive power to another fixed consciousness — this time not the poet's but their own. Such is the case, for example, in Robert Langbaum's *Poetry of Experience* (1957), where on the one hand Langbaum attempts to respond to the poems from within, but on the other ostensibly refers to an outside realm in order to substantiate his reading.

Rejecting the need to refer to evidence outside the text, Langbaum suggests: "It is when we look inside the dramatic monologue, when we consider its effect, its way of meaning, that we see its connection with the poetry that precedes and follows Browning" (77). In Langbaum's view, the dramatic tension typical of monologues is caused by a disequilibrium which the reader experiences when he finds himself

sympathizing with characters whose actions he knows he ought to judge and reject. Yet although Langbaum insists on reading the poems from within, suggesting that each reader's own responses constitute the poems' meanings, he nevertheless claims that in the process of responding to poems readers refer to a realm outside and beyond them. In his discussion of *The Ring and the Book* Langbaum maintains that there is a right and a wrong way of reading dramatic monologues. As we read the poems, we come to understand the characters as productions of their particular circumstances. We judge them on the basis of "what we understand of them as people — of their motives, sincerity and innate moral quality" (115). Thus, claims Langbaum, the truth is not revealed; nor does it emerge as the result of our implementing an "external yardstick" (122). However, at the same time that Langbaum disavows reference to an external source of truth, he reintroduces it by claiming that some characters in *The Ring and the Book* are innately more worthy than others:

The moral judgments are definite and extreme, but they depend upon our total apprehension of the characters themselves. What we arrive at in the end is not *the* truth, but truth as the worthiest characters of the poem see it. (122)

Hence, Langbaum's reading ultimately and implicitly relies on a clearly defined and universally valid moral sense, common to all readers of dramatic monologues, by which they assess the worthiness of some characters in relation to those deemed less worthy.

c. Textual Processes

Langbaum's tendency to discuss monologue characters as though they were real people has been challenged by Philip Drew (32) and noted by Rader ("Dramatic Monologue" 133). However, whether critics implicitly agree with Langbaum on this point or not, when they begin to question the existential status of monologue speakers (either as independent entities or as representations of the poet's views), they frequently do so in

order to validate what they consider to be correct readings. Consequently, they posit their views as attempts to establish the meaning of monologues, the origin of which they locate either in the reader's interpretation or in the poet's intentions (or in Rader, both) — in any case, in a source external to the poem. More recently, theories which emphasize textual processes without resorting to external means of validation have begun to subvert the notion that there must be a fixed and authoritative consciousness which controls a poem's meaning. Modern readings highlight the ironies with which many Victorian poets believed themselves to be confronted, not in order to demonstrate a dialectical moral progression (as was the case in Shaw's and Ryals' readings), but in order to show how in monologues ironies and conflicts are dramatized but remain unresolved. Thus, Slinn notes that Post-romantic poetry became increasingly dramatic, "shifting the emphasis from what is perceived to the processes of perception, from the structure of an external world to the structuring powers of individual minds" (*Fictions* 1). Herbert F. Tucker describes the shift of critical approaches to monologues in his introduction to *Critical Essays on Alfred Lord Tennyson* (1993). Discussing the effects of cultural studies on twentieth-century critical scholarship, Tucker suggests that redoubled inquiry "into the dynamics of the self, and into the inherently differential character of language, has lately splintered the once sturdy lever of mid-century ego psychology." This and other developments now "call into question the psychological premises not only of textual formalism but also of contextual historicism as practiced until quite recently" (*Critical Essays* 6).

Tucker's own *Browning's Beginnings* (1980) exemplifies the tendency in current criticism to regard monologues as challenging the Romantic belief in an autonomous subject, both in his method of approaching Browning's monologues and in the readings he provides of the poems. Tucker maintains that Browning's art "resists its own finalities" (5). Browning's dramatic lyrics represent characters who are unable to reconcile their intentions with the language they appropriate in order to articulate their will: the lyric speaker "begins by turning his or her will into words, but begins to be a Browningsque speaker when this conversion leads to a turning of the

will *against* words" (153). Constantly in the process of beginning to speak themselves, Browning's speakers posit selves which are always anticipated, future to themselves, but never fixed or present. Elsewhere, Tucker elaborates the dilemma of Browning's characters, suggesting that although each monologist desires a return to a lyrical self in the Romantic sense, that self can only ever exist as an object of desire, constructed in the process of articulating a desire for the (assumed) lyrical self. Hence, monologists are always inevitably divided, "a quotient, a ratio of history and desire, a function of the division of the modern mind against itself" ("Overhearing" 231). Similarly, Slinn regards Victorian poetry as dramatizing a division of the self: "Poets, speakers, subjects face a terrifying prospect in Victorian poetry: they speak in order to establish the presence of their authority. . . . Yet the moment they speak, they commit the self to inevitable division" (*Discourse 2*).

In these readings, monologue speakers, like their modern readers, have no access to external referents which they may appropriate as fixed points in order to establish their selves. Rather, they are constantly in the process of attempting to articulate their desire, although any attempt to do so necessarily results in division — a division which precludes any possibility of achieving a unified, autonomous or lyrical self. In Loy D. Martin's words, Browning's new form produced "experimental discourses that could present powerful images of self-sufficiency only to torment them with irony, analysis, and the painful detailing of missed opportunities to reach beyond the self" (30).

Martin's discussion of dramatic monologues, published in 1985, recognizes the poems' challenge to the Cartesian *cogito*. In an argument similar to Tucker's, he claims that individual monologists posit hypothetical centres of being-in-language, but as soon as they attempt to articulate that being, language fuses them with other persons, other times, other cultures (28). Thus, Martin's discussion opens up the possibility for an intersubjective reading of dramatic monologues, although Martin himself focuses primarily on the semiotic processes at play in the poems.

To read monologues intersubjectively would be to investigate the extent to which monologuists construct not only themselves but also their interlocutors, while they themselves are constructed by them. Tilottama Rajan has remarked that the lyric is associated with logocentrism, "whereas drama makes explicit the dialogic nature of language, because the presence of more than one speaker makes the text . . . a perpetually shifting intersection of textual surfaces rather than something fixed" (203). Rajan takes issue with logocentric readings of Romantic lyrics, encouraging us to read them dialogically. The same can be suggested of monologues. If we accept that language is inherently dialogic, and expand Tucker's comments regarding the desire of monologuists to return to a lyrical self, monologues can be shown to resist logocentrism in favour of a more dialogic, dynamic, and intersubjective reading. Ashton Nichols undertakes to read Browning's monologues dialogically, suggesting that if we "examine [them] from the perspective of the dialogic utterance, we find numerous voices that lie just outside the text" (29). Nichols identifies a series of interactions in monologues, among "poet, poetic speaker, speaker's apparent self, speaker's 'hidden' self, and reader" (29-30), further claiming that although monologuists "often masquerade as offering a single-voiced, monological statement . . . they tend, at the same time, to reveal the inherent weakness of their effort" (31). Thus, although monologuists often attempt to produce monologic (or logocentric) utterances, such speech always and inevitably eludes them. Similarly, in my view the selves which emerge are constituted in an ongoing dynamic interaction with those at whom speakers address their speech. Consequently, a dialogic or intersubjective reading of dramatic monologues would inevitably include an investigation of the roles of interlocutors, actual or notional.

II The "Silent Auditor"

The importance given to interlocutors in dramatic monologue criticism varies considerably. While almost all critics make mention of them, some see interlocutors as all but unnecessary, while others see them as a vital component of the genre or at least

discuss their function in those poems in which an interlocutor is obviously present. However, one notion which all readings share is that interlocutors are autonomous entities, at most influencing but not constructing the speaker's speech, present but not constructed by the speaker. This section traces the various ways critics have discussed interlocutors, moving roughly from those discussions which see them as least significant to those which give them the most status.

Langbaum all but discounts the auditor as a significant player in the dramatic monologue. In his view, the speaker directs his utterance outward, but his speech can never reach its target. Thus, although Langbaum claims that the monologue represents one voice of a dialogue (156), in effect it functions as a closed circuit:

Not only does the speaker direct his address outward as in dialogue but the style of address gives the effect of a closed circuit, with the speaker directing his address outward in order that it may return with a meaning he was not aware of when sending it forth. I say a closed circuit because the utterance seems to be directed only obliquely at the ostensible auditor, and seems never to reach its ultimate goal with him. Nor does the essential interchange take place with the auditor; for even where the auditor's remarks are implied, the speaker never learns anything from them and they do not change the meaning of the utterance. (191)

Consequently, Langbaum views the monologue as "in its ultimate effect a private dialogue of the speaker with himself, leading to a private illumination" (196-97).

Yet Langbaum's description of the monologue as a closed circuit contradicts his discussion of "Andrea del Sarto," where he claims that Lucrezia indeed affects Andrea's speech. He maintains that while describing his past life to Lucrezia, Andrea uses the situation in order to "make love to Lucrezia, to persuade her to spend the evening home with him" (148). Andrea is, in Langbaum's account, trying to impress Lucrezia in a double way, "on the one hand, with all that he has sacrificed for her in the way of artistic accomplishment; and on the other, with how important a painter he nevertheless is" (149). In his conceptualization of the internal dynamics of dramatic monologues, Langbaum fails to articulate what he elsewhere exemplifies: that the interlocutor is an integral part of the monologue, and that while she or he might not

fulfil the requirements of a second speaker in a dialogue, she or he nevertheless contributes to the construction of the speaker's utterance.

Sinfield provides the most unusual and ambiguous claims about the interlocutor. He maintains that the dramatic monologue constitutes an ideal form through which poets can present their own views, allowing these to arise incidentally in the words of a speaker who only partially understands their significance. Using this poetic form, Victorian monologuists were able to avoid the visionary capacity expected of Romantic poets, not as a "dishonest failure to take responsibility for their views . . . but [in] recognition that truth is complex" (60). Sinfield aims primarily at a redefinition of the form, yet it is surprising to see that he has difficulty evaluating the role of the interlocutor, claiming that the "silent auditor is the most artificial and peculiar feature of dramatic monologue. . . . it is useful to have another person present because he acts as a catalyst, obliging the speaker to respond to an immediate challenge" (26).

In fact, in his discussion of "Andrea del Sarto" Sinfield, like Langbaum, gives the interlocutor more status than his attempts at defining the form might suggest. Sinfield claims that Andrea's aim is to please Lucrezia, and that Andrea's "sensitivity to his wife's reactions" (28) supports the illusion that Andrea is the speaker. Nevertheless, while Sinfield claims that the dramatic monologue incorporates the "task of following the thought of a speaker who is quite unaware of the *reader*" (29, emphasis added), he fails to mention that speakers are often very aware of their interlocutors.

Despite their differing views regarding the speaker (Langbaum sees him as an independent character while in Sinfield he represents the poet's mouthpiece), Langbaum's and Sinfield's readings present interlocutors as passive receptacles for the speaker's views. At most, interlocutors facilitate speakers' utterances. Yet more status is given to the interlocutor when she or he is viewed as an internal substitute for the reader. Such is the case in Shaw's, Flowers' and John Woolford's discussions. In *The Dialectical Temper*, Shaw claims that the "silent auditor has much the same relation to the speaker as the reader has; he is the reader's friend because he shares the same perspective" (60). As the subtitle of his book suggests (*The Rhetorical Art of Robert*

Browning), his discussion focuses on the rhetorical aspect of dramatic monologues. Shaw sees the speaker's role as dual: he must simultaneously persuade his auditor and must communicate his meaning to the reader. Similarly, in Flowers' view, the image (or mask) which she claims the speaker creates for the auditor is also the image the poem creates for the reader. Yet while Shaw collapses the role of the auditor and reader (the dramatic monologue form "forces Browning to begin with the rhetorical effect upon the speaker's imagined auditor, then to invent speech that will make the desired impression on the listener, who can function as the reader's surrogate or 'friend'" [60]), in Flowers the role of the interlocutor becomes secondary. In her reading there is a potential differentiation between the auditor's and the reader's perception, because the reader can see the artifice of the mask: "All the reader can see is the mask, and yet he sees it as a mask, and senses the presence of the real character beneath it" (Flowers 107). However, the extent to which the auditor is able to see the mask's artifice remains uninvestigated in Flowers' discussion. Rather, she views the auditor as a screen or mirror towards which the speaker directs his veiled subjective self. Ultimately in Flowers' reading, the effect on the auditor is irrelevant because all that counts is the reader's ability to distinguish objective fact which reveals the "true" character from the subjectively produced mask, and the subjective poet from the objective speaker. In the end, the poet controls the mask, animating it from within (115).

Woolford (1988) also regards the interlocutor as a way into the poem for the reader, claiming that interlocutors remain silent in order to give the speaker total power. That power, however, is compromised:

To complete the construal of a dramatic monologue's meaning, we require access to the response of the person to whom it is addressed, and for whom its rhetorical manoeuvres are intended. In withholding that response Browning forces the reader himself to provide it, and thus compels him to hypostasise a meaning beyond the periphery of the persona's intention.
(74)

Woolford's appraisal of the subjects involved in producing the meaning of dramatic monologues is far from clear. He posits speakers who are in control of their utterances and readers who control interpretation through (the lack of response from) the silent auditor. Yet Woolford also allows the poet to appear spontaneously, to resume a position of power, and subsequently to disappear: "By allowing the persona to speak, the poet abdicates a power which his reappearance as implied author allows him to resume; the fact that that implied author is constructed by the reader, allows the poet again to abdicate while the reader determines the poetic meaning" (70). In this process, the reader constructs the interlocutor's responses to what is, in effect, the poet's utterance. Thus, in Woolford's reading the interlocutor is not only silent but superfluous, gaining status only as a marker for the reader's presence.

Generally, critics agree that dramatic monologues present their readers with revelations of speakers' psyches. Most often, interlocutors are viewed as facilitating that revelation, and the way in which they do so is discussed variously. While Sessions insists that the speaker must be regarded as the leading dramatic figure, she also claims that the interplay between speaker and listener "reveals character and centers on the climactic effect on the speaker" (509). Expanding that view to a broader investigation of the role of the interlocutor, Park Honan suggests that the "hearer's presence serves to illumine the speaker's character" (153). In his discussion of "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St. Praxed's Church," Honan identifies four audiences which the speaker addresses. The shifts in the Bishop's utterance from one audience to another help to illustrate his state of mind at each point in the poem (150), even though the audiences in monologues are generally only ever indicated "through a few, select, emphasized characteristics, [the sum of which] is always less than the speaker's own character and always symbolically duplicated in it" (156).

Fred Kaplan (1972) takes Honan's discussion one step further, specifying the particular characteristic which he claims is revealed by Andrea del Sarto's interlocutor. Lucrezia represents an aspect of Andrea's psyche which also shapes the speaker's entire utterance: "she has no independent and 'realistic' existence within this

poem except as a projection of Andrea's own death impulse" (105). In his discussion, Kaplan acknowledges the possibility that speakers unwittingly construct their interlocutors as projections of themselves. Yet his model lacks the flexibility of later readings. Lucrezia comes to represent only one aspect of Andrea's psyche (his death impulse). Further, Kaplan's model suggests that Lucrezia is fixed in her function of representing Andrea's death wish, implicitly symbolizing it even before Andrea begins to speak. In Kaplan's reading, she is not produced as Andrea's self-projection *during* his act of speaking to her; nor is she the product of an ongoing interaction with Andrea, whom she fails to construct in any way. Rather, she represents Andrea's alter ego, a notion which leads Kaplan to suggest that, for Andrea, to attack Lucrezia is to attack himself (100). For the reader, to understand (Kaplan's) Lucrezia is to understand only (and only to understand) one aspect of Andrea's psyche. (Presumably there could be other interlocutors representing other versions of Andrea.) Kaplan summarizes: "Browning creates a past in which Andrea reveals that the limits of his vision . . . are connected directly to the failure that amounts to his life" (102). That failure is represented by his interlocutor, Lucrezia.

Kaplan quite clearly allows for the possibility that speakers construct their interlocutors: "Had Andrea not stolen Francis's money . . . and had Lucrezia not 'grown restless' or indeed had she never existed as an historical personage, Andrea's accomplishment would have been no more than it was. He would have created another Lucrezia" (107). Yet Kaplan fails to investigate the implications of his discussion, for example by examining the extent to which Andrea has indeed created the first Lucrezia. Even in Kaplan's reading, Lucrezia's historical, "real" existence overrides any possibility that she is first and foremost Andrea's construction.

Other critics have gone further in attempting to allow interlocutors the status I propose they deserve. Mermin in particular investigates the role of the interlocutor to a considerable extent. She begins her investigation by emphasizing the significance of the interlocutor in monologues. The auditor's responsiveness, she claims, determines the poem's movement and meaning, and considerably affects the course of the utterance.

Mermin's study hinges on the notion that, unlike other forms of poetry, dramatic monologues contain an auditor "from whom the speaker wants (and often gets) a response . . . while he is speaking" (*Audience 2*). Opening up the possibility for a dynamic, intersubjective reading of monologues, she insists that both the utterance and the poem's meaning are affected by the auditor's response or refusal to respond. However, Mermin qualifies her approach by maintaining the auditor must be "human, adult, alive, awake, physically present, and able to hear and respond" (*Audience 2*); in other words, Mermin's auditor must be as close an approximation of a real auditor as possible. Later in her investigation, Mermin reintroduces the hidden poet, claiming that poets used the dramatic monologue form in order to veil their own opinions or their private beliefs:

If the speaker is characterized as someone other than the poet, the poet can disavow his words, and dramatic context can always justify them. . . . Thus the poet can incorporate into the poem the reader he wants or fears, and try out ways of talking to him. He can objectify possible relationships between artists and audience, and show how different relationships produce different kinds of speech. (*Audience 8*)

What is fundamental in Mermin's reading is the notion that she, and presumably her readers, are able to differentiate between poems which represent the poet's own voice and those which characterize someone else's. Implicitly, the reader is to take the interlocutor's place, although whether or not she considers herself addressed by the poet or by a fictional character when she appropriates that role remains a question of how she interprets the speaker.

Martin's approach to the interlocutor is similar to Mermin's, although he extends some of her initial presumptions. According to Martin, dramatic monologues represent a form of subjectivity, incorporating new devices of reciprocity and exchange absent from previous poetic forms. Individual speakers posit hypothetical centres of being-in-language, but the very fact that they exist in language fuses them with others. In a move similar to Mermin's, Martin sees the possibility of response by the interlocutor as crucial to the form. But while Mermin retreats at this point,

claiming indirectly that the interlocutor's role parallels the reader's, Martin locates the possibility of response as a product of the speaker's consciousness:

The listener's ability to respond is always 'there' in the consciousness of the speaker, either as potential or as realized fact, but it cannot be 'there' in the dramatic monologue. . . . The dramatic monologue, in other words, presents a delicate antithesis between the speaking subject as isolated and that same subject as constituted only by language in the process of communication and exchange. (132)

Similarly, in *Fictions of Identity* Slinn implicitly considers the interlocutor as the key to the speaker's psyche, yet in such a way that any self which emerges from the text is seen as the product of discursive processes. With reference to the interlocutor Slinn claims: "In the attempt to persuade an auditor, there is a reciprocal process which means that the speaker in a monologue demonstrates a deeply felt desire for both self-definition and self-understanding" (14-15). What is implicit but not articulated in Slinn's reading is the possibility that his "reciprocal process" can be read in terms of the interrelationship between speaker and interlocutor. The way Slinn portrays it, the reciprocal action is exclusively the product of the speaker's internal, psychological processes. But if his model is expanded to include the interlocutor, the speaker's "simultaneous straining for self-expression and effort to view himself realistically" (14) necessarily occurs in relation to the other, who, after all, is as much a product of the utterance as the speaker himself. In his later essay, "Hegel and Browning" (1989), Slinn indeed articulates the significance of the interlocutor. Basing his discussion on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, he states:

Hegel's conception that desire and identity are determined by the existence and impact of an opposing consciousness and yet also act on their own behalf, would seem to apply directly to the monologue form, particularly in terms of the function of the auditor. Both Hegel and Browning explore a conception of selfhood as being determined simultaneously by the structures of an interpersonal exchange and by the structures of personal desire. Each set of structures (the exchange and the desire) is the condition of the other. (95)

Later still, in his *Discourse of Self in Victorian Poetry*, Slinn discusses the discursive processes at play in monologues:

For speakers to be speakers ('voices'), they must enter the double process of discourse, becoming 'characters' who both act and are acted. They act through the production of their own rhetoric and they are acted upon by the language (public and institutional) which structures their conceptualising. Hence the drama of voices becomes an interaction of personally assigned concept and socially produced image. And the relationship between self and other is dialectical, a continuing process of weaving and transformation, definition and dissolution. (*Discourse* 149-50)

This "double process" between self and other-as-discourse and between self and other-as-interlocutor is what is at stake in this study.

III Testing the Interlocutor in "My Last Duchess"

According to Martin, the interlocutor is one of the most commonly observed features of dramatic monologues (131). However, few critics have discussed the ways in which interlocutors produce monologuists' utterance. "My Last Duchess" is a case in point. Critics recognize the envoy as the Duke's interlocutor, but the role he is seen to play in the poem is generally one of passive acquiescence, although some critics acknowledge that his presence affects the speaker's utterance. Paradoxically, the Duchess is afforded much more attention, despite the fact that she is dead. The following discussion will examine the ways in which the Duke, the Duchess and the envoy have been viewed in the past, and the ways in which critics view the relationships between them.

a. The Duke

Browning's monologues have long been recognized as dramatizations of their speakers' psyches, and it is therefore no surprise that discussions about the poems focus primarily on the way his speakers speak about themselves. However, there appears to be an almost infinite number of ways in which these speakers' psyches can be seen to function. For example, many critics engage in the debate about whether or not

Browning can be identified as agreeing with his speakers, and if he can, about the extent and means of his control over his readers' responses.

Most discussions of "My Last Duchess" focus therefore predominantly on the Duke, who is variously seen as artfully compelling, manipulative, controlling, and even insane. Because he is generally regarded as evil, those critics who otherwise claim that the speaker is in some way the poet are unable to reconcile the Duke's malevolence with what they assume to be Browning's benevolence and integrity. Sinfield, for example, suggests that the speaker as the poet's mouthpiece "is not an important aspect of 'My Last Duchess', though we may conclude from the poem that Browning prefers the qualities of the Duchess to those of the Duke" (13).

Langbaum gives the most dazzlingly favourable, but also the most condemning appraisal of the Duke. He claims that initially the reader is sympathetically drawn towards the Duke on the basis of his "conviction of matchless superiority, his intelligence and bland amorality, his poise, his taste for art, his manners" (83). Seduced by his utterance, the reader is then suddenly confronted (in lines 47-52) with "a series of shocks that outstrip each time our understanding of the duke, and keep us panting after revelation with no opportunity to consolidate our impression of him for moral judgement" (84). Although in the final ten lines the Duke's sanity is called into question, the final two-and-a-half lines cause the reader to suspend her moral judgement, which threatens to intervene during the "series of shocks." In Langbaum's discussion of the poem, the reader's continuing sympathy for the Duke right until the very end is a precondition for understanding the poem. Thus, the reader must approach the poem with a willingness to see the world through the Duke's eyes; the reader's sympathetic approach to the Duke will provide her with "a meaning not inherent in the content itself but determined peculiarly by the treatment" (85).

Shaw also remarks upon the seductiveness of the Duke's utterance, describing it as a verbal "'courtship' of an inferior" (102). Yet while Langbaum discusses the way in which the reader responds with sympathy to a character who eventually reveals himself as insane (85), Shaw identifies the Duke's insanity as a perfect example of

Freud's obsessional neurosis. In order to avoid facing the reality of his past, the Duke is "staging a 'show' which enables him to transform his domestic past into what he believes it should have been" (104).

The question which appears to perplex critics the most is why the Duke speaks at all, and in particular, why he speaks to the messenger on whom his future marriage and entailing financial well-being depends. A commonly proposed answer is that the Duke's description of his last Duchess is intended as a warning to the future Duchess, communicated to her through the envoy. Curry, Sessions, Shaw, Honan, and Rader subscribe to this view. By contrast, Langbaum maintains that there is no perceptible reason in the poem for the Duke's utterance. He suggests that the reader must find the cause of the Duke's speech outside the poem by supplementing it with her own experience. Sinfield's view is similar: he suggests that we know the Duke through his own mind, but we also gain a larger view because "we feel the pressure of an alternative way of viewing these matters" (34). Presumably, Sinfield's "pressure" comprises our moral judgement, which Langbaum claims we must subordinate to our sympathy. Consequently, while Langbaum claims we must bring our sympathy to the poem, Sinfield implies that in reading we are subject to the external imposition of moral values which expand our reading and our understanding. Thus, in both Langbaum's and Sinfield's discussion, critics and their readers are implicitly presumed capable of separating their experience of the poem from their wider experiences, their sympathy from their judgement, and their personal responses from a generally valid, external social response.

Mermin opens up the possibility of reading "My Last Duchess" in terms of textual processes, suggesting that because the poem is "mostly about speech," the Duke's "license to speak derives from, reinforces, and demonstrates his power" (*Audience* 49). However, Mermin subsequently refers to historical and biographical evidence in order to conclude that the Duke "has the freedom, the 'license,' Browning thought all poets want" — the license to speak out without inhibition (*Audience* 50). Tucker's discussion, based more firmly on the textuality which constructs the

speaker's psychology, suggests an analogy between the Duke's interpretive activities and those of Browning's readers. Tucker's Duke represents the "ducal reader" of poetry, "that impulse within every reader that would settle for a formulaic reduction of poetic meaning." The ducal reader "acts out of self-defense in order to allay a private suspicion that without such a reduction meaning may be quite absent" (*Browning's Beginnings* 182). However, Tucker's ducal reader is merely an impulse, and while in his utterance the Duke might remain unconscious of the "gap between signs and meanings" (181), the reader must resist any temptation to read Browning's poems in search of closure.

The trap which the Duke produces for himself as he attempts to fix himself and others in order to prove what might be called his own "lyricism" forms the basis of Slinn's study. Implicitly undermining Flowers' notion that the Duke hides his true self behind a mask constructed for the envoy (Flowers 106), Slinn suggests that the Duke "is the constructed persona, his own mask" (*Fictions* 41). Such a view echoes Peckham, who insists that there are no secrets behind the monologues, that in fact the secret is "that there is no secret. Behind the speaker is everything, and nothing" (Peckham 117-18). In Slinn's reading, there is no poet or true self hiding behind the Duke's utterance. The utterance which the Duke speaks *is* the Duke, who shapes his self and his world in a formidable act of solipsism (*Fictions* 41). Thus, by implication, Slinn suggests that "My Last Duchess" represents the Duke's attempt at lyrical or monologic speech. However, his attempt is unsuccessful. His speech provides little solace and certainly no exclusive control or freedom, because "the monarchy of [the Duke's] ego requires a domination of self as well as others" (*Fictions* 41). Consequently, in his attempt to control others by fixing them in particular roles, the Duke remains limited by the controlling role he must necessarily appropriate in order to attempt to fix others.

Slinn suggests that one of the main limitations the Duke implicitly imposes on himself is an inability to respond spontaneously. The Duke's intolerant desire to control his environment means that he was unable to accept his Duchess's spontaneity

and vitality. Artefacts, however, provide him with a means of replacing chaotic reality with ordered artifice. In the end, the Duke had the Duchess murdered, but only after having had her image reproduced in a painting.

b. The Duchess

The notion that the Duchess has become fixed as a work of art is widely accepted by monologue critics. Langbaum claims that the Duke had taken from his Duchess what he wanted (her beauty, now represented in the painting) before throwing away the life (84), while A. Dwight Culler (1975) claims the Duke had fixed the Duchess in a single moment (383). Culler juxtaposes Browning's "My Last Duchess" with his own description of how the poem would look and function if it had been written as a monodrama instead of as a dramatic monologue. (Culler's essay constitutes an attempt at differentiating the two forms.) Culler suggests that as a monodrama "My Last Duchess" would have been spoken by the Duchess (and presumably he would need the poem's title to be changed). Speaking in prison, moments before her death, Culler's monodramatic Duchess would have "begun with a low moan at her wretched state, would have remembered how her husband had grown increasingly tyrannical" and would have then fondly reminisced about her past. "The point of the poem," claims Culler, "would have been the varied passions of the lady." Instead, Browning portrays the painting rather than the Duchess in order to show how the Duke had fixed her, and in so doing "himself, in a posture of cold pride and esthetic detachment" (383).

Culler's sympathy with the Duchess comes close to Langbaum's view that the Duchess's goodness "shines through the duke's utterance" (83). Like most critics, Langbaum reads the poem as the revelation of the Duke's character, rendering the Duchess significant only to the extent that the Duke's narrative about her allows the reader to draw conclusions about the Duke. By contrast, Tucker gives her a more active role, suggesting that she continues to affect the Duke's utterance even after her death. Tucker allows for the fact that the Duke is not simply remembering his Duchess as she

had lived, but is interpreting what he remembers about her in terms of his present needs and objectives. Tucker argues that despite the Duke's attempt to fix her in the painting, "her joyful energy breaks into his discourse" through the spot of joy on her cheek — precisely that marker of independence which the Duke had meant to eradicate when he had his Duchess murdered. Ultimately, in Tucker's view, she has resisted the Duke's attempts to "tak[e] her meaning" from her (*Browning's Beginnings* 179).

c. The Envoy

While discussions of "My Last Duchess" often go to considerable lengths to describe the Duke's relationship with and past crime against his Duchess, thus emphasizing her role in the monologue, discussions about the envoy's role are far less common and less detailed. Frequently, the envoy is mentioned only in passing. However, when critics comment upon him in more detail, his function is understood in a number of ways.

Some critics regard the envoy as a passive presence to whom the Duke addresses his speech. Sinfield, for example, claims that the envoy does not materially affect the Duke's utterance, although his presence raises the question of why the Duke is prepared to speak in this manner to him. Langbaum ambiguously states that the utterance is "not quite directed to the auditor," but avoids demonstrating why the Duke's speech fails to reach its (presumed) target (201). Sessions gives the envoy more credit, claiming that "My Last Duchess" is a perfect monologue, fulfilling all seven of her criteria, including "interplay between speaker and audience" (508). In fact, Sessions suggests that the hearer has a certain influence on the speaker because his remarks and questions are inherent in the Duke's utterance (509). Slinn, by contrast, maintains that those remarks and questions are fabricated by the Duke, not by the envoy (*Fictions* 41), and that they consequently function as further evidence of the Duke's desire to control others because he even constructs their potential responses.

Those discussions which acknowledge the envoy's presence tend to do so in various ways: some emphasize the need for an interlocutor for speech to occur at all,

thus suggesting that the envoy's presence is a technical (or formal) necessity (as in Sessions); others focus on the envoy's role as the Count's messenger, claiming that this particular interlocutor in some way affects the content of the Duke's speech. (The latter view has, in part, engendered the debate about whether the Duke reveals himself deliberately or unintentionally; Shaw and Rader suggest deliberation and calculation while Langbaum, Sinfield, and Ryals emphasize the gratuitous, unintentional, and generative nature of the Duke's speech.) Still other critics see the envoy as an internal substitute for the reader. Of course, these ways of discussing the envoy are not mutually exclusive; in fact, the notion that the interlocutor is vital to the form is often linked to the view that he is necessary in order to give the reader access to the speaker's psyche.

Shaw's reading of "My Last Duchess" implies that the envoy is vital both to the poem's form and to the poet's act of creation. As has been shown, Shaw views dramatic monologues as fundamentally rhetorical. He maintains that Browning's creative act begins with his creation of a suitable auditor (60). In Shaw's reading the envoy is the Duke's literal audience: the Duke stages a show in an obsessive attempt to regain his past as he believes it should have been. Further, Shaw states that this particular envoy is "precisely the person to revive the Duke's memories of his last marriage" (99). The envoy's suitability hinges on Shaw's belief that he is both important enough to allow the Duke to relish his acts of manipulation, but also insignificant enough^{not} to threaten the Duke's sense of (implicitly solipsistic) power over him (99). The Duke and the envoy have an unspoken agreement: while the Duke exerts his power by acting out his play, the envoy must also act his proper role as the Duke's audience (95). Finally, Shaw claims that the reader is addressed in the same way as the auditor, as in the end both feel that they, rather than the Duke, are being inspected (94).

Shaw's reading implies that the envoy represents the site at which the reader enters the poem, a notion supported by Culler, Flowers, Tucker and Ryals. Culler expands his discussion of stasis in the poem to include the reader: while the Duke fixes his Duchess in the "stasis of a work of art" and thereby fixes himself, the envoy's "eye

is fixed upon the [Duchess'] spot of joy and his ear upon the [Duke's] cold intonation of pride" (383). The envoy must consequently make the choice between what his eyes see and his ears hear. Similarly, the reader, in the same position as the envoy, must "listen, view, understand, and make his choice" (383). As already shown, Flowers sees the Duke's mask, created for the envoy, as simultaneously the image with which the reader is presented, although unlike the interlocutor, the reader is aware that she is observing a mere mask. Flowers implicitly distinguishes between that which the envoy perceives and that which the reader comes to know: only the reader recognizes the Duke's utterance as a mask because the poet is within it, animating it. Tucker establishes a textual parallel between interlocutor and reader, seeing the Duke's address to the envoy as an analogy for the monologue's address to the reader, both relationships "compulsively bringing interpretive issues into discursive prominence" (*Browning's Beginnings* 178). Ryals implicitly suggests that we read the Duke in the same way the envoy does, suggesting that reader and envoy are equally fascinated by his compelling speech (151).

Finally, John Maynard (1987) provides a reading which is more complex and dynamic than those which suggest a direct correlation between the interlocutor and the reader. Maynard triangulates the conventional model, suggesting that the reader's position is determined by the relative positions of speaker and listener:

As overhearer rather than direct audience of the poem, the reader is drawn into a position vis à vis the speaker by his evaluation of, or reaction to, the speaker's rhetorical relation to the listener in the poem. We have, in effect, a rhetoric of speaker on reader at one remove, as a kind of vector determined by both speaker and listener. (107)

In Maynard's reading of "My Last Duchess" (which is somewhat tongue-in-cheek), the "poor" envoy's "moral inertia" repels rather than entices the reader, forcing the reader to assume a stance in opposition to the envoy's, as "rescuer, or at least avenger, of abused innocence" (110). However, at the same time, the reader is enthralled by the rhetoric of the Duke's speech. As a result of these opposing pressures, the reader

eventually finds herself in the uncomfortable position of Neptune's sea-horse, which also symbolizes the Duchess. Maynard thus posits a reader who is drawn into the dynamics of the poem both by the interlocutor and the speaker, suggesting that the responses readers might have are as fluid and ambivalent as the situation portrayed in the poem (111).

Although the interpretations of the characters in "My Last Duchess" differ considerably, there are a number of consistent assumptions made by critics. Most notably, the envoy is regarded as the only interlocutor in the poem. Further, he is discussed under the assumption that he represents a consciousness which is entirely discrete and autonomous from the Duke's. The envoy might be influenced by or might influence the Duke, but no discussions suggest that his perceived persona might be the product of the Duke's utterance. Similarly, no readings seriously doubt the veracity of the Duke's utterance, but view his speech as a fixed record of his emotional state at the time of speaking. The following discussion suggests a way of reading "My Last Duchess" as a web of intersubjective processes in which not one but two interlocutors construct and are constructed by the speaker.

IV The Duke, the Duchess, and the Envoy

It is unlikely there will be any critical opposition to the notion that the envoy in "My Last Duchess" functions as the Duke's interlocutor. However, his role is often viewed as one of influence or of being influenced, suggesting that the Duke and the envoy constitute separate, autonomous entities who meet, affect each other a little, and subsequently part. Yet as Slinn and Tucker have pointed out, monologues represent subjects in the process of constructing themselves through discourse. Although they might attempt to produce controlling, unitary selves, the act of uttering commits them to a division and precludes the establishment of precisely that lyrical self they ostensibly yearn for. Expanding on Slinn's and Tucker's readings, if we attempt to comprehend the dialogicality of post-Romantic poetry — and Rajan suggests of Romantic poetry also — we can examine the extent to which speakers not only construct

their texts, but are simultaneously constructed in and by them. The subjects which emerge are indeed divided, and that division is made manifest in the utterance by the interlocutor.

The Duke of Ferrara addresses his interlocutor (the envoy) in order to intimidate him, to warn the future Duchess through him, to exert power over him and to justify his actions to himself or to his interlocutor. He may also speak as a sign of goodwill, or possibly to pass the time so that the "company below" (48) might believe that lengthy negotiations have occurred, although it is impossible to ascertain the extent of the dealings which have taken place before we enter the scene. Most likely, some or all of these motives have caused the Duke's utterance. However, the aim of this discussion is not to determine the Duke's motivations or intentions. Such an attempt must necessarily remain speculative. Rather, this reading will investigate the roles of two interlocutors — the envoy and the Duchess — in the Duke's utterance.

In "My Last Duchess," the Duke attempts to construct a centre of being for himself from which he can dominate all others. The roles in which he casts the envoy attest to his desire for control, asserting his own superiority in relation to his interlocutor's inferiority. The Duke addresses the envoy as one man to another, displaying his possessions, and assuming that the envoy will appreciate their value (1-5, 53-56). Further, he reminds his interlocutor of his own superior aristocratic standing (33). And although he mentions that he needs the dowry, and is therefore to some extent dependent on the Count, his allusion to it functions as an aside, uttered towards the end of his speech when he has already established his authoritative position (49-51). However, although the Duke appears to produce himself successfully as the commanding centre of the situation, the very fact that he needs to assert his dominance (and to a social inferior) undermines that which the Duke is attempting to prove: that his centre of being is unquestionably fixed and permanently in control.

By establishing his dominance over the envoy, the Duke implicitly dispenses with him as a significant interlocutor. As the Duke speaks (to) him, the envoy becomes merely one of a series of insignificant strangers for whose benefit the Duke displays

the Duchess' painting (6-7). Thus, the envoy emerges as an empty marker, a mere facilitator to the Duke's speech. However, the speaker does engage in an interaction with an interlocutor who is far less easily located, much less fixed. I shall argue here that the Duchess represents the Duke's other interlocutor.

The Duke uses the envoy as a means of testing his control, and to the extent that the envoy remains silent, his test is successful. However, the Duke's apparent need to discuss his last Duchess in order to affirm his own control suggests a residual insecurity about her role in his life. Implicitly, although she is dead, she still represents a voice with which the Duke seems constrained to contend. For example, as he speaks he constructs her as beautiful, disloyal, disrespectful, happy and, worst of all in his rendition, independent. However, as he represents her in this light she simultaneously and reciprocally constructs him — as deceitful, arrogant, miserly, jealous, implicitly unpopular and, worst of all for him, dependent on her, both in the sense that his past jealousy suggests a deep-seated reluctance to allow her to mix socially with others, as well as in the sense that he still needs her as a means of testing his own position.

The Duke's continued dependence on the Duchess constitutes the limits of his existence, although he himself exhibits no awareness either of his dependence on her or of his own limits. Yet he seems condemned to deal continually with her, implicitly until such time as she ceases to affect his apperception. In one sense, the Duke has already exerted the ultimate control over his Duchess — he has had her killed. Her death means that at least on one level, she is unable to undermine his dominance; a mere work of art has taken her once subversive place. However, on another level, she continues to construct him through her image on the wall. Thus, precisely because she is dead, she 'escapes her husband's control. As Tucker has pointed out, in the painting she still smiles in direct and defiant contradiction to the Duke's claim that "all smiles stopped together" (46).

In the Duchess' physical absence, her portrait comes to signify the Duke's ongoing contention with her. He indeed regulates her entrances and exits: he can pull

the curtain back at will, or leave the painting covered, and he uses this action as a symbol of his power when he displays the Duchess to his visitors. However, although the Duke fails to realize it, once he draws the curtain, the portrait of the Duchess both confirms and denies his power over her. On the one hand it confirms his power because it is, after all, a mere painting. Yet on the other hand, once the portrait has become visible, the Duke is unable to exclude the Duchess from his utterance, and consequently from his apperception. He must continue to struggle against her residual subversiveness which exists, as far as the reader and the envoy are concerned, only as a smile, "painted on the wall" (1).

However, in order to validate what he tries to construct as his power over the Duchess, the Duke needs others. It is no coincidence that the envoy is merely one of a series of strangers for whom the Duke draws back the curtain, for the speaker can only gain an understanding of himself if his utterance is recognized by others. When alive, the Duchess had functioned as his other. Constructing himself in relation to her, he had continually and unsuccessfully attempted to establish the dominant position he seems to feel is his due. However, since her death he has become dependent on others whom he unwittingly hopes will confirm that the Duchess is dead, and hence finally in his control. Without that confirmation she remains at least partially alive.

The Duke draws others like the envoy into his utterance, seducing them, to use Shaw's term, in order to establish a fixed centre of being. What he requires of them is their acknowledgement of his ducal power. However, the very fact that he needs them in order to deal with his other interlocutor, with whom he is still locked in a dialogic struggle for dominance, further undermines his already tenuous position. The Duke needs the Duchess in order to produce himself as controlling, and also needs the envoy (or others like him) to confirm that controlling self. Thus he has inadvertently produced a model for constructing a fixed and autonomous self which depends on both interlocutors for verification; and the fact that he is dependent on their verification undermines the unambiguously controlling self he is seeking to produce.

In this chapter I have shown how critics have discussed dramatic monologues in the past, in particular with regard to the role of the interlocutor, and how an intersubjective reading of "My Last Duchess" might take shape. Given the theoretical context within which all but the most recent critics were writing, it is not surprising to find that little attention has been given to the intersubjective processes involved in the construction of monologuists' utterances. Nor is it surprising to find that the role of interlocutors has not been investigated in terms of theories which allow for intersubjective appraisals of dramatic monologues. Before providing new readings of four of Browning's dramatic monologues, I shall now outline those theories which have informed my discussions of them, and which provide intersubjective models of consciousness.

CHAPTER TWO

INTERSUBJECTIVE AND DISCURSIVE THEORIES

I Introduction

As was argued in the previous chapter, in the past, dramatic monologue critics have tended to underestimate the role of the interlocutor. Although some have acknowledged that speakers produce themselves in their texts, and consequently have no recourse to an external or transcendental truth, the extent to which speakers also construct their interlocutors has gone unnoticed. Further, the majority of discussions are based on idealist assumptions regarding subjectivity. They view language as a transparent medium, capable of accurately bearing a true message; many insist on the exclusivity of the poet's authority, and when they do not, they often merely relocate authority from the poet to the reader, believing that the reader is capable of revealing the poet's true intentions through a close analysis of his texts; and, most importantly for this discussion, most critics view the speaker and the interlocutor as discrete and autonomous entities. In so doing, they display aspects of Descartes' subjective idealism which has continued to dominate Western philosophy for the past 300 years.

More recent criticism of Browning's poems has unsettled some of the fundamental tenets which earlier discussions took for granted. As Martin has pointed out, monologues undermine traditional philosophy regarding the human subject: "The dramatic monologue, more perhaps than any other literary form, challenges the immense prestige of the Cartesian dualism of the self and the other" (28). Martin further states that while the monologue "exclusively displays the unique individual, it allows him or her to exist only as an indissoluble part of something that is not himself or herself and thereby lays siege to the sovereignty of the *Cogito* as a basis for subjectivity" (28). In Martin's discussion, that "something" which partakes in the speaker's utterance in Browning's monologues comprises the speaker's social environment. Consequently, Martin is able to argue for a speaker whose subjectivity is linked to something beyond himself which is not transcendental. Similarly, in Tucker's

and Slinn's discussions the other which disallows any recourse to a transcendental realm the speaker might like to establish comprises the textual processes of language. However, Slinn's and Tucker's readings still provide for subjects — speakers and interlocutors — who are potentially separate and discrete from one another. In my reading, the other whose position undermines any speaker's claim to exclusive autonomy is the interlocutor.

As was the case in Chapter One, part of the following chapter proceeds to some extent against the grain of historical chronology. In keeping with the historical sequence, my discussion of Descartes' theory precedes that of Hegel's work. Following Hegel, I briefly discuss Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, a collection of lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (also translated as the *Phenomenology of Mind*), delivered from 1933 to 1939 at the École des Hautes Études in Paris. Kojève's work helps to elucidate some of Hegel's concepts. A discussion of the Bakhtin School's work follows the discussion of Kojève's. However, it should be noted that Voloshinov's and some of Bakhtin's works were published several years before Kojève presented his lectures. The Bakhtin School was made up of varying combinations of members, and over the years it met in several locations. Ann Shukman writes that the group met in Nevel' (sic) in 1918, and consisted of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1981), V.N. Voloshinov (c. 1894-1936), L.V. Pumpyansky (1891-1940), future pianist M.V. Yudina (1899-1970), poet, sculptor and eccentric B.M. Zubakin (1894-1937), and philosopher M.I. Kagan (1889-1937). Later, the group reformed in Vitebsk, joined by P.N. Medvedev (1892-1938), and I.I. Sollertinsky (1902-1944). Others associated with the Bakhtin School are I.I. Kanaev, M.I. Tubyansky, and K.K. Vaginov (Shukman 1). This thesis deals with works by Voloshinov and Bakhtin.

The Bakhtin School published a number of significant works during the mid- to the late-1920s (in Russian).¹ Lacan (1901-1981), who was born and died within

¹In *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* Michael Holquist indicates that Bakhtin claimed to have published some works (written between 1924 and 1929) under Medvedev's, Voloshinov's and Kanaev's names. Holquist concludes: "I hold to the opinion that Bakhtin is, in his own charged sense of the word, primarily responsible for the texts in question" (8). By contrast, my

only a few years of Bakhtin, published his first article in 1933, but he is best known for his seminars presented from the late-40s to the mid-60s. (Many of these were collected, edited, and published by his son-in-law Jacques-Alain Miller from the mid-60s on.) Translations of Lacan's work became available to the English speaking public in the 1970s, while the Bakhtin School's work was published in English slightly later, mostly during the 1980s. In my discussion, I deal with the Bakhtin School last, preceded by Lacan, because in this chapter it is my intention to move from the least to the most fully intersubjective theory. Thus, although Hegel, Kojève, and Lacan subvert the Cartesian idealist model, and open the possibility of reading texts intersubjectively, I believe that Bakhtinian dialogism provides us with the most liberated and liberating concepts for reading texts, and indeed our worlds, intersubjectively.

II Descartes' Subjective Idealism

Descartes' subjective idealism was based on doubt. Descartes begins his *Discourse* by rejecting as "absolutely false all opinions in regard to which I could suppose the least ground for doubt, in order to ascertain whether after that there remained aught in my belief that was wholly indubitable" (26). Doubting the reality of appearances on the basis that our senses may deceive us, rejecting empirically proven truths on the basis that human reasoning may be erroneous, and deducing from his experience of dreams that all thoughts must necessarily be illusions, Descartes concluded that the only truth about which he could be absolutely certain was his "I." It alone could prove all thoughts other than its own "cogito, ergo sum" to be false: "from the very circumstance that I thought to doubt of the truth of other things, it most clearly and certainly followed that I was" (27).

reading follows Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson's view that "there is no convincing reason to credit Bakhtin with the authorship of the disputed texts" (102). I shall therefore refer to members of the Bakhtin School as separate authors (and collectively as the Bakhtin School). See Morson and Emerson's chapter three, "The Disputed Texts" (101-19) for a discussion of the debate regarding authorship.

Descartes' first principle posits a self which is conscious to its very core, and which is radically discrete and autonomous. It stands in irrevocable opposition to all else, including all other conscious beings, which are mere objects external to the thinking "I," and including its own physical existence:

. . . I observed that I could suppose that I had no body, and that there was no world nor any place in which I might be. . . . I thence concluded that I was a substance whose whole essence or nature consists only in thinking, and which, that it may exist, has need of no place, nor is dependent on any material thing; so that 'I,' that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body. (27)

Yet although Descartes describes a self which he regards as fundamentally unified, his formula for representing his essential self suggests division. In order to claim exclusive autonomy, Descartes needed not only to establish an incontrovertible self, but also needed to prove its existence. In order to do so, he separated his thinking self from his existing self: "*ego cogito, ergo ego sum*." As Vincent Descombes states, the "conflict of consciousness exists in embryonic form within the Cartesian *cogito*. For what was known as 'the philosophy of consciousness', that is, for the Cartesian tradition, the 'I think, I am', was at once the *origin* and the *rule* of all truth" (22). For Descartes, such reasoning was unproblematic. The ego which thinks is, in his view, "ergo" the same ego which is. As Hegel has pointed out, in Descartes' metaphysics

. . . being and thought are inherently the same. . . . The real essence is here divided assunder in such a way that, to begin with, it appertains to two specifically distinct modes of thinking. In part, the real must hold distinction in itself; in part, just by so doing, both ways of considering it merge into one. (594).

In Descartes' method each "ego" reciprocally validates the other, for the thinking ego confirms the subject's existence, while the ego which is allows the subject to rationalize itself. In modern critical thought, this method is now known as the "'logic of identity' . . . that form of thought which cannot represent the *other* to itself without reducing it to the *same*, and thereby subordinating difference to identity" (Descombes

75). Thus, Descartes' logic of identity fails to recognize that language, which more recent theories argue constitutes thought, is merely a representation of that which can never be fully accounted for — the self. The "I" established by Descartes is self-confirmatory and can only be conceptualized as fixed and immutable because it is produced by a self-enclosed, circular model. Such reasoning, taken to its extreme, leads to solipsism.

Descartes was well aware that his method posed some problems, particularly in relation to God. Acknowledging his own limitations — that his method of doubt could never lead to full, transcendental knowledge — he concluded that his own imperfection was a consequence of his human condition:

The idea, I say, of a being supremely perfect, and infinite, is in the highest degree true. . . . And this [idea] is true, nevertheless, although I do not comprehend the infinite, and although there may be in God an infinity of things that I cannot comprehend, nor perhaps even compass by thought in any way; for it is of the nature of the infinite that it should not be comprehended by the finite. (105)

In order to account for his limitations, Descartes needed to explain how he could know of God's infinity without ever being able to attain a state of infinity himself. He suggested that God had instilled in humans the faculty of reason, with whose aid we are able to know of God's infinity and comprehend our own finiteness in relation to Him:

. . . considering only that God is my creator, it is highly probable that he in some way fashioned me after his own image and likeness, and that I perceive this likeness, in which is contained the idea of God, by the same faculty by which I apprehend myself, — in other words, when I make myself the object of reflection, I not only find that I am an incomplete (imperfect) and dependent being, and one who unceasingly aspires after something better and greater than he is; but, at the same time, I am assured likewise that he upon whom I am dependent possesses in himself all the goods after which I aspire . . . and that he is thus God. (110)

Descartes' human reason, fashioned on God's, is therefore transcendental and essential. Yet in this passage, Descartes' argument replicates the same circular model used in his production of the thinking, existing self: he confirms God's existence by claiming

knowledge of His perfection to which Descartes himself has no access, although he knows of its existence because God has given him the faculty of reason, which allows him to know of God, and so on.

If we read dramatic monologues in terms of Descartes' subjective idealism, we can account for the ways in which some speakers construct narratives from whose circularity they are unable to extricate themselves. As I have shown, the Duke of Ferrara is unable to escape from the trap which he himself has fabricated. The Duke remains unaware of the method by which he establishes control over his circumstances and his situation, and of the illusory nature of that control. Although he seems to believe his objective has been successfully achieved, the reader realizes that he only gains a stable sense of self because he divides the role of the interlocutor between the Duchess and the envoy. The Duke thinks (in terms of the Duchess), therefore he is (but for the envoy). Proceeding in this fashion, he can contend with his Duchess' voice, which continues to haunt him, while at the same time he can anticipate a potential response from his more obviously present interlocutor, the envoy, or any other stranger for that matter. The Duke remains entirely oblivious to the ambiguity his utterance produces. Also, he cannot perceive that his controlling self is static, or that his identity is trapped by the conditions of a situation which he will continually be forced to replicate. The Duke's reasoning reiterates the circularity evident in Descartes'.

In order to illustrate the Duke's and Descartes' circular method of producing their selves, I have ostensibly drawn on theories which go beyond Cartesian idealism; a Cartesian reading of "My Last Duchess" would not consider the interlocutor as a significant character in the poem, but would see both the envoy and the Duchess' painting as objects external to the thinking or speaking "I" (the Duke), and therefore as inconsequential to his sense of identity. Descartes' theory of self provides no room for interlocutors who, after all, only emerge in monologues through the speakers' utterances. In order to open up a space for the interlocutor I shall now turn my

attention to theories which reject Cartesian idealism, and which allow for intersubjective readings of monologues.

III Hegel's Materialist Subjects

Hegel rejected a number of tenets which had continued to dominate philosophy since Descartes' time. His dialectic questioned his predecessors' dualistic structures. In Hegel's view, to discuss things in terms of their substance alone, and to view the subject as independent and autonomous, was to exclude fundamental aspects of the nature of human existence. Of particular interest to my reading of dramatic monologues is Hegel's master-slave parable, which initiated the move away from idealist notions regarding the subject to theories which emphasize intersubjectivity. It should be noted that my understanding of Hegel's dialectic follows Slinn, who rejects the Victorian propensity to focus on the "potentially transcendent aspects of Hegel, the movement towards a spiritual Absolute, or an apparent shift from material forms to categories of thought" (*Discourse* 13). This reading, like Slinn's, is based on Hegel's earlier work, in particular his Preface to the *Phenomenology of Mind*, which emphasizes the dialectic process rather than its goal. (Hegel's master-slave parable comprises chapter four of the same work.)

Hegel rejected any belief in the existence of a realm which is "undisturbed identity and oneness" with itself (81). Although he agreed with his predecessors that the human subject is limited, in Hegel's view that limitation is inherent in our rational processes rather than an effect of our (inferior) position in relation to God. For Hegel, there is nothing beyond or above the human mind, and any human tendency to posit a transcendental realm is merely the consequence of fallacious reasoning:

The force of mind is only as great as its expression; its depth only as deep as its power to expand and lose itself when spending and giving out its substance. Moreover, when this unreflective emotional knowledge [described by Hegel's predecessors] makes a pretence of having immersed its own very self in the depths of the absolute Being, and of philosophizing in all holiness and truth, it hides from itself the fact that instead of devotion to God, it rather, by this contempt for all measurable precision and definiteness, simply attests in its own case the fortuitous character of its content, and in the other endows God with its own caprice. (74)

In other words, the subject who believes in his own essential self and in his independence from matter, and who has faith in a transcendental realm, is in fact merely experiencing his own projections on to the world in an unreflective and irrational manner. Belief in God and in a realm beyond our world is in Hegel's view mere anthropomorphism.

By contrast, Hegel's subject is not essential. It exists in history and is characterized by continual change. For Hegel, the fundamental characteristic of the human subject is negativity: the subject knows itself only by identifying and subsequently negating that which it is not. Yet no sooner has the subject negated its other and by that action produced a temporary subject-position, than it must negate a new other in order to attempt, once again, to find itself by negation. Consequently, Hegel places the subject in a continuous dialectical process of always becoming that which it is not. It follows that the Hegelian subject can never truly be, but exists only "in mediating with its own self its transitions from one state or position to the opposite" (80).

Hegel rejected philosophical models which privilege the immediate and believe only in the positive — that is, those which posit fixed, transcendental selves which experience themselves as fundamentally real and true. He believed that we experience the world by facing the negative, and in so doing, by converting it into being. Our experiences, according to Hegel, are products of the process of projecting ourselves outwards onto an other, an action which causes us to observe ourselves in the other and through the other — as a product of mediation with the other. In other words, and in opposition to Descartes, Hegel regards human experience as the product of mediation through others.

Hegel differentiates between consciousness and self-consciousness. Consciousness constitutes the act of distinguishing the self from objects of experience; further, it is the precondition for self-consciousness, which is produced by the same dialectical method of negation as consciousness. When subjects become self-conscious they recognize themselves by differentiation not from objects of experience, but from

other consciousnesses, thereby adopting social roles in relation to them. Hegel exemplifies the emergence of the self-conscious being in his parable of the master and slave (or lord and bondsman) relationship. In this parable Hegel posits subjects who depend on other consciousnesses for their emergence as self-conscious beings.

Hegel's model of consciousness begins where Descartes' left off: challenging Cartesian idealism, Hegel concedes that every subject desires to have itself validated as a unified entity. In fact, each subject will initially take its own unity as the truth, and will subsequently seek to have that truth validated by others. However, because the Hegelian subject is characterized by change, such unity, even if it could be established, would never be permanent. Consequently, the Hegelian subject must enter into a futile process of continually seeking to prove its own unity.

In Hegel, the subject is forced to seek confirmation of what it perceives as its own unity in a source external to itself. Hegel thus avoided the trap of Cartesian solipsism. In order to obtain confirmation of itself as unified, each subject looks to objects of experience. However, looking at an other, all the subject initially sees is an external, discrete entity. Desiring to perceive itself rather than the other, the subject projects itself onto the other, subsequently recognizing itself in it. But at the very moment it projects itself onto the other, the subject divides itself, thus destroying its originally presumed and desired unity, and becoming at once self and other.

The Hegelian subject faces a further dilemma. In the act of projecting itself onto the other, it has sublated (*aufgehoben*) the other on whose recognition it depends for confirmation of its own unity. What it sought in the other was a reflected image of its own unified self, but in projecting itself onto the other, it has also undermined the confirmatory unity of the other. At this moment both subjects are locked in an impasse. Neither subject regards the other as a truly unified being, for each recognizes merely itself in the other. Eventually, having overcome temporary sublation of self and other, the subjects return to themselves. Implicitly in Hegel, this return to the self signifies a re-establishment of the initially presumed unity of self. However, such unity is a mere illusion, because each subject will need to undergo the same process of projection

in a continual attempt to establish a self which is from the outset and by its constitution a mere fiction. The point which is absolutely crucial to the Hegelian model of subjectivity is the notion that each consciousness immediately is and is not the other consciousness, while each is at the same time the mediating term to the other,

through which each mediates and unites itself with itself; and each is to itself and to the other an immediate self-existing reality, which, at the same time, exists thus for itself only through this mediation. They recognize themselves as mutually recognizing one another. (231)

Consciousness is the necessary precondition of the implicitly higher state of self-consciousness to which subjects ultimately aspire. In order to establish and validate its own self-consciousness, the subject must reveal its consciousness to its other and at the same time must recognize the other not merely as an object, but as another consciousness. However, in order that the first subject have itself recognized as self-conscious, it must first destroy the other's unity. The desire for self-recognition is, of course, mutual. Consequently, Hegel maintains that the two subjects must engage in a struggle in which each must put its own life at risk. Hegel further insists that only if life is literally risked, can true self-consciousness come into being:

The individual, who has not staked his life, may, no doubt, be recognized as a Person; but he has not attained the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness. In the same way each must aim at the death of the other, as it risks its own life thereby; for that other is to it of no more worth than itself; the other's reality is presented to the former as an external other, as outside itself; it must cancel that externality. (233)

However, it is imperative that each subject survives. Literal death would defeat the purpose of fighting, for each consciousness which engages in the process of trying to achieve self-consciousness is dependent for its very existence on the continuing life of the other: "death is the natural 'negation' of consciousness, negation without independence, which thus remains without the requisite significance of actual

recognition" (233). Nevertheless, each subject must recognize that the fight to the death has been real, and that both subjects have risked their lives.

Recognizing the futility of literal death, the two opponents survive by taking on the "unlike and opposed" states of mind defined as master and slave (234). Hegel describes the role of the master as "independent, and its essential nature is to be for itself." The master's is "a consciousness existing on its own account which is mediated with itself through an other consciousness, i.e. through an other whose very nature implies that it is bound up with an independent being or with thinghood in general" (234-35). That other, dependent consciousness to which the master's is bound is the slave's, whose consciousness is "dependent, and its essence is life or existence for another" (234). However, the relationship between master and slave is not a simple, fixed one of dominance and subordination, or of independence and dependency. Both subjects continue to depend on the conditions of the original battle which had forced them to appropriate their two discrete modes of consciousness. In other words, while the master establishes himself as dominant and independent, his power is fundamentally dependent on the battle which had established it in the first place. Thus, the master's role is qualified by the fact that he continues to depend on the slave's recognition of him as master in order to retain his (only ever relative) freedom. Further, by condemning his other to dependent slavery, the master no longer has access to an essential, independent, equal other by which he can test and validate his own self-consciousness. For the master, the slave has become an "unessential consciousness," and as a result the master himself becomes dependent: "he finds that his truth is rather the unessential consciousness, and the fortuitous unessential action of that consciousness" (236-37).

In a surprising twist the hierarchy between master and slave is reversed. The slave initially defers to the master's domination. However, the experience of the death-threat has been more real for the slave, and it remains as a trace throughout his subsequent subjugation. Hegel states that the slave's consciousness "has been in that

experience melted to its inmost soul, has trembled throughout its every fibre, and all that was fixed and steadfast has quaked within it." Dissolved into "fluent continuity," the slave's consciousness reveals the "simple, ultimate nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure self-referrent existence" (237). In Hegel's parable, the slave ultimately achieves power by serving and toiling for the master, for whereas the master consumes the product of the slave's work, thus having only mediated satisfaction of the object, the slave shapes the thing, giving it form and permanence. By destroying (or reshaping) the thing, the slave achieves an immediate relationship to it, and thus gains affirmation of himself. The slave's consciousness "becomes for itself a self-existent being" (239).

IV The Duchess and the Duke: Master and Slave

If we read "My Last Duchess" in terms of the master-slave model, we can account for the Duchess' continuing role as the Duke's interlocutor. As the Duke describes his relationship with her, husband and wife had been engaged in an ongoing struggle, the Duke attempting to dominate her and the Duchess trying to elude her husband's repression. The Duke's monologue suggests that outside the marital relationship, he and the Duchess had implicitly encountered others by revealing his or her consciousness to them. The Duchess had projected her spot of joy indiscriminately onto everyone she encountered, while the Duke had presumably projected his nine-hundred-years-old name and its concomitant authority on to acquaintances and strangers alike. Such social struggles generally bear no consequence other than the establishment of relative social roles. However, when the Duke meets the Duchess, neither consents to taking the position of slave in relation to the other's mastery. The Duchess rejects her husband's attempts to impose his will upon her, failing to be lessoned, and merely making excuses. Simultaneously, the Duke refuses to stoop:

Even had you skill

In speech — (which I have not) — to make your will
 Quite clear to such an one,

— and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set
 Her wits to yours, forsooth, and made excuse,
 — E'en then would be some stooping; and I choose
 Never to stoop. (35-43)

The Duchess' refusal to subordinate herself to her husband's implicitly not so silent complaints, and her confrontational reaction to him (she "plainly set / Her wits to [his]") have dire consequences for her. Fighting the battle to the death she succumbs to the Duke's physically and socially more powerful position — he has her murdered.

However, the relationship does not end with the Duchess' death. The Duke's statue of Neptune taming the sea-horse acts as metaphor for the outcome of his struggle with her: although Neptune has overcome his opponent, in the bronze statue he remains permanently locked in the final battle with his victim (54-56). The same can be said of the Duke. Having overcome his Duchess in the most radical way possible, the Duke has established himself as the ultimate victor. However, as a consequence of her death, he remains an unconfirmed master. In fact, having had his Duchess immortalized on canvas, and subsequently having had her murdered, the Duke has unwittingly painted himself into her portrait. As a result, the portrait, like the statue of Neptune, comes to represent the final battle between the Duke and his last Duchess. To use Hegel's terms, by negating the Duchess' consciousness through death, the Duke has destroyed all possibility of being recognized by her, and has therefore precluded his own independence. Consequently, he must find another against whom he might measure his power. Thus, the Duke now casts the envoy in the role of slave.

V Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*

Re-reading Hegel in the 1930s, Alexandre Kojève introduced a concept which was to influence subsequent intersubjective theory. Kojève insisted that human consciousness is an effect of desire. He also emphasized more clearly Hegel's differentiation between

consciousness and self-consciousness by distinguishing between what he termed animal and human desire.

Kojève explained Hegel's two modes of being — consciousness and self-consciousness — as constituted by desire. Desire in Kojève, as later in Lacan, is constituted by lack, and "receives a real positive content only by negating action that satisfies Desire in destroying, transforming, and 'assimilating' the desired non-I" (Kojève 4). Kojève considered desire to be the single motivating force in the production of consciousness and self-consciousness which he defined as animal consciousness and human self-consciousness.

Kojève differentiates between natural and non-natural objects. Natural objects are constituted by being. They simply exist, but can never know of their own existence. Humans, however, transcend the simply natural because their desire transforms being by negation of the natural object. In Kojève, humans are representations in speech, and are therefore always non-natural objects: "Man becomes conscious of himself at the moment when — for the 'first' time — he says 'I.' To understand man by understanding his 'origin' is, therefore, to understand the origin of the I revealed by speech" (3).

Although always conscious, humans can direct their desire either at natural or at non-natural objects. The former will produce consciousness (animal consciousness, or simple sentiment), while the latter will allow for the implicitly higher state of self-consciousness. In Kojève, animal consciousness is produced when the subject contemplates a "natural non-I," that is, an object which has no consciousness of its own existence. Losing himself in the natural object the conscious subject becomes absorbed by it. The subject's desire allows him to return to himself, but all that will be revealed to the subject who passively contemplates "thingish" objects is "thingish" consciousness. Kojève further states that desire which produces thingish consciousness is mere animal desire, or sentiment. Only human desire can produce the higher state of human self-consciousness because it is directed not at a natural object, but at another's desire.

In order to become humanly self-conscious, the subject must direct his desire at a non-natural object (or a non-natural non-I). According to Kojève, the only non-natural object through which self-consciousness can emerge is another's desire, for it is desire which constitutes humans as non-natural objects. This leads Kojève to claim that human subjects are constituted by "negating-negativity" (4) — which is another way of saying that subjects can only be truly self-conscious if they negate the other's desire, thus satisfying their own. Further, like Hegel, Kojève sees the production of self-consciousness as committing the subject to a state of becoming: "since Desire is realized as action negating the given, the very being of this I will be action" (5). Therefore, the self-conscious subject's continuation will depend on his continual desire not to be what he is and to be what he is not (5).

Both consciousness and self-consciousness emerge as the result of attempts to satisfy a form of desire (either animal sentiment or human desire). Because animal desire is directed at an object and human desire at another's desire, that which differentiates the two states of mind is the target of the subject's desire. When humans direct their desire at another human, the aim of their desire is not the other's physical body, but her or his recognition; and although human desire can appear to be directed at natural objects (Kojève uses the example of a medal or an enemy's flag), its real target is the other's desire for that same object. Consequently, humans directing their desire at non-natural objects wish primarily to have their own desire recognized as valid by other desiring subjects.

Kojève explains Hegel's master-slave model as the struggle which occurs between two consciousnesses attempting to achieve self-consciousness. In order to become self-conscious, humans must overcome animal consciousness which nevertheless forms the basis of self-consciousness. Animal desire is limited to the desire for continued physical life, and such desire is overcome by self-conscious subjects only if they risk their animal consciousness for the sake of self-consciousness. Master and slave emerge; and like Hegel's, Kojève's slave's is ultimately the only possible true form of self-conscious existence. Only the slave recognizes that

he must overcome or transcend his slavish existence. Having done so, he alone represents "pure negating-negativity" and "Being for itself" (20-21). Thus, in Kojève's Marxist interpretation of Hegel, the slave is self-consciousness proper:

If idle Mastery is an impasse, laborious Slavery, in contrast, is the source of all human, social, historical progress. History is the history of the working Slave. . . . it is indeed the originally dependent, serving, and slavish Consciousness that in the end realizes and reveals the ideal of autonomous Self-Consciousness and is thus its 'truth.' (20, 30)

Hegel's *Phenomenology* provides a model which allows us to read monologues in terms of a struggle for power between speaker and interlocutor. Kojève's Marxist interpretation of Hegel introduces the concept of desire, and reinforces Hegel's view that the slave is the ultimate victor in the battle for power. However, both Hegel's and Kojève's texts are limited by their failure to articulate the means by which subjects engage in their battles. Although Kojève begins his interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* by intimating the importance of speech, neither he nor Hegel discuss the linguistic and textual processes considered necessary by later theorists for the construction of subjectivity. Further, while Hegel's and Kojève's models allow for the constitution of subjectivity in terms of intersubjective processes, they provide no account of the unconscious. Hegel's master-slave model still allows, at least potentially, for subjects who experience themselves as discrete from their others, for although they engage in an external struggle with others, and can no longer be regarded as fixed and unified, they nevertheless retain the right to retreat to a realm of relative stasis.

Kojève's emphasis on desire as lack and as constituted by action, and the Hegelian-Kojévian emphasis on change and becoming, are vital to Lacan's theory of the human psyche. Lacan posits a model in which the subject is fundamentally fragmented, although Lacanian subjects might still believe in the infallibility of their imaginary, unified egos. As I read Lacan, the other, which in the Hegelian-Kojévian model

undermines the notion of a unified subject, is fragmented into the other and the Other; division is implicated in the constitution of consciousness and of the unconscious.

VI Lacan's Psychoanalytical Situation

Lacan's original aim had been to rescue Freud's work from what he regarded as misinterpretation by American ego-psychologists. Much of his work is consequently based on Freud's. I shall begin this section by examining the developmental stages of early childhood which Lacan described as he interpreted those established by his predecessor. Having produced chronological stages of development, however, Lacan went on to suggest that these only had relevance in relation to the adult psyche (Lee 20). Of most interest to this study is Lacan's description of the analytical situation, and consequently, the developmental stages are described below as a means of introducing concepts relevant to the later discussion of the adult psyche under analysis.

In Lacan, the infant initially has no concept of self as separate from others. Between the ages of six and eight months she enters into the mirror stage. Looking at herself in the mirror for the first time, the child recognizes herself as a unified entity distinct from others. Her response is jubilation. For the first time, she achieves a sense of identity, although the identity she experiences during the mirror stage is insufficient to constitute her as a subject. However, her identification with her mirror image affords her access to the imaginary realm. The child's reflection comes to symbolize an ideal image of self, although that image of unity remains at odds with her experience of her own body, and her as yet uncoordinated motor-skills.

The child's identification with her image in the mirror also constitutes the first representation, in primordial form, of her subjectivity, and that form is the necessary condition for later access to the symbolic order. In Lacan's own words, this "jubilant assumption of [her] specular image . . . would seem to exhibit in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" ("Mirror Stage" 2).

Thus, the mirror stage represents the first step towards her separation from the imaginary realm, a separation which will occur when the child gains access to language. Implicitly, the image in the mirror divides the child between her external objectification and that which she experiences of herself. However, during the mirror stage, which continues until she is approximately eighteen months old, the child remains oblivious of her dividedness. Further, her identification with her mirror image pre-forms the condition by which she will later construct herself through the other's gaze, a condition of subjectivity which characterizes both females and males once they have entered the symbolic realm.

At around the age of eighteen months, the child begins to speak. Access to speech irrevocably divides her, while at the same time it constitutes her as subject. When the child speaks herself as "I" she names herself as subject, constructing herself through language as a member of society. As had been the case in the mirror phase, the child is divided between the signifier she uses to represent herself (previously the mirror image), and the self she experiences as herself.

Appropriating the signifier "I" for herself, the child is forced to submit to social codes of language, that is, to the realm of the Other. As a consequence, she irretrievably loses access to the immediate and unifying realm of the imaginary. As she increasingly identifies with the social signifiers by which she represents herself, and which others appropriate in order to represent her, she is separated from her truth. In Lacan's view, language can never provide the subject with the truth about herself, so that although she identifies with her socially produced self, that self is always other to her true self. Representing herself through signifiers, the subject produces a self in language which is always characterized by a lack, or void. She comes into existence as an irreconcilable gap.

Lacan also stresses that the subject's division is double. On the one hand, as a conscious being she is separated from the Other, which is language, or the symbolic order. On the other hand, the subject's unconscious is also marked by a division between the other (her ego, which continues to exist as an imaginary, unified entity)

and the symbolic narrative she produces about herself (*Book II* 236). From the symbolic stage onward, the subject is therefore doubly alienated, although the imaginary continues to exist as a desired state of existence. Thus, when the subject speaks, she produces herself as fundamentally fragmented. This fragmentation, of which the subject herself is unaware, can never be overcome, although subjects will unsuccessfully attempt to fill the gaps which constitute them for the rest of their lives.

In "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis" Lacan concerns himself with methods of analysis, and it must be noted that when describing and conducting psychoanalysis, he deals predominantly with subjects who are mentally unwell, that is, alienated. Generally speaking, Lacan's analysands display disorders which he describes in terms of his exposition of language as constitutive of subjectivity (although, unlike Freud, Lacan does not discuss specific cases of his own). Lacan maintains that even in analysis there can be no return to the imaginary, undivided self because for the subject to be a subject at all she must inevitably be a product of language. Thus, according to Lacan, the ultimate aim of the analytic situation is to present the analysand with her alienation, bringing to her awareness the illusory nature of her imaginary self.

Analysis, claims Lacan, can only occur through the analysand's speech, for speech is the only medium available to the psychoanalyst. Further, as in Freud, the aim of Lacanian analysis is to uncover the unconscious repressions which the subject is unable to access herself. In Lacan's own words, the unconscious is embedded in language:

The unconscious is that part of the concrete discourse, in so far as it is transindividual, that is not at the disposal of the subject in re-establishing the continuity of his conscious discourse. . . . The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere. ("Function and Field" 49-50)

The unconscious, according to Lacan, has been written down in the subject's body, in childhood memories, in "the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular

vocabulary," in traditions, and in links between repressed and conscious "chapters," the meaning of which will become clear in analysis ("Function and Field" 50). The unconscious manifests itself in speech, for the speech that the subject emits "goes beyond, without his knowing it, his limits as discoursing subject — all the while remaining, to be sure, within his limits as speaking subject" (*Book I* 266).

The aim of analysis is to assist the analysand to construct a continuous narrative history for himself, which Lacan terms "anamnesis." In speaking, the subject initially undertakes free association (which Lacan also defines as "empty speech"), producing a train of utterances which he cannot perceive as coherent or continuous. If analysis is successful, the subject will achieve "full speech" (anamnesis), in which he will have made the past "pass into the *verbe*, or, more precisely, into the *epos* by which he brings back into present time the origins of his own person" ("Function and Field" 46-47). In so doing, the subject assumes his history by reordering "past contingences by conferring on them the sense of necessities to come, such as they are constituted by the little freedom through which the subject makes them present" ("Function and Field" 48). Thus, the subject's history does not represent a return to a historical reality which once existed and has now been remembered, but "is like an indirect discourse, isolated in quotation marks within the thread of narration, and, if the discourse is played out, it is on a stage implying the presence not only of the chorus, but also of spectators" ("Function and Field" 47). Yet in order to recognize his own historicity, the analysand requires the presence of the analyst.

Lacan insists that the analyst must remain silent during the analysand's free association, and that he must "suspend the subject's certainties until their last mirages have been consumed" ("Function and Field" 43). Such silence is necessarily met with frustration, for the subject "asks me [the analyst] for something. To answer him, in fact. But he knows very well that it would be mere words. And he can get those from whomever he likes" ("Direction" 254). Until the subject realizes that his demand for an answer has no object, and that what he demands of the analyst is not the analyst's

words but the mediation of his own demand, the subject remains frustrated. Implicitly, what the subject requires of the analyst is his recognition, and speech is "essentially the means of gaining recognition" (*Book I* 240). Thus, the analysand continues to speak until the analyst responds, mediating the analysand's demand, and allowing anamnesis to occur. Then, "the whole past opens up right down to early infancy" ("Direction" 254).

For the most part, the analysand's free association is a labour undertaken without assistance from the analyst. Gradually becoming aware of his fundamental alienation, unable to overcome it, and confronted by the analyst's silence, the analysand displays an increasing frustration:

Not frustration of a desire of the subject, but frustration by an object in which his desire is alienated and which the more it is elaborated, the more profound the alienation from his *jouissance* becomes for the subject. . . . even if the subject were to reintroduce its form into his discourse to the point of reconstituting the passifying image through which the subject makes himself an object by displaying himself before the mirror, he could not be satisfied with it, since even if he achieved his most perfect likeness in that image, it would still be the *jouissance* of the other that he would cause to be recognized in it. ("Function and Field" 42)

There can be no return to the imaginary. The increasingly frustrated analysand comes to realize that the self he has been constructing is, in fact, not essential or unified, but a representation of the other misrecognized for his own ego.

The analyst must eventually attempt to show the analysand the disparity between his imaginary and symbolic selves. The analyst does this by carefully "punctuating" the analysand's speech with intervening replies, thus forcing a temporary closure upon the utterance ("Function and Field" 44). The analysand then becomes aware that what he has said has gained meaning, and can take possession of his historical narrative, retrospectively constructing that which he has been in relation to that which he will be. However, the analyst's punctuation must be reserved until the subject's speech calls for it. The point at which the analyst intervenes is that of the transference ("Direction" 256).

The subject's construction of his historical narrative is intimately and inextricably linked to the analyst's presence through the transference. In Lacan's words, the transference starts when the "image which the subject requires becomes confused for the subject with the reality in which he is placed. The whole progress of the analysis is to show him the distinction between these two planes, to unstick the imaginary and the real" (*Book I* 241). The effect of the transference is love, and "to love is, essentially, to wish to be loved" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 253). Consequently, the transference marks the point at which the subject's speech opens itself up to the possibility of achieving anamnesis, but only with the assistance of what he perceives as the analyst's recognition. At the point of transference the psychoanalyst intervenes, not in order to interpret from an authoritative and correct point of view, but in order to allow the analysand to construct his history, which is ultimately inconceivable apart from language:

I identify myself in language, but only by losing myself in it like an object. What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. ("Function and Field" 86)

Lacan's descriptions of the constitution of the human psyche and of the analytic situation shift the focus from the subject to language as the foundation of conscious and unconscious processes. The analyst must always remain conscious of the vital notion that every time the analysand speaks he is not merely repeating an a priori psychological state, but is constructing himself anew. Further, the analyst must not believe himself to be grasping for the analysand's reality, but his truth, which must never be mistaken for an external, transcendental occurrence. The analysand's truth is always and necessarily confined to and by his utterance.

In his description of the processes of the analytical situation, Lacan deals primarily with subjects who are alienated. However, his model of the human psyche, and his illustration of the means by which analysands construct themselves, are

relevant to all subjects. In fact, Lacan suggests that alienation is experienced to differing degrees by all who live in our scientific civilization ("Function and Field" 70). Thus, Lacanian subjects are fundamentally divided. Although they believe in the existence of an essentially unified core self — indeed, belief in a unified self is necessary to their social existence and to their sanity — Lacan demonstrates that such a self is always and necessarily illusory. He further insists that every speech calls for a reply from an auditor who is physically present, and emphasizes the importance of the analyst to the emergence of the alienated subject's full speech. Consequently, Lacan establishes a theoretical model which is intersubjective not only in its description of the human psyche, but also in its description of the ways in which subjects construct fictional selves through encounters with others, both in the analytical situation, and by implication in all social situations.

VII The Duke's Unsuccessful Analysis

There are a number of links between the dramatic monologue and the Lacanian analytical situation: in both, we have a speaker attempting to achieve a sense of his own identity through speech. Further, in both analysis and in dramatic monologues speakers construct their identities by addressing others, and implicitly request a response from them, although for the most part their others remain silent. In his New Historicist study of the relationship between the dramatic monologue and the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century development of psychiatry, Ekbert Faas draws attention to the similarities between the poems and modern psychoanalytical practice, suggesting that

. . . speakers of dramatic monologues, at least of the more accomplished kind, rarely just simply relate their story. Prompted as it is by a specific situation, the narrative usually takes the form of how past events are remembered by the persona, not of how they might be told by a poet. More specifically, it can be shown as arising from the depth of long forgotten or repressed memories. In this, the randomness of memory and stream-of-consciousness are as significant as they are in the babblings of a twentieth-century neurotic talking to his psychoanalyst. (156-57)

In Faas, the position of the psychoanalyst is held by the interlocutor (whom he refers to as the "listener"): "the listener in Romantic 'crisis autobiographies' as well as in many dramatic monologues tends to assume the role of the modern psychoanalyst toward his patient" (150-51). In my view, the reader, as well as the interlocutor, is implicitly cast in the role of analyst. This view follows Armstrong's suggestion that monologuists speaking to themselves "force the reader to be aware of his or her exclusion and simultaneously force that awareness into a consciousness of *reading*, understanding the poem as the object of analysis and thus as ideology" (*Victorian Poetry* 145). (Nichols similarly emphasizes the function of the reader, although in terms of dialogism, claiming that "In asking the sorts of questions we ask of the text, we are creating a form of dialogue. We interrogate the situation in an effort to fill in countless gaps left by the text" [39].) If we expand Faas's link between speaker-interlocutor relationships and modern psychoanalytic practices to include the reader, investigating the processes at play in "My Last Duchess" in terms of the Lacanian psychoanalytical situation, we can show how the Duke becomes the analysand, while the envoy, the Duchess, and the reader are coerced into accepting the role of analyst.

For analysis to succeed it is essential that the analyst punctuate the patient's speech. In "My Last Duchess" the envoy remains silent throughout, and the Duchess is obviously unable to answer. It can therefore reasonably be assumed that the Duke will never reach a state of anamnesis under his present circumstances. However, the Duke's utterance ostensibly "goes beyond, without his knowing it, his limits as discoursing subject" (Lacan, *Book I* 266). Placed in the role of analyst by the poem, the reader can ascertain a discrepancy between what the Duke seems to be trying to say and what his utterance implies. This discrepancy in monologues has generally been described as an "ironic gap," but I see no reason why we should not read it in terms of alienation, particularly since in monologues we are dealing with speakers' psychological processes.

Lacanian psychoanalytical theory allows us to account for the ambiguity which emerges from the Duke's representation of his late wife, as well as for the complex

psychological processes in which he engages as he addresses his interlocutor(s). As he describes the Duchess, the Duke presents her as neither truly dead nor alive. He begins his speech by saying:

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now: Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? (1-5)

The ambivalence in the Duke's illustration of the Duchess begins with his first sentence, uttered in the present tense. As the speaker defines her, she seems, if not alive, then at least present. Although he claims that she is merely "painted on the wall," he then draws attention to the life-likeness of the painting when he says "looking as if she were alive."

The Duke's claim that he sees the Duchess only "as if" she were alive is undermined by the surprisingly animated terms he uses to describe her soon after: "there she stands." Later still, he illustrates the depth and passion of her glance, and the spot of joy on her cheek as though they were real (8, 14-15). Certainly, on the surface he seems to be describing only the painting. But in line three he calls the picture a "wonder," implying uncertainty about the Duchess' state of being: to the Duke she is something of a mystery or a miracle — a wondrous being. The initial five lines are indicative of the way the Duke constructs his last Duchess throughout the monologue as in some way still alive. However, the speaker seems unaware of this paradox.

The Duke's utterance is marked by a gap between what he consciously knows (that the Duchess is dead) and what he seems to have repressed (that in a peculiar way she is still alive, and still constructing his apperception). The euphemistic way he describes her murder to the envoy reinforces the idea that he is unable to deal with her death. When he finally confesses that he had the Duchess murdered, he simultaneously

distances himself from the deed, veiling the atrocity by constructing it as a simple act of speech:

Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,
Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without
Much the same smile? This grew; *I gave commands*;
Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands
As if alive. (43-47, emphasis added)

Further, the obvious disparity between the claim that "all smiles stopped together," and the immediately following suggestion that she nevertheless "stands as if alive," attests to the Duke's confused state of mind.

If the envoy were to interrupt at this point, the Duke might be forced to face the irony of his situation. However, the envoy remains silent. On the one hand he was probably a reluctant interlocutor in the first instance; on the other, considering that the Duke has just confessed to murder, the envoy probably fears him, or is simply silenced by the horror of the event, and of the Duke's delusion.

Because the envoy fails to respond, the Duke is unable to achieve anamnesis. He remains trapped by the situation which he himself has constructed. Paradoxically, as long as his visitors remain silent (which, if his present utterance is representative, they always do), the Duke will be unable to recognize the extent of his delusion, despite the fact that it emerges from his speech and is consequently available to the reader for analysis. If one of his visitors were to challenge him, he might be able to overcome the Duchess, her death, and his role in her execution; yet as will be shown later, the Duke ensures his visitors' silence.

VIII The Dialogic Model of Consciousness

Lacan's description of the subject is closely related to the work of the Bakhtin School, whose members were his contemporaries. The most significant difference between the two schools of thought can be traced to the disciplines out of which they emerged.

Lacan's major concern was with Freudian psychoanalysis, while the Bakhtin School's

interest lay predominantly in linguistics, sociology and literature. (There is, however, a considerable overlap in the areas they discuss: both Lacan and the Bakhtin School draw on a variety of areas such as anthropology, philosophy, sociology, psychology, literature, and history.) As a result of their differing perspectives, Lacan's work focused on describing the functions of the unconscious and its relation to consciousness, while the Bakhtin School questioned the existence of the unconscious. Hence, the two schools of thought initially appear at odds; however, both Lacan and Voloshinov discuss Freud, and while their conclusions particularly regarding the unconscious appear disparate, on examination their theories are closely related.

As has been shown, Lacan reinterpreted the Freudian model of the unconscious, which consisted of repressed desires not available to consciousness except as a result of analysis. However, Voloshinov discerned an insoluble paradox in Freud's description of the unconscious. He argued that Freud's new category of the unconscious was based on the "old psychology" and on its method of introspection. In Voloshinov's view such a method was not a valid means of establishing the unconscious, for he held that introspection was a thoroughly conscious process. Freud should not have assumed that the unconscious is structured in the same way as consciousness, for in Voloshinov's view, once "consciousness is cast aside, it becomes totally senseless to retain feelings, presentations, and desires" (Voloshinov, *Freudianism* 69). Censorship, for example, is described by Freud as a "mechanism" that operates unconsciously, but Voloshinov radically undermined such a view, suggesting that all Freud's psychical mechanisms were in fact ideological (70). Voloshinov rejected what he believed were idealist aspects of Freud's work, claiming that Freudian psychoanalysis was merely a continuation of earlier, idealist psychologies. Lacan took issue with some interpretations of Freud's work. Like Voloshinov, he rejected what he considered to be idealist tendencies, in particular those evident in the works of American ego-psychologists. Thus, as far as their emphatic rejection of idealism in psychology and psychoanalysis is concerned, Voloshinov's and Lacan's theories are not as far apart as they might initially appear.

Voloshinov insisted that contemporary theories of the unconscious were necessarily subjectivist and idealist and (by implication) tended towards solipsism. By contrast, he attempted to construct a materialistic psychology. Such a project led Voloshinov to substitute the subject's speech for the (Freudian) unconscious, for he held that anything which could not be accounted for in consciousness would be found to reside in language itself. Hence, speech would always exceed the speaker's conscious thoughts and intentions: "Not a single instance of verbal utterance can be reckoned exclusively to its utterer's account. Every utterance is *the product of the interaction between speakers* and the product of the broader context of the whole complex *social situation* in which the utterance emerges" (Voloshinov, *Freudianism* 79). Such a view comes close to Lacan's claim that, "The speech that the subject emits goes beyond, without his knowing it, his limits as discoursing subject — all the while remaining, to be sure, within his limits as speaking subject" (*Book I* 266). Further, in Voloshinov's view any faith in a transcendental realm beyond human reach was futile and misguided. Thus, in a move which radically undermined idealism, Voloshinov proposed a model in which all aspects of human thought, experience, and existence were available for interpretation because they could be accounted for by an investigation of discursive and ideological processes manifest in language.

In Voloshinov's materialistic model of subjectivity, discourse gains a supreme position. It constitutes the subject both in his "inner speech" (directed at himself) and "outward speech" (directed at others): "Nothing changes at all if, instead of outward speech, we are dealing with inner speech. Inner speech, too, assumes a listener and is oriented in its construction toward that listener. Inner speech is the same kind of product and expression of social intercourse as is outward speech" (Voloshinov, *Freudianism* 79). (Again, Voloshinov's theory can be compared to Lacan's, for although the unconscious, rejected by Voloshinov, is a vital aspect of Lacan's theory, Lacan posits an unconscious which is as much divided by language, or more precisely the symbolic order, as is consciousness.)

Voloshinov's suggestion that inner speech and outward speech function in the same way might initially appear to replicate the paradox Voloshinov himself identified (and so emphatically rejected) in Freud's definition of consciousness and of the unconscious. However, because Voloshinov posited discourse as constituting both inner and outward speech, he rendered untenable the notion that consciousness is distinct from the unconscious. The patient under analysis, speaking to his doctor, will never reveal his unconscious, because that which his speech establishes is the dynamic relationship between him and his analyst, not between his consciousness and unconscious. Rather, in speaking the subject places himself in opposition to "the doctor, his requirements and his views." Consequently, in Voloshinov, "'Resistance' is . . . primarily resistance to the doctor, to the listener, to the *other* person generally" (*Freudianism* 80). And it is on this point that Voloshinov's and Lacan's theories deviate from one another.

Voloshinov's rejection of Freud and of traditional psychology, and his emphasis on language as constitutive of the human psyche (which he shared with other members of the Bakhtin School), is in many ways similar to Lacan's psychoanalysis. The two schools of thought converge in three major points: first, both incorporate aspects of Hegel's master-slave parable (Lacan's through Kojève and the Bakhtin School's through Marx), as well as the teachings of modern semiology; secondly, both reject psychological theories which are founded on idealist presumptions, Lacan opposing the ego psychologists' appropriation of Freudian psychoanalysis, and Voloshinov rejecting Freud's work itself; and thirdly, both theories emphasize the primacy and materiality of language, which each regards as ideological and as always and necessarily preceding the subject.

Lacan's emphasis on language led him to claim that the unconscious "is constituted by the effects of speech on the subject, it is the dimension in which the subject is determined in the development of the effects of speech, consequently the unconscious is structured like a language" (*Four Fundamental Concepts* 149). Similarly, in Voloshinov, ideology and language precede consciousness:

Ideology cannot be derived from consciousness, as is the practice of idealism and psychologistic positivism. Consciousness takes shape and being in the material of signs created by an organized group in the process of its social intercourse. The individual consciousness is nurtured on signs; it derives its growth from them; it reflects their logic and laws. (Voloshinov, *Marxism* 13)

Thus, both Lacan and Voloshinov (and other members of the Bakhtin School) arrived at a similar emphasis on language as constituting the subject, and viewed language as preceding not only the individual subject, but the very community in which he lives. The subject thus conceived can never have recourse to a sphere of his psyche, to language, or to a community which is in any way essentially valid or transcendental, for such transcendental entities cannot exist.

What is most pertinent to this discussion is the way in which the Bakhtin School posits the other, or the interlocutor. Voloshinov presents a model in which not only speech, but thought itself is always already aimed at an interlocutor:

Even the most intimate self-consciousness is already an attempt to translate the self into a common language, to take into account the point of view of another, and consequently, contains within itself an orientation towards the potential listener. ("Discourse" 27)

Similarly, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* Bakhtin claims:

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a *thou*). . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory. . . . I cannot manage without another, I cannot become myself without another; I must find myself in another by finding another in myself (in mutual reflection and mutual acceptance). (287)

This passage encapsulates what has come to be known as "dialogism." Reflecting Hegel's description of the way in which self-consciousness is produced intersubjectively, the dialogic model posits a subject who can only come into existence by mediation with others; and because Bakhtin views discourse as constitutive of human subjectivity, his interpretation of dialogue is fundamentally at odds with Cartesian idealism. In idealist models, dialogue was viewed as an occurrence between two discrete consciousnesses.

Any interlocutor was believed capable of discerning a speaker's intended meaning through his speech, as long as the conventional rules of language were followed and there were no obvious impediments to the expression of speech. Implicitly, if the intended meaning was unsuccessfully transmitted, the fault was assumed to lie with one of the dialogue participants, not with language itself. Language was regarded as an entirely transparent tool. Consequently, when critics subscribe to idealist views of language and regard monologues as one side of a conventional dialogue, they tend to discuss the poems as expressions of a discrete consciousness in the process of communicating with another discrete consciousness, albeit in a specific spatio-temporal situation. Further, those critics who regard monologues as texts produced by the poet for the reader display no doubt in their own ability to deduce the poet's intended meaning from the speaker's utterance, that is, from the poet's use of language in the poem. "Dialogue" has conventionally been understood as two interwoven but always separately authored monologues.

By contrast, Bakhtinian dialogue produces dialectics (*Problems* 293). The wish to understand a message (always already a mediation constituted in and by language), forces the subject to enter into an endless web of interactions with others. Consequently, a Bakhtinian reading of a monologue (and a Hegelian and Lacanian one) would base the speaker's utterance firmly within its specific context, a context which most significantly is always constituted by the other. Utterance seen in this light is a response not to a discrete, external situation or to an autonomous interlocutor, but is the very process by which subjects produce themselves in relation to interlocutors whose presence they presume as they speak. Thus the speaker's consciousness belongs in part to his other (implied or real), or rather, belongs no more to himself than to the other. Read dialogically, dramatic monologues represent the speaker's attempt at establishing his own existence, while at the same time the very utterance is the speaker, who can never exist outside it, and who can therefore only ever construct himself as simultaneously speaking and spoken.

Because dialogism posits subjects who are entirely the products of discourse, the dialogic model of consciousness precludes full self-knowledge. No speaker can ever take command of language. Although communication can be achieved in the agreement of an approximation of meaning, there can be no meaning which exceeds the utterance, although the full extent of the speaker's meaning can, and very often does, elude him. In Bakhtinian terms, meaning becomes a political struggle, fought on the battleground of language.

Language constitutes the human subject as a product of his attempt to address an interlocutor. However, it is not essential that the interlocutor is obviously present or even actual. As Voloshinov puts it:

Utterance, as we know, is constructed between two socially organized persons, and in the absence of a real addressee, an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs. The *word is oriented toward an addressee*, toward *who* that addressee might be. . . . (*Marxism* 85)

Such a view stands in marked contrast to discussions of monologues which insist that in order to be classified as a true or perfect dramatic monologue, a poem must contain an obvious interlocutor. Such is the case, for example, in Dorothy Mermin's statement that poems are representations of speech only when the auditor is "human, adult, alive, awake, physically present, and able to hear and respond" (*Audiences* 2). By contrast to Mermin's view, Voloshinov insists that any act of thought or speech forces us to enter into a dialogic interaction with others. Consequently, an anticipated yet absent addressee (to whom I shall refer as the "notional interlocutor") is no less real to the speaker than a present one. In fact, all addressees are necessarily concrete, for there can be "no such thing as an abstract addressee, a man unto himself, so to speak. With such a person, we would indeed have no language in common, literally and figuratively" (*Marxism* 85). Voloshinov further states that any addressee who is not present is characterized by particular limitations: "we assume as our addressee a contemporary of our literature, our science, our moral and legal codes" (*Marxism* 86).

By implication, the Bakhtin School challenges the notion that dramatic monologues can be anything but dialogues. Read dialogically, the monologist's utterance always occurs in anticipation of a response; it is always directed at an other, whether that other is actual or imaginary. To use Bakhtin's term, the dramatic monologue functions like a "hidden dialogicality":

Especially significant and important for our further purposes is the phenomenon of hidden dialogicality. . . . Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the statements of the second speaker are omitted, but in such a way that the general sense is not at all violated. The second speaker is present invisibly, his words are not there, but deep traces left by these words have a determining influence on all the present and visible words of the first speaker. We sense that this is a conversation, although only one person is speaking, and it is a conversation of the most intense kind, for each present, uttered word responds and reacts with its every fiber to the invisible speaker, points to something outside itself, beyond its own limits, to the unspoken words of another person. (*Problems* 197)

Hidden dialogicality becomes particularly significant in monologues in which the interlocutor is notional. Also, the suggestion that dialogicality might be concealed is relevant to discussions of monologues in which speakers attempt to coerce their interlocutors into adopting roles which support the speakers' own perspectives. Speakers in these monologues can be observed as contending with and seeking to override the "unspoken words" of their interlocutors. However, their efforts are invariably unsuccessful. Utterances by manipulative speakers can also be understood in terms of monologic speech which, according to Bakhtin, constitutes a discourse which "denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities" (*Problems* 292). In monologic speech, no response is expected that could change the world of the speaker's consciousness; such speech is "finalized and deaf" to the other's response, and pretends to be the ultimate word (*Problems* 293).

Yet if, as the Bakhtin School suggests, human subjects are constituted in and by discourse, and all speech is dialogic, then subjects who are silent, and subjects who achieve fully monologic speech are unable to partake in human life:

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 293)

To be means to be for an other; to avoid the other successfully means death.

IX Trials of Monologism

The Duke of Ferrara tries to address the envoy monologically, and in so doing, he precludes any response from his immediate interlocutor. By shutting out the envoy's reply, the Duke refuses to acknowledge his presence, and speaks as though his own speech were the ultimate word. For example, when the Duke asks his interlocutor to sit, he says:

Frà Pandolf's hands
Worked busily a day, and there she stands.
Will't please you sit and look at her? I said
'Frà Pandolf' by design. . . . (3-6)

Obviously, the question is merely rhetorical, for we know that the envoy was encouraged to observe the Duchess' portrait from the moment the Duke uttered his first word. Also, the Duke barely interrupts the flow of his speech, so that no space appears which might provide the envoy with the opportunity to interject. A similar situation occurs towards the end of the poem:

There she stands
As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. (46-48)

Again, there is no occasion for the envoy to contradict. He is at no greater liberty to refuse to rise than he is to refuse to go below.

Throughout the monologue the Duke speaks in a way which prohibits any response. He speaks in a commanding and authoritative manner. He even reminds the

envoy of his own social superiority, so that any response from the envoy would not only be inappropriate, but also inadvisable. The speaker becomes even more controlling when he states:

I said
 'Frà Pandolf' by design, for never read
 Strangers like you that pictured countenance,
 The depth and passion of its earnest glance,
 But to myself they turned (since none puts by
 The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)
 And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,
 How such a glance came there; so, not the first
 Are you to turn and ask thus. (5-13)

In these lines we can observe the Duke in the act of fabricating a question for the envoy. Others, he claims, only turned to him and *seemed* to ask him how the Duchess' glance came there; he may never actually have been asked about the painting at all. Further, in the monologue there is no evidence that the envoy asks the Duke anything at all. Consequently, when the Duke says "so, not the first / Are you to turn and ask thus," the reader begins to suspect that this entire passage has been nothing but a ploy used by the Duke to control his (present and possibly past) visitors by silencing them. We can also reasonably assume that the Duke deliberately constructs the envoy's question as one which he is prepared to answer. Fabricating the envoy's question, the Duke provides himself with the opportunity to investigate a question fundamental to his apperception: why does the Duchess continue to elude his control? Constructing the envoy in a way which suits his own objectives, the Duke avoids being asked any questions he might not be willing to answer, and simultaneously uses the envoy as a means of examining his relationship to the Duchess, or at least to her picture. In so doing, he seems to be aiming to produce monologic speech.

In terms of the monologic-dialogic distinction, we can read the Duke's utterance in two ways: on the one hand, we can read his attempts at monologism as partially successful. He silences the envoy's potential responses, thereby achieving control over him. However, on the other hand, we can read his monologic speech as unsuccessful

because it fails to solve the problem of the Duchess. What the Duke overlooks is that while he is controlling the envoy through his monologic utterance, the Duchess is still eluding him: he is still contending with her voice, he is still attempting to construct himself in relation to it, and he is therefore still addressing her dialogically. As Nichols has suggested, the monologic elements of the poem are undercut by our sense of the Duchess' voice which has "been suppressed or silenced by the monologue" (32). In "My Last Duchess" we can observe how the Duke's conscious attempts to speak monologically are unsuccessful: although his utterance posits itself as finalized and deaf to the envoy and to his potential responses, it still anticipates and even begs a response from the Duchess.

As I have already proposed, the Duke sustains an ambivalent view of his last Duchess. To him she is both dead and alive. As the Duke attempts to produce monologic speech, he ostensibly constructs himself analogously to the way he constructs the Duchess: as both dead and alive. He speaks monologically to the envoy, and is consequently unable to engage actively in human life, in Bakhtinian terms. Yet at the same time the reverse is also true: he speaks dialogically to the Duchess, which suggests that he does participate in a social interaction of sorts. As a result of the apparently unbreachable gap between his overtly monologic and covertly dialogic speech, the Duke's situation is marked by an equally insoluble paradox: the only aspect of his utterance which is alive and dialogic is directed at one who is already dead, and consequently unable to respond.

If we read dramatic monologues in terms of dialogic processes, we can show how all monologuists address interlocutors, even if they are not aware that they do so, and even if their interlocutors are notional. Further, we can show that in speaking monologuists construct themselves, are constructed by, and construct their interlocutors. The dramatic monologue itself becomes the paradigm of Voloshinov's word, which is determined by whose it is and whom it is for: "As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. . . . A word is territory shared by . . . the speaker and his interlocutor"

(*Marxism* 86). In the monologue the interlocutor's presence is inscribed in the speaker's utterance to the extent that speaker and interlocutor emerge simultaneously in the text. The following chapters will read monologues as territories in which both speakers and interlocutors are produced intersubjectively and discursively.

CHAPTER THREE

PORPHYRIA'S LOVER'S INTERLOCUTOR

I Introduction

"Porphyria's Lover" lacks an obvious interlocutor. It is generally regarded as a marginal monologue, located on the boundary between the lyric and the dramatic monologue primarily because critics fail to identify an addressee at whom the lover directs his speech. However, critics have acknowledged its significance as an early example of Browning's emerging new poetic form, and as a result it has been widely discussed.

We can identify several trends in the ways "Porphyria's Lover" has been read in the past. First, a number of critics aim to describe the poem's generic status. For example, Park Honan claims that the poem does not fulfil the criteria of the dramatic monologue genre because it contains little revelation of character. Rather, the poem's main effect is accounted for by the "tight lyrical telling of an extremely good anecdote" (30). In his view, "Porphyria's Lover," and its companion poem "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," are "more effective as lyrics than as character-revealing monologues" (30). Following conventional genre definitions, Honan regards lyrical poems as "more expressive of the poet's own feeling than of outward incidents or events, and they do not cause the reader to suspend his awareness of the writer's own presence . . . and to imagine that someone else is really speaking" (105). Of course, the insane lover is obviously not Robert Browning, so that on the basis of his own definition of the lyric, Honan is compelled to allow for a dramatic element in "Porphyria's Lover." For Honan a dramatic monologue is a "single discourse by one whose presence is indicated by the poet but who is not the poet himself" (122), and consequently he locates the poem in a realm where the lyrical and the dramatic overlap (123).

A second approach to "Porphyria's Lover" has been to attempt to identify Browning's reasons, implicit or otherwise, for writing the poem. Miller suggests that the poem functions as a suitable vehicle for Browning to "get the whole meaning of life

into the most concentrated form" (126), suggesting that "Porphyria's Lover" demonstrates how it is impossible to fix life. Shaw claims that Browning's earlier poems express the poet's moral views less overtly than his later ones. In his view, "Porphyria's Lover" is "too suggestive of insanity to be amusing" (77). Michael Mason identifies possible sources of the poem. Claiming that Browning believed that "a man's character will be 'consistent' if analysed in enough depth" (254), Mason maintains that the "facts about the origins of 'Porphyria' make it almost certain that Browning intended to portray a madman; at least we can be sure this possibility was strongly before his mind" (255). Mason implies that Porphyria's murderer is suffering from what was known in the early-nineteenth-century as rational lunacy, a condition which allows for the possibility that the sufferer's behaviour is disordered, while his intellectual powers remain unimpaired. In Mason's view, although there is no evidence that Browning was familiar with contemporary advances in psychiatry, "Porphyria's Lover" shows "how an act conventionally referable to insanity might be the act of a rational being" (257).¹

Three notable discussions distinguish themselves from those which attempt to define the poem's genre or to establish the poet's implicit intentions. Martin Bidney analyzes the poem in order to show how "Browning's new psychology of imagination extends and deepens the kind of insights for which Keats is usually given sole credit" (672). Bidney also addresses an aspect of the poem he believes has not been sufficiently investigated: the interrelation between Browning's two "Madhouse Cells," "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation." U. C. Knoepfelmacher provides a new reading based on the notion that Browning wished to give voice to the "Female Other" while remaining aware of the distortive effects of representation. Knoepfelmacher draws parallels between the Duchess of Ferrara and Porphyria, showing how the reader must rescue both women from imprisonment "within a male's

¹The sources Mason identifies are "Extracts from Gosschen's Diary," published in *Blackwood's* (1818), and Bryan Procter's (Barry Cornwall) poem "Marcian Colonna." In her 1993 essay "Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover,'" Catherine Maxwell argues convincingly for the inclusion of Shakespeare's *Othello* as a further source for "Porphyria's Lover."

rhetoric of justification, [for] they have . . . become bereft of a voice of their own" (143). Finally, Earl G. Ingersoll discusses aspects of narrating, listening, looking, and being looked at in the poem, concluding that the lover staves off his fear of death by murdering desire in Porphyria ("Lacan" 156).

Whether they attempt to determine the poem's genre, try to establish Browning's motives (and sources) in the poem, or read the poem from within (as Langbaum has suggested we read all monologues), there is a tendency in these commentaries to reduce the speaker to a singular, fixed, autonomous (albeit mad) consciousness, whose aim is to take control of his present situation by objectively recounting the past. By contrast, David Eggenschwiler and Herbert Tucker imply that the poem dramatizes the psychological complexity of speakers who believe they can recapture the past in an unmediated way, but in attempting to do so in fact unwittingly present themselves or their interlocutors with a version of that past which is a mediated representation created at the moment of speaking. In his essay "Psychological Complexity in 'Porphyria's Lover,'" Eggenschwiler insists that "the speaker's mind is active and sinuous and . . . the style of the poem is dramatically precise, helping to reveal the movements, conflicts, and evasions of that mind" (40). He also draws attention to the fact that the lover creates his past, suggesting that he reacts to Porphyria as he speaks: "she is variously described, judged, and acted upon by the speaker" (41). Eggenschwiler further suggests that Porphyria is not a fixed and essential character who resides beyond the boundaries of the poem: the Porphyria of the early lines of the poem differs from the woman who is described later by the lover. Nevertheless, Eggenschwiler sustains the general view that the poem lacks an interlocutor: "this poem has no specified listener to provide a motive for the speech, but it does not need one" (45).

Tucker's brief comments are even more in line with intersubjective theories. Like most critics, Tucker suggests that the lover speaks to himself; yet Tucker's description of the way in which he does so radically differs from readings which discuss self-address in terms of the Cartesian logic of identity, and which presuppose

that the self which speaks and the self which is spoken are unified and identical. For Tucker, the act of speaking produces division:

What Browning's speakers say gains ascendancy over what they set out to mean. The business of articulation, of putting oneself into words, compromises the self it would justify; it disintegrates the implicit claim of self-presence in the lyric into a rhetorical fabric of self-presentation. ("Monomania" 125)

Thus, Porphyria's lover constitutes a good example of the divided modern psyche, and Tucker's claim that the lover "plays audience to himself" acknowledges this divisiveness ("Monomania" 125).

In this chapter I shall expand Eggenschwiler's suggestions that the speaker's psyche is more complex than has previously been acknowledged and that the characters in the poem — the lover and Porphyria — are not discrete, autonomous subjects. This chapter also follows Tucker's notion that speakers in dramatic monologues emerge as divided. In my reading the complexity of the poem and of the speaker's psyche is constituted in and through the dialogic processes at play in his speech.

II The Notional Interlocutor

A number of critics discuss the absence of an interlocutor in "Porphyria's Lover." Eggenschwiler suggests that because the poem has no obvious interlocutor there can be no specific motive for the speaker's utterance. Similarly, Knoepfelmacher claims that the reader is unable to ascertain whom the lover addresses, if anyone at all, or why he speaks (154). Dorothy Mermin claims that the absence of an interlocutor allows the reader to understand that the lover is an inherently weak character. Further, she suggests that his weakness can be proven by the fact that he is "passive and voiceless" in Porphyria's presence ("Speaker and Auditor" 141). Implicitly, she bases the speaker's weakness on the (present) absence of an interlocutor, emphasizing that he was silent when Porphyria had been available as a potential interlocutor in the past. However, what Mermin fails to recognize is that — obviously present interlocutor or

no — for the duration of his monologue the speaker undoubtedly does speak; by Mermin's own definition, he cannot therefore be regarded as "voiceless."

Isobel Armstrong tentatively identifies an interlocutor in the poem. She argues that the speakers in Browning's "Madhouse Cells" speak "so patently" to themselves that they force a "conscious intervention" from the reader, who must consequently "be aware of his or her exclusion and simultaneously force that awareness into a consciousness of *reading*" (*Victorian Poetry* 145), a point with which I fully agree. Armstrong implies that in Browning's early "Madhouse Cells" the reader is placed in the position of interlocutor, participating in a dialogue with the speakers (Johannes and the lover). In later monologues, claims Armstrong, Browning introduced a silent listener "within the monologue itself, so that the poem is doubly a text." Armstrong further notes that the "Madhouse Cells" nevertheless display the "rudiments of this structural politics" (*Victorian Poetry* 145). If we read "Porphyria's Lover" as a product of dialogic processes, we can show how even this early poem is already "doubly a text," containing a notional interlocutor who emerges simultaneously with the lover.

It is certainly true that the lover does not directly address Porphyria (or rather, her corpse) or any other obviously present interlocutor. As far as we can tell, he is alone in his cottage. Further, there is no evidence until the final line of the poem that he may conceive of God as a potential interlocutor. (One critic has debated whether in fact he speaks at all. Ralph W. Rader states that the poem is not "literally voiced speech but must be understood as implicitly giving the speaker's stream of memory and reflection after the represented action has taken place" ["Notes" 109].) However, if we follow the Bakhtin School's model of dialogism, we can show that interlocutors need not necessarily be visibly or obviously present in order to be addressed by speakers. (Nor does it matter whether a monologue is literally voiced or merely thought.) According to the Bakhtin School, any utterance as well as any thought is constituted in and by language; consequently any act of speech posits an interlocutor:

. . . every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. . . . Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 280)

In the absence of an obviously present interlocutor, a notional one is addressed.

Further, in Voloshinov's view, there can be no consciousness without speech, and therefore, by deduction, no consciousness without an interlocutor. The act of speech, silent or voiced, constitutes the speaker's consciousness as the product of her or his society, whether the interlocutor is actual or notional:

We must emphasize once more that we always think of the listener as an immanent participant in the artistic event. . . . no act of consciousness can take place without internal speech, without words and intonation — without evaluations, and it follows, that it is already a social act, an act of intercourse. . . . In this regard *consciousness . . . is not merely a psychological phenomenon*, but first and foremost, *ideological, the product of social interaction*. . . . The listener . . . develops in just this way from this constant participant in all acts of our consciousness. (Voloshinov, "Discourse" 26-27)

Although in this quotation Voloshinov is discussing the creation of artistic texts, dramatic monologue speakers can easily be read as engaging in the process of constructing artistic narratives about themselves and about their worlds. Yet that is not to suggest that they are autonomous authors of their texts; in fact, it is precisely Voloshinov's and Bakhtin's intention to disestablish the notion that authors have full control over their productions.

As the lover attempts to gain an understanding of the events of the previous evening by articulating them, he creates an artistic version of the past. In so doing he anticipates the response of an other. Several critics, while emphasizing the absence of a specific interlocutor, nevertheless have inadvertently allowed for the possible presence of an interlocutor, even describing his possible function in the poem. They maintain that the speaker speaks to himself in order to justify the crime he has committed. For example, Eggenschwiler states that because there is no specific listener there is also no obvious, specific motive for speech. Yet he concludes that the speaker

speaks to himself in order to justify himself to himself, suggesting that the poem represents an *apologia*, "a desperate, complex, and compulsive defense" (45). In Eggenschwiler's view, the speaker wishes to convince himself that his act was natural and guiltless, and by speaking he seeks reassurance for his claims. Similarly, Ryals maintains that the lover wishes to justify his actions to himself by convincing himself that Porphyria wished to be murdered, claiming further that the lover is partially aware that he has acted incorrectly. By implication, Ryals suggests the possibility that other voices, particularly God's, are present in the lover's utterance: "The lover may be mad, but he has still enough sanity to be dimly aware that murder is wrong, forbidden by God. Yet if God does not speak in condemnation of him and his deed, then surely the act is to be condoned" (166).

By suggesting that the speaker is to some extent aware that he has acted in defiance of social codes or God's laws, Eggenschwiler and Ryals open up the possibility that the speaker contends with an interlocutor who considers murder a crime and a sin. Thus, in Eggenschwiler he makes an "effort to convince himself" (46), while in Ryals he "seeks for ways to show that the deed . . . was the right thing to do" (167). Similarly, I would argue that the speaker constructs his narrative in response to a notional interlocutor whom he constructs as at least potentially regarding the murder and the motives behind it as socially and morally unacceptable. Consequently, he engages in dialogic processes.

The dialogic model suggests that self-address is no less dialogic than speech addressed at an actual or a notional other. Bakhtin describes the process of constructing a narrative about oneself in the first person as follows:

If I relate (or write about) an event that has just happened to me, then I as the *teller* (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred. It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own 'I,' and that 'I' that is subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair. (*Dialogic Imagination* 256)

Bakhtinian dialogism thus disrupts idealism's logic of identity. Any discussion of oneself, according to Bakhtin, separates the speaking from the spoken self (a notion which represents an alternative way of accounting for the division which has been convincingly explained by Tucker). This separation forces subjects to construct an other self as an interlocutor who functions in the same way as any other notional or actual interlocutor would. Consequently, in the absence of an obvious interlocutor "an addressee is presupposed in the person, so to speak, of a normal representative of the social group to which the speaker belongs" (Voloshinov, *Marxism* 85). By implication, even when monologuists assume that they speak only to themselves, and in so doing fail to realize, or rather successfully (and unconsciously) conceal, the divisive processes of speech, we can nevertheless identify an other self who functions as a notional, socially determined interlocutor.

In his dialogic reading of dramatic monologues, Nichols argues that Porphyria's lover speaks monologically, further suggesting that monologic speech is most often used in Browning poems by disempowered speakers:

Dramatic speakers often masquerade as offering a single-voiced, monological statement; but they tend, at the same time, to reveal the inherent weakness of their effort. Many of Browning's speakers — the monk in the cloister, the duke, Porphyria's lover, the bishop in St. Praxed's — are striving to gain power over an individual or a situation. Monological discourse would be a means to such power. But all of these speakers are actually individuals who have lost power . . . Porphyria turns her lover into a murderer . . . [and] dominates her lover's madness. (31)

My reading of "Porphyria's Lover" is in full agreement with Nichols'. In "Porphyria's Lover" the speaker constructs a narrative in which he is also one of the protagonists. He begins by assuming a stance which is inherently monologic, in the Bakhtinian sense. However, as he proceeds with his monologue, we can see how his initial attempt to exclude all others and to produce a discrete, objective narrative reconstruction of his past is gradually eroded: he begins to contend with voices which undermine his attempts to justify his actions.

Initially, the lover speaks in a detached manner, seemingly in order to create the illusion of objectivity and accuracy. He begins by describing the scene prior to Porphyria's arrival at his cottage:

The rain set early in tonight,
The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake:
I listened with heart fit to break. (1-5)

Assuming a monologic stance the lover denies the existence of all other voices which might have the potential of subverting the image he aims to produce. As he continues, he uses clauses which appear measured and calculated to convey the facts objectively. He describes the events in a meticulously chronological sequence ("When," "Which done," "last," "When" [6, 10, 14, 15]). Further, the emphasis on detail in his story indicates his desire to reproduce the evening logically and with absolute accuracy, suggesting that he hopes to capture the truth which he seems to believe is locked in the sequence of past occurrences. In effect, his narration represents a search for clues which he hopes will lead to an understanding of his present situation:

When glided in Porphyria; straight
She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. (6-15)

As his monologue progresses, the lover attempts to reproduce Porphyria's actions (15-21) and her speech (21-30). Still assuming a monologic stance, he excludes the possibility of alternative versions of the past by sustaining the illusion that his narrative is an objective rendition of his and Porphyria's actions. Yet after his

description of the events which led to Porphyria's death (1-30), he begins to engage with a voice which appears at odds with his own:

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me. (31-33, emphasis added)

Eggenschwiler has explained that this exclamation is a colloquial idiom, but further suggests that it indicates the speaker's wish to convince, although, as already shown, Eggenschwiler claims that the speaker wishes only to convince himself (45). I suggest instead that at this point the voice of a notional interlocutor interrupts the lover's attempt to construct the past monologically: now he feels compelled to emphasize his own sincerity. By implication, the notional interlocutor who emerges as the lover insists "Be sure" represents a social other who might disbelieve the veracity of his affirmations. Paradoxically, such a need to convince an other undermines the certainty which the exclamation aims to produce, suggesting that the speaker is at least partially aware of voices which might oppose his own. His emphatic "Be sure" also marks the point at which the lover begins to take a more active role in his narrative. He begins to define himself in relation to Porphyria: "I looked up at her eyes / Happy and proud; at last I knew / Porphyria worshipped me" (31-33).

As the speaker's monologic introduction (1-30) is interrupted by the apparent presence of a notional interlocutor, and also by the speaker's construction of himself in relation to Porphyria, his language becomes more emotive. He begins to allude to his own feelings towards and responses to Porphyria:

. . . I looked up at her eyes
Happy and proud; at last I knew
Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
Made my heart swell, and still it grew
While I debated what to do. (31-35)

This description of his relationship to Porphyria is marked by a sense of excitement, culminating in his affirmation that she belonged to him: "She was mine, mine" (36).

Given his earlier statement that she was bound by "vainer ties" (24), the lover appears to believe that he has now won his earlier struggle for possession of Porphyria, a perceived struggle fought against an assumed rival, possibly an other lover, who is not clearly identified and whose role in Porphyria's life remains obscure:

[She murmured] how she loved me — she
 Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,
 To set its struggling passion free
 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
 And give herself to me for ever. (21-25)

A later repetition in the speaker's utterance suggests that he then addresses another, more general interlocutor. When he maintains that at the point of Porphyria's death "No pain felt she; / I am quite sure she felt no pain" (41-42), his repetitive phrasing seems aimed at convincing a member of a community which insists on the humanitarian treatment of others. By implication, the speaker seems to be contending with a voice which he assumes will disapprove of his action if it has caused pain to his victim. Of course, the speaker's insistence that Porphyria's death was without discomfort actually draws attention to his delusion because the avoidance of inflicting pain on a murder victim does not exonerate the murderer from his sin and crime. However, when the lover repeats his statement (41-42), he seems intent on convincing a notional member of his society that the murder was conducted humanely and is therefore pardonable. Consequently, he shows himself to be at least partially aware of accepted social and moral behaviour.

Bakhtin suggests that reservations, repetitions, and ellipses are indicative of others' words or accents which force themselves into the fabric of speakers' utterance (Bakhtin, *Problems* 245). While there are no ellipses in the lover's seemingly objective monologue, and only one significant statement which can be read as a reservation (line 60), he does use repetitions for emphasis. Thus, although he initially seems to assume a monologic stance, we can show how his original exclusion of other voices is gradually interrupted by the emergence of a notional social interlocutor

with whom he engages and whom he simultaneously constructs dialogically as he attempts to represent the events of the previous evening. As Nichols has pointed out, the lover's efforts at monologic speech "all point toward the ultimate impossibility of such univocal expression. Language reveals its social aspect even when being spoken by a solipsistic killer alone in a room with his dead victim" (37).

Critics frequently regard speakers in monologues in which there appears to be no obvious interlocutor as speaking to themselves. Such a view is not entirely at odds with dialogism; however, in contrast to idealistic assumptions about self-address, the dialogic model posits self-address as always an entirely ideological, social act. In other words, to speak to an other self is to speak to an interlocutor who also represents a social voice:

The dialogic form is most apparent when we have to take some decision. . . . Our consciousness seems to be divided into two independent and contradictory voices. *And one of these voices always, independently of our will or consciousness, merges with the point of view, opinions and judgements of the class to which we belong.* The second voice always turns into that of the most typical, the most exemplary representative of our class. (Voloshinov, "Stylistics" 119)

No utterance is ideologically neutral or fully objective, and even in this speaker's detached and seemingly logical utterance we can identify ways in which other voices, suggestive of the class contexts of his consciousness, subtly inform his speech. These voices culminate in the concluding ambiguity of a statement which suggests that the judgement of the speaker's narrative has eluded him:

And thus we sit together now,
And all night long we have not stirred,
And yet God has not said a word! (58-60)

Slinn has highlighted this ambiguity, suggesting that it "captures both the speaker's confidence in his objectivity . . . and his growing uncertainty about God's silence" (*Fictions* 12). I agree with Slinn's appraisal of the lover's final statement, and with his further suggestion that Browning fails to provide either reader or speaker with an

external judge. Despite the speaker's apparent superficial success in presenting himself with an utterance which is logical and coherent, his final utterance leaves him without any understanding of his situation and almost certainly incapable of making any decisions. This lack of understanding, or meaning, can also be explained by the tenets of dialogism, which require the reversibility of speaker and interlocutor for the negotiation of meaning: "Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker" (*Speech Genres* 68).

By implication, the potential for the listener to become speaker is the precondition of any negotiation of meaning, and therefore meaning can only ever be achieved temporarily. However, in dialogism there is no reason why the responding listener might not be notional. For example, if I argue against another's views, and when I can conceive of, or rather construct, potential interjections from him in response to what I believe are my provocative utterances, I can achieve an understanding of my position in relation to his, although I can, of course, never fully know either my interlocutor or myself. Thus, notional interlocutors can function successfully as a means of negotiating meaning; whether an interlocutor is someone I know but who is absent, or is merely another representative of my community, I can gain meaning of my speech through her or him, as long as I am able to anticipate (or construct) her or his voice. In the lover's utterance, there is no possibility of an other's response. Although the lover's speech can be shown to implicate other social voices, and is consequently not entirely monologic, he is unable to conceptualize fully the existence either of other voices or of others' views.

In terms of Lacan's psychoanalysis, the lover is unable to achieve anamnesis because he fails to locate an other's voice which he might address in order to gain an understanding of his narrative. By murdering Porphyria he has eliminated his only immediate interlocutor who may have confirmed his narrative. He knows that Porphyria will remain silent, and he consequently never attempts to address her —

although he also never fully acknowledges her death, an omission which suggests that to him she is still curiously alive (58-59). Further, although he implicitly addresses a notional interlocutor, he is unable to recognize the other's voice as capable of providing him with meaning. Nevertheless, he seems to intuit that some response from an other is necessary in order to relieve him of his ignorance. Although he does not directly address God, he takes His voice as a significant locus of meaning, anticipating the possibility of a response from Him: "And yet God has not said a word!" (60).

At the end of his monologue, the lover indirectly turns to God as the only voice which might in some way react to his speech. Yet he does not speak to Him directly, as an interlocutor capable of confirming or rejecting his narrative; he merely expresses surprise that God has not "yet" intervened. Thus, his interaction with God is not, strictly speaking, dialogic. Rather, when he refers to God's silence, it seems as though the speaker has reached the boundaries of his dialogic abilities. Intuiting that he has arrived at a point at which confirmation would be appropriate, if not necessary, in order to construct meaning, he is still unable to anticipate a viable response.

Lacan argues that speakers need the response of an other in order to gain a sense of their own (historical) identity. Because the lover is unable to conceive of others, he is also unable to achieve an understanding of the meaning of his past and of himself in relation to it. His failure to achieve anamnesis is also shown by his inability to conceive of and articulate a future for himself and Porphyria, despite his implicit belief that he now possesses her, and that he has met the requirements of a permanent relationship with her. In fact, the future is conspicuous by its absence in his monologue. No thought is given to, nor mention made of, possible ramifications of his deed. And although the lover has constructed a narrative about his past, psychologically he appears unable to recognize it as meaningful and coherent. In effect, he seems incapable of linking not only his future, but also his present self to past events. In the final analysis, his monologue casts him as static and incapable of psychological change.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANDREA'S STRUGGLE FOR LUCREZIA

I Introduction

Unlike Porphyria's lover, Andrea del Sarto has a clearly defined interlocutor. He speaks to his wife, Lucrezia, with whom he has been quarrelling. Andrea concludes the quarrel when he begins to speak by agreeing to undertake work which will benefit his wife (but not himself), and it seems reasonable to assume that the argument preceding the monologue was caused by his initial reluctance to comply with Lucrezia's wishes. Because Andrea continues to concede to his wife throughout the monologue, his utterance has often been read as a representation of a weak and somewhat obsequious character. Honan argues that Andrea lacks depth of character (156), Drew claims that he demonstrates a defective personality (17), while Martin suggests that to understand Andrea is to understand his "communicational disability" (140). In these and other critics' views, Andrea emerges as permanently and incontrovertibly flawed. Yet such readings fail to acknowledge the extent to which Lucrezia informs Andrea's speech. If we read the poem in terms of discursive processes, we can show how Andrea constructs himself and Lucrezia dialogically, responding to, and simultaneously interpreting, his version of her voice.

Lucrezia is an unresponsive interlocutor. For the most part of the monologue, she fails to react to Andrea's speech. Uncertain about his wife, and about her feelings towards him, Andrea repeatedly attempts to identify her voice, constructing his monologue in the same way Isobel Armstrong has argued that Sordello speaks: "He has to construct *possible* actions, roles, people, to enact a drama within himself" ("Browning" 285, emphasis added). If we read his monologue intersubjectively, we can observe the ways in which Andrea constructs roles for Lucrezia which he deems appropriate and valid. These allow him to fix her temporarily and to define himself in relation to her, although Andrea remains unaware of the temporariness of his discursive productions. Armstrong has argued with regard to Browning's love poems

that speakers attempt to "make consistent wholes out of people" ("Browning" 288), and the roles in which Andrea attempts to fix Lucrezia function individually as a means of constructing her precisely as such a whole being. Yet Armstrong also insists that speakers' attempts to define their interlocutors are inevitably unsuccessful. As monologuists attempt to locate their interlocutors and themselves in their utterances, they are forced to confront the fictionality of the roles which they construct. What emerges in their utterances is the "appalling unknowableness of the other" (Armstrong, "Browning" 289). If we take into account the effect Lucrezia has on her husband's speech, we can observe how Andrea constantly seeks confirmation from her that his versions of her are truthful. At the same time, his inability to know and fix Lucrezia is demonstrated by the fact that he addresses her not in one role, but in a series of roles. Thus, although "Andrea del Sarto" is not generally regarded as a love poem, this chapter follows Armstrong's emphasis on speakers' acts of role-construction and their need to engage in internal dramas in order to make sense of their worlds, of their own positions in their worlds, and of their relationships with others.

The second section of this chapter discusses the ways in which Lucrezia has been viewed by monologue critics. Because most emphasize Andrea's dependency on his wife (a number of critics have referred to his uxoriousness), Lucrezia has been discussed relatively extensively. Yet both Lucrezia and Andrea are invariably regarded as discrete, autonomous subjects, and Andrea's reliance on his wife is generally seen as an inherently fixed characteristic of his psyche. In my reading, Andrea constructs Lucrezia as he speaks to her. Simultaneously, however, Lucrezia constructs him: she responds or more often refuses to respond to his utterance, forcing him to interpret her inconclusive gestures and verbal interruptions as meaningful replies to his speech. The third section in this chapter investigates the roles which Andrea tries to apply to Lucrezia, and the success or failure of his attempts to adopt analogous roles. In the fourth section I discuss the ways in which Andrea reads Lucrezia's gestures and responses, and the effect his understanding of these has on his apperception. This section is based on Lacan's description of the psychoanalytical situation. Finally, in the

fifth section I argue that Lucrezia emerges as Andrea's (Hegelian-Kojévian) master. This point has been made by a number of critics; however, as I read the poem, the speaker's slavery is not a fundamental condition of his psyche. Rather, I propose that Andrea constructs himself as slave as he speaks to an interlocutor whom he implicitly addresses as his master, and who confirms him, if at all, as her slave.

II Reading Lucrezia

As was shown in Chapter One, critics have tended to underestimate the extent to which monologuists' utterances are affected by their interlocutors. Browning's "Andrea del Sarto" is no exception, although the degree to which critics regard Lucrezia's presence as significant varies considerably. Langbaum, for example, suggests that Andrea speaks primarily to himself. Lacking the moral courage to force his wife to respond, Andrea proceeds to degrade himself in front of her for no other reason than his own enjoyment. Because (according to Langbaum) there is no significant interaction between Andrea and his interlocutor, Langbaum sees Andrea as failing to achieve any change in his external circumstances, although he does suggest that Andrea's utterance leads to a private illumination, "a self-revelation which does not serve [his] strategic purposes" (196). This illumination, like that of other monologuists in Langbaum's reading, comes about "through some private purpose of the speaker which cuts across the dramatic situation. . . . the utterance is in its ultimate effect a private dialogue of the speaker with himself" (196-97). Thus, Langbaum implies that Lucrezia merely provides Andrea with an occasion (a "routine quarrel" [183]) to speak — an occasion which serves an "ultimately self-expressive or lyrical purpose" (182).

Langbaum's reading posits Andrea as the intending, purposeful origin of his utterance and of its ultimate meaning. Similarly, Mermin presents an authoritative speaker whose main objective is simply to speak. She suggests that "it scarcely matters what [Andrea] says," because Lucrezia "hardly listens and does not judge" (*Audience* 55). Rather than attempting to tell Lucrezia anything, Andrea's utterance is merely intended to keep her in the room so that he might "consciously enjoy[...] the luxury of

saying the worst about himself" (55). Langbaum's and Mermin's discussions differ in their interpretation of the poem: Langbaum emphasizes Andrea's self-revelation, while Mermin suggests that when he speaks Andrea makes the best "of a soulless, pretty reality" (55), "feed[ing] his self-contempt" with "barren knowledge" (59). Yet in both readings Lucrezia's presence is discussed as of only secondary importance.

Other critics give Lucrezia a more active role, maintaining that she functions as a mirror for Andrea's inadequacies or failings. Such a view is held by King, Honan, Kaplan and Bloom. Preceding Langbaum's discussion, King's posits a speaker whose ultimate aim is self-justification. In King's view, Andrea's utterance is characterized by a disjointed flow of oppositional forces which are partially united in Lucrezia. Claiming that Lucrezia is a particularly rich auditor by comparison to interlocutors in other monologues, King insists that she affects Andrea's utterance: her presence and her opinion of her husband elicit a complex response from him (*The Bow and the Lyre* 22). According to King, Lucrezia acts as a dominant symbol in the monologue, representing Andrea's emptiness which he subsequently comes to understand. Yet in King's reading the speaker and interlocutor remain distinctly separate, for if Lucrezia reflects aspects of Andrea's psyche, by implication he can only see in her elements of himself. In King's reading, Lucrezia exists merely as an extension of Andrea: "She is the materialization of [Andrea's] desires . . . reflecting his erroneous judgment, his false standard of values" (24-25).

Honan regards Lucrezia as the symbol of Andrea's perfection (156). He argues that she represents a "vital element of [Andrea's] psyche," suggesting that she functions in the poem as the embodiment of her husband's art; in Honan's view, Lucrezia signifies the "soulless facility of [Andrea's] work" (158). Kaplan's reading proceeds along similar lines. Although Kaplan allows for the possibility that Andrea creates Lucrezia to some degree, he also implies that she constitutes a fixed and irrevocable representation of Andrea's (fixed and irrevocable) dilemma: "Andrea del Sarto creates Lucrezia as the outward symbol of his own inner loss of vital power" (65). Finally, on the basis of his theory of the anxiety of influence, Bloom claims that

Lucrezia symbolizes Andrea's anxiety at being a latecomer in a sequence of great artists comprising Michelangelo, Raphael and Leonardo: "Lucrezia is the emblem of [Andrea's] belatedness, his planned excuse for his failure in strength, which he accurately diagnoses as a failure in will" (137).

To discuss Lucrezia as the symbol of an aspect or aspects of Andrea's character is to suggest that she exists as a separate entity, outside or beyond the boundaries of Andrea's speech. Read this way, Lucrezia merely duplicates one or several aspects of the speaker's inherent and unchanging characteristics; consequently, she not only represents Andrea's psychological processes in the first place, but also provides proof for readings which claim to reveal the speaker's true intentions and the nature of his fixed psyche. Thus, although King, Honan, Kaplan and Bloom emphasize the significance of Lucrezia's presence in the poem, their descriptions of her as symbol or emblem of elements of Andrea's character support idealist views regarding subjectivity: in these readings Lucrezia does not significantly contribute to the construction of Andrea's utterance, while Andrea addresses her from the authoritative position of speaker.

As has been shown, more recent discussions of monologues insist that monologuists are not autonomous, but emerge in their utterances as subjects divided by the process of representation. Tucker (*Browning's Beginnings*), Slinn (*Fictions*), and Martin see this division as an effect of discourse. For example, Martin suggests that Andrea's utterance is limited by an inherent "communicational disability" (140). He maintains that Andrea is unable to interpret Lucrezia's responses. Further, Martin writes that "Andrea del Sarto's consistent recourse to images of enclosure and possession reveals a hermetic mind incapable of meaningful intercourse" (145). By implication, Martin's reading suggests that Andrea's act of speaking is an independent event, "revealing" nothing more than the speaker's own mind. Thus, in Martin's reading Andrea's mind is doubly hermetic: the content of his utterance reveals a mind which is limited by notions of enclosure, while the very act of uttering constitutes him as a subject incapable of entering into intersubjective processes.

To discuss Andrea's mind as hermetically sealed is to overlook the often subversive effect his interlocutor has on his attempt to construct a meaningful version of his situation. In the following section I shall investigate the ways in which Andrea tries to construct Lucrezia in four different roles — as his wife, as his model, as critic of his art, and as his muse — in an attempt to locate her, and himself in relation to her.

III Constructing Lucrezia(s)

As he speaks to his interlocutor, Andrea's intention seems to be twofold. First, he appears to require an understanding of his present status. Andrea's utterance suggests that he senses that he will achieve an understanding of his own situation only in relation to Lucrezia: he consequently focuses his utterance on attempting to construct her in roles which will then allow him to appropriate analogous ones, although there is no evidence in the text that he is aware of his implicit aims. Secondly, he appears intent on coercing her into responding to his construction of her in such a way that she also confirms what he views as adequate and suitable versions of himself. For the most part, Lucrezia remains silent. Only occasionally does Andrea's utterance incorporate gestures and responses she seems to have made. Yet when Lucrezia responds, her interjections tend to subvert rather than confirm the roles Andrea attempts to produce. As a result of Lucrezia's general refusal to corroborate Andrea's role-constructions, he seems constrained to try out ever new roles, in the hope that she will eventually support his narrative. Andrea's monologue is thus marked by a latent desire to negotiate an understanding of the way in which Lucrezia views him and the way she regards her relationship to him.

For the purposes of discussing the ways in which Andrea's utterance shifts from one version of Lucrezia to another, I have identified four roles which he applies to her in sequence as his narrative progresses. Andrea's main concerns are related to his personal life and to his work, or as he puts it, to his "work and self / And all that [he] was born to be and do" (47-48). Consequently, as he addresses Lucrezia, he surreptitiously tries to coerce her into accepting roles which allow him to affirm his

status as husband and as artist. Both of these roles gain meaning only in relation to other members of society: a husband is only a husband if he has a wife, and an artist can only assume that role if he paints. Yet Andrea tries to convince Lucrezia that the titles alone ("husband" and "artist") are unsatisfactory. For example, he argues that the roles of "husband" and "wife" require certain social and moral behaviour from each partner. Thus, Andrea presents his wife with his version of marriage in terms of what Slinn has most appropriately defined as a "domestic cliché" (*Fictions* 62).

Andrea also seems determined to construct himself as a painter. He believes that he can only appropriate that role if he has an object worth painting, if his work is recognized as art, and if his paintings are inspired by a force above and beyond his own (human) limitations. Thus, his utterance demonstrates an underlying suspicion that he needs others in order to establish and validate his artistic achievements. As a means of gaining validation of the roles he wishes to adopt (husband and artist) Andrea projects himself on to his versions of Lucrezia, addressing her as his wife, as his model, as critic of his art, and as his muse. In the following section I shall investigate the roles Andrea presents to Lucrezia, the ways in which he attempts to gain her confirmation that these are accurate versions of her, and the extent to which she undermines his attempts to force her into roles for which, as Shaw has suggested of the role he discusses, she was never fitted (152).

a. Lucrezia as Wife

Andrea begins his utterance by agreeing to produce five paintings in order to fulfil the conditions of a transaction between Lucrezia and her "friend's friend":

I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
Treat his own subject after his own way,
Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
And shut the money into this small hand
When next it takes mine. (5-9)

Andrea implies that the conditions under which he is prepared to work will compromise his artistic integrity (6). Further, he relinquishes any control over the paintings (7), adding that he will immediately surrender any payment he receives to Lucrezia (8). Consequently, as he emerges from his description of the deal, Andrea has yielded to Lucrezia's and another's wishes. Yet even as he concedes the power he might have commanded as an artist to the recipient(s) of the paintings, Andrea attempts to reverse his implicit disempowerment, constructing his own cooperation as a benevolent attempt to placate his wife:

But do not let us quarrel any more,
No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
Sit down and all shall happen as you wish. (1-3)

Andrea suggests that he agrees to the transaction in order to put an end to the quarrel with Lucrezia which had presumably been caused by his initial reluctance to undertake the painting. Possibly suspecting that a concession to Lucrezia's wish will entail a loss of power, Andrea implies that he will work for love rather than for social kudos. In so doing, he constructs himself as a conciliatory and benevolent partner (1-3) whose kindness has been underestimated by Lucrezia in the past: "bear with me for once" (2). Spelling out the exact details of the working conditions, Andrea highlights the extent of the sacrifices he is prepared to make for his wife, reassuring her that she should "never fear" (5) that he might let her down. Thus, he describes his agreement to cooperate by simultaneously giving in to his wife, and attempting to soften the impact of his capitulation by constructing it as an act undertaken by a loving and indulgent husband.

At the same time that Andrea covertly constructs his own benevolence towards Lucrezia, she emerges in his utterance as an opposing voice. At the beginning of the second line, he silences what we might suspect was an interjection by her: "No, my Lucrezia" (2). Even if she has not spoken in the space between the first and second lines, Andrea at least anticipates an antagonistic comment from her. Further, he

constructs her as hostile, suggesting that she is initially reluctant to conclude their quarrel and to allow him to speak (1-2). In Andrea's utterance, Lucrezia emerges as desiring only fulfilment of her own request, remaining emotionally detached from her husband, and interested only in his ability to provide her with money (8). Further, she is to be mistrusted: "You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?" (4).

Andrea's attempt to justify his capitulation by constructing Lucrezia as an ungrateful and exploitative wife is not overt. Ultimately his willingness to surrender his artistic rights to Lucrezia and her friend's friend overrides any charges he surreptitiously brings against her. However, having implicitly constructed himself as a benevolent husband, and Lucrezia as an unthankful recipient of his kind-heartedness, Andrea seems to wish to oblige her to adopt a more sympathetic role towards him. Initially, his attempt to coerce her into the role of loving wife is tentative. He describes the future as the possible time at which he might be paid for his work with Lucrezia's love: then, he will "shut the money into this small hand / When next it takes [his]" (8-9). Searching for Lucrezia's approval, Andrea adds two questions: "Will it? tenderly?" (9). It is not clear whether she replies at this point, although Andrea's subsequent "Oh" suggests that she may have objected to what she could easily interpret as provocative questions. If she has interjected, her response has certainly not satisfied Andrea's expectations. Rather than perceiving his utterance as confirmed, Andrea seems compelled to affirm hurriedly that he will content her friend's friend: "Oh, I'll content him" (10).

Interpreting Lucrezia's refusal to respond as a slight against himself, Andrea tries once again to persuade her to adopt the role of wife. He describes the ideal toward which he strives: a reciprocal relationship based on the marriage contract. He even goes so far as physically to enact the situation he hopes to coerce Lucrezia into accepting:

. . . it seems
 As if — forgive now — should you let me sit
 Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up tomorrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try. (12-19)

If Lucrezia were to agree to accept the role into which Andrea tries to manipulate her, physically and emotionally, he could justify his agreement to work for her friend's friend. In fact, if Lucrezia were to reciprocate his advances at this point, he could bring his monologue to an end. His narrative would then constitute a confirmed transaction which satisfies both partners: as husband he has agreed to provide funds for his wife, who has agreed to repay him with her love. Andrea pauses after presenting Lucrezia with the situation he desires: the full stop following the imperative "Let us try" (19) functions in Andrea's speech as a point at which he seems to hope for a reply. But Lucrezia remains silent.

As he continues to speak, Andrea ostensibly interprets Lucrezia's silence as a rejection of the relationship he tries to realize through enactment. Although Andrea does not appear aware of the effect which Lucrezia's refusal to respond has on him, he subsequently addresses her once again as an opposing and antagonistic voice. Continuing his speech, Andrea offers Lucrezia an ideal image of marriage: "Your soft hand is a woman of itself, / And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside" (21-22). Yet even as he presents this ideal of complementary roles to Lucrezia, he anticipates her rejection of it. His ideal version of their relationship is bracketed by two lines which presage Lucrezia's discontent. If she were to fulfil the situation he hopes for, she would have to defer her enjoyment until the following day ("Tomorrow, how you shall be glad for this!" [20]), and might even consider any time spent with him to be wasted: "Don't count the time lost, neither" (23).

Lucrezia's failure to confirm Andrea's utterance eventually forces him to abandon his attempts to construct himself and Lucrezia as husband and wife (or as lover and beloved) on his own terms. Later he indeed alludes to Lucrezia as his wife

(136, 179, 264). Yet given his early failure to convince Lucrezia of her obligations as he sees them, these later references reinforce rather than modify Andrea's disempowerment. They represent signs or titles without substance.

b. Lucrezia as Model

Unable to gain Lucrezia's confirmation, Andrea abandons the roles of husband and wife. Still implicitly uncertain about the meaning of Lucrezia's silence thus far, but suspecting her indifference, Andrea feels compelled to construct new roles. His almost imperceptible shift from one set of roles to another occurs in the middle of line 23, marked by the semicolon: "Don't count the time lost, neither; you must serve" (23). Andrea now addresses Lucrezia as his model:

. . . you must serve
For each of the five pictures we require:
It saves a model. So! keep looking so —
My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!
— How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
Even to put the pearl there! oh, so sweet. . . . (23-28)

This pictorial description of Lucrezia's beauty seems to preclude any response from her. In these lines Andrea ostensibly addresses Lucrezia from the position of a Bakhtinian monologic speaker who views his interlocutor as "merely an *object* of consciousness, and not [as] another consciousness" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 293). Andrea even tries to preclude any physical movement from Lucrezia (25). She indeed appears temporarily caught by his covert attempt at monologic speech. Yet as soon as Andrea tries to locate himself in relation to his image of Lucrezia ("*My face, my moon*"), he destroys his potentially controlling monologic stance. As he proceeds, his speech transforms Lucrezia from a monologic object (painted by him) to a dialogic consciousness, characterized by her relationships with others:

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
Which everybody looks on and calls his,
And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less. (29-32)

At this point Lucrezia responds: "You smile?" (33). Andrea incorporates her smile into his further speech, interpreting it in the first instance as a confirmation. He responds to what he initially interprets as her acquiescence by bringing his description of her as his model to a temporary conclusion, summarizing:

. . . why, there's my picture ready made,
There's what we painters call our harmony! (33-34)

In these lines, Andrea seems to feel acknowledged in his role as artist. Having defined Lucrezia in terms of other social relationships ("everybody's moon, / Which everybody looks on"), Andrea now expands his own role as artist to include others, likening himself to other artists ("we painters"), and claiming the authority of their discourse ("There's what we painters call our harmony!").

Yet although Andrea has been able to draw his description of Lucrezia-as-model to a tentative close, he still seems to require her confirmation. The exclamation mark at the end of line 34 marks a point at which Andrea pauses in order to allow Lucrezia to reply. Again she remains silent, and again Andrea unconsciously interprets her silence as a rejection. As he continues, he seems to reinterpret her earlier smile: had she smiled in response to his suggestion that she is his ("My face, my moon"), or to his implicit claim that she is disloyal ("everybody's moon, / Which everybody looks on and calls his")? Lucrezia's smile becomes ambiguous.

Lucrezia's reactions to Andrea's speech, silent or otherwise, unsettle him. As he continues to speak (from line 35), he revises his former suggestion that his relationship with her is based on equality, reciprocity and complementarity. At first he still attempts to construct himself and Lucrezia as similar:

A common greyness silvers everything, —
All in a twilight, *you and I alike*. . . . (35-36, emphasis added)

But as he continues to speak, his utterance undermines their perceived similarity:

— *You*, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know), — *but I*, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole. (37-40, emphasis added)

In light of Lucrezia's refusal to recognize Andrea's presentations of her as his wife and model, Andrea temporarily turns his attention toward himself (39). Once again, he resorts to monologic speech, defining himself in terms of the convent "across the way" (42) and in relation to God (49-52). However, he seems to intuit that monologic speech is incapable of providing him with the confirmation he so desperately desires. Eventually he addresses Lucrezia once more: "turn your head" (53). Still trying to determine his status as an artist, Andrea now attempts to coerce her into accepting the role of critic of his art.

c. Lucrezia as Art-critic

If we take Andrea's utterance regarding his role of artist in its entirety, we can conclude that he represents himself to Lucrezia as both a success and a failure. Generally, he has therefore been viewed as trying to come to terms with his own technical perfection which at the same time he seems to believe (and his peers seem to confirm) is spiritually uninspired. Many critical readings refer to historical discussions of the Renaissance painter, Andrea del Sarto, and in particular to Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, in order to substantiate this assessment of Browning's character's art. However, in my reading Browning's Andrea constructs himself first as a success and secondly as a failure in response to Lucrezia and as a means of gaining her recognition. If we investigate the way in which Andrea's utterance shifts from an initial assertion that his art is great to his later depiction of himself as an uninspired artist, we can see the extent to which Lucrezia's responses and silences inform his speech.

Andrea begins his discussion about his role as artist on the assumption that Lucrezia is not interested in his work: "You don't understand / Nor care to understand about my art" (54-55). Yet he nevertheless hopes that she will judge it. Andrea invokes others' appreciation of his paintings as proof of his skill: "But you can hear at least when people speak" (56). In an attempt to convince Lucrezia, whom he now casts in the role of critic, Andrea presents himself to her as though he were in complete control of his art and of its production:

— It is the thing, Love! so such things should be —
Behold Madonna! — I am bold to say.
I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for, if I ever wish so deep —
Do easily, too. . . . (58-63)

Suspecting that Lucrezia might interpret such self-assertiveness as unfounded self-righteousness, he immediately tempers the boldness of his statement: "Do easily, too — when I say, perfectly, / I do not boast" (63-64). Still supposing that Lucrezia might react unfavourably, he adds "perhaps" as a further modification (64). What becomes apparent in these lines is Andrea's increasing uncertainty about Lucrezia's view of him, and his own corresponding ambivalence about himself and his art as she withholds her judgement. Unsure of Lucrezia, and possibly aware of the ambiguity in his own statement ("when I say, perfectly, / I do not boast, perhaps"), Andrea places the impetus on Lucrezia to judge him:

. . . yourself are judge,
Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
And just as much they used to say in France. (64-66)

Yet Lucrezia refuses to reply to his claims, neither confirming nor contradicting others' views about her husband's art. If she had responded, she may have provided Andrea with a point of reference on which to build his further argument, and indeed the full-stop at the end of line 66 can be seen as a prompt aimed at eliciting her reaction.

However, Lucrezia remains silent, forcing Andrea to continue without a concrete, fixed notion of what his art represents, either to himself or to her.

Andrea's next statement, "At any rate" (67), seems to confirm the notion that he had expected a response from Lucrezia. Rendered even more uncertain by her silence, his former self-assertive tone becomes subdued. He now seems more aware of Lucrezia's indifference, and he continues to attempt to persuade her by describing his own skill in more detail (68), contrasting the ease with which he paints with the agony of other painters:

. . . 'tis easy, all of it!
No sketches first, no studies, that's long past:
I do what many dream of, all their lives,
— Dream? strive to do, and agonize to do,
And fail in doing. I could count twenty such
On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
Who strive. . . . (67-73)

Following line 66, Andrea had successfully veiled Lucrezia's refusal to respond by continuing the train of his speech as though her silence at that point was of little consequence to him, and in so doing he had "interpreted" it to what we might consider his best advantage. Yet despite his attempts to repress the effect Lucrezia's silence has on his utterance, Andrea is unable to cancel out fully its subversive potential.

Following the break in line 73 (indicated by the dash), that trace of ambiguity left by Lucrezia's earlier silences breaks through. Andrea shifts his argument to address her more directly, interrupting the flow of his utterance with an accusation:

— you don't know how the others strive
To paint a little thing like that you smeared
Carelessly passing with your robes afloat. . . . (73-75)

This (albeit tentative) attack suggests increasing frustration. Antagonized by Lucrezia's silence, Andrea now provides her with another opportunity to respond: the pause marked by the dash at the end of line 75 indicates a point at which an apology from her might be considered appropriate. But again, Lucrezia fails to react to her

husband's implicit suggestion that she has damaged his painting and, more importantly, his reputation, at least as he seems to be trying to construct it: she has refused to recognize what he describes as his superlative artistic skill.

Following Lucrezia's refusal to acknowledge his artistic achievements, Andrea picks up his argument where he had broken it off ("Who strive . . . Yet do much less" [73, 76]). However, his renewed attempt to resuscitate the inferiority of others' achievements in order to define his own comparative superiority now seems half-hearted. He becomes despondent and resigned. Although on the surface he is still describing his own art as superior, and is providing his interlocutor with evidence on the basis of hearsay ("Someone says"), he now suspects that his suggestions will have little effect ("no matter") on her:

Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
(I know his name, no matter) — so much less! (76-77)

Once again, Andrea's utterance shifts. He now dispenses with the attempt to convince Lucrezia of his artistic skill. Instead, he suggests that his art is inferior to that of other painters.

The discrepancy between Andrea's technical perfection and lack of spiritual inspiration has often been read as the key to his dilemma and as a metaphor for his psychological limitations. Yet Andrea's assessment of his art is less important in my reading than the cause of this shift in his argument. In my reading, Andrea's move from describing his art as superior to qualifying his superiority by claiming a lack of inspiration emanates from Lucrezia's failure to acknowledge both society's view (as Andrea constructs it) and his own rendition of his artistic competence. Andrea interprets Lucrezia's silences as a negative judgement of his art: "Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged" (78). Yet despite his tentative conclusion that Lucrezia and others have judged him adversely, he still requires his interlocutor's confirmation. He seems to reason that if she does not agree that his art is superior, she might agree if he modifies such claims to greatness. Consequently, he presents her with a new version of

his artistic skill, suggesting now that his art is inferior because spiritually uninspired.

Andrea's inclination to emphasize his inferiority is well recognized by critics. Shaw, for example, refers to Andrea as a masochist and suggests that he invents situations which ensure his failure (153). Tucker sees Andrea as a preemptive loser (*Browning's Beginnings* 198), while Earl G. Ingersoll claims that Browning has drawn a tragic hero as self-punisher ("Autumn Songs" 77). Such views suggest that Andrea's psyche is characterized by an inherent (albeit unconscious) desire to fail. By contrast, as I read the poem Andrea is driven to present his art as inferior as a result of his dialogic interaction with an interlocutor who refuses to acknowledge the reverse.

In the passage which follows Andrea's suggestion that Lucrezia has rejected his artistic achievements ("Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged" [78]), Andrea retains the notion that his art is technically perfect, but concedes that it is passionless, uninspired, and therefore inferior. Again, he provides Lucrezia with opportunities to confirm his new assessment of his social standing as a painter. He pauses after suggesting that other painters "come back and cannot tell the world" (86), after claiming that by comparison to their works his "are nearer heaven, but [he sits] here" (87), and after stating that what distinguishes him from other, more successful painters is their uncontrollable, irrational yet ultimately superlative passion: "Praise them, it [their blood] boils, or blame them, it boils too" (87-89).

Lucrezia still remains silent. Seemingly compelled by her apparent indifference to continue to speak, Andrea describes his own lack of passion in terms which allow him to retain a certain amount of self-worth and autonomy:

I, painting from myself and to myself,
Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
Or their praise either. (90-92)

In these lines, Andrea suggests an independence which sets him apart from other, more impetuous painters, but as he subsequently attempts to demonstrate and substantiate

his autonomy he draws a telling analogy. In the lines which immediately follow Andrea's claim that he is unconcerned with others' judgements he implicitly likens himself to a painting of Morello, the staid, unmovable mountain often painted by Florentine artists:

Somebody remarks
 Morello's outline there is wrongly traced,
 His hue mistaken; what of that? or else,
 Rightly traced and well ordered; what of that?
 Speak as they please, what does the mountain care? (92-96)

Andrea's attempt to use a painting of Morello as a symbol of his own steadfastness is ambiguous. Initially adduced as a means of elaborating his own indifference to others' judgements of his work as a painter — an indifference which in itself is doubtful in light of his earlier persistent references to others' judgements — the mountain is also the object painted. If we refer back to Andrea's attempt to construct Lucrezia as the object which *he* paints (25-34), it can reasonably be concluded that *she* rather than Andrea is like the mountain. Read as an image of Lucrezia, Morello symbolizes her indifference to Andrea's attempts at provoking her judgement, favourable or otherwise: "what does the mountain care?" (96). Thus, in his attempt to vent his frustration at Lucrezia's continuing silence, Andrea ostensibly inscribes her in his self-image. Yet at the same time, paradoxically, the analogy with Morello supports his claim that he is unmoved by others' judgements, for he seems to desire judgement only from Lucrezia. As Andrea constructs himself, he paints and speaks only for Lucrezia, or rather, for himself and Lucrezia as an indivisible entity represented by the painting of the mountain Morello.

My reading of Andrea's attempt to construct Lucrezia and himself in relation to her suggests that he is less concerned with convincing or persuading Lucrezia of his greatness or inferiority as an artist than with negotiating analogous roles for each of them. Andrea offers Lucrezia a series of possible roles. In an attempt to elicit her approval of them and of his utterance in general, he produces gaps in his utterance in which she might respond. However, Lucrezia fails to take a stand, and Andrea becomes

increasingly frustrated. His failure to coerce Lucrezia into accepting the role of art-critic eventually culminates in his exasperated outburst: "Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?" (117). Lucrezia remains silent even after this desperate cry, so that Andrea is compelled to continue his utterance, sliding through ever new versions of himself and of her in the hope that she will eventually respond.

d. Lucrezia as Muse

Following Andrea's frustrated cry "Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?" (117), he becomes more assertive, if not aggressive, in his attempt to coerce Lucrezia into responding to him. Now addressing Lucrezia as his muse, he surreptitiously challenges her by trying to blame her for his own shortcomings. Andrea begins his construction of Lucrezia as an unsatisfactory muse with an accusation:

Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
We might have risen to Rafael, I and you! (118-19)

Yet his attempt to give Lucrezia partial responsibility for his inadequacy as an artist is short-lived. She seems to object (at the end of line 119). Andrea responds by conceding:

Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think —
More than I merit, yes, by many times. (120-21)

As he continues to speak, Andrea modifies his charge against Lucrezia with flattery and simultaneous self-denigration:

But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind!
Some women do so. (122-27)

Still covertly challenging Lucrezia by constructing her as an unsatisfactory muse, Andrea now seems urged on by her silence, apparently encouraged by the fact that she fails to contradict him. He repeats his charge against her, even hypothesizing how she could have inspired him:

Had the mouth there urged
'God and the glory! never care for gain.
The present by the future, what is that?
Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!' (127-31)

This time, he does not wait for Lucrezia's interruption, immediately checking himself: "I might have done it for you" (132). With this statement, Andrea suggests that she has been and will continue to be disadvantaged by her refusal to comply, modifying his earlier stance (lines 118-19) that they both will suffer from her failure to inspire him. Still uncertain of Lucrezia's position, although she has not challenged his attack thus far, Andrea concedes once more:

So it seems:
Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.
Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
The rest avail not. (132-35)

As Andrea continues to anticipate a potentially antagonistic reply from Lucrezia, his charge against her becomes continually weaker. He brings this section of his argument to a temporary conclusion with two questions: "Why do I need you? / What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?" (135-36). These function as a capitulation to a voice which, despite its silence, informs and even partially controls Andrea's utterance. Andrea's questions draw attention to his deference to Lucrezia and to other painters: he needs her, although he claims he is unable to understand why. At the same time, he subtly retains the original charge that Lucrezia is somehow to blame for his artistic failure: why does he need her, given her failure to function as a satisfactory muse? Thus, although Andrea capitulates to Lucrezia, his original attempt to blame her continues to

reside in the questions he addresses to her. As Shaw has pointed out, Andrea "can win a nominal victory by seeming to blame Lucrezia for his failure" (153). Yet Lucrezia neither confirms nor denies his suggestion that she is an unsatisfactory muse.

Andrea is unable to produce roles which Lucrezia acknowledges because, taken individually, each role he imposes on her is implicitly monologic, precluding any real negotiation with her, and failing to take into account her needs and desires. As I have already shown, this is indicated in Andrea's (monologic) ideal of a marital relationship:

Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside. (21-22)

The fixity of this image with its symmetrical reciprocity and complementarity disallows any possibility of growth, change, and becoming. Later Andrea uses a similarly monologic model when he tries to construct Lucrezia as the object of his paintings:

Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine! (175-76)

Yet despite the rigidity of the individual roles Andrea constructs for Lucrezia, his utterance, when taken in its entirety, emerges as an ongoing process of exploration. Because Andrea attempts to construct Lucrezia by casting her in fixed roles, and because he believes she rejects these one after the other, he is forced to create ever new versions of her, and of himself in relation to her. In effect, Andrea's utterance is characterized by what we might term a "serial monologism," a series of binary roles which he constructs in speech, each of which emerges as unsatisfactory. Of course, the term contains a paradox: monologic speech precludes all other discourses and therefore, by implication, precludes any development or change. Yet the fact that Andrea is engaged in an ongoing attempt to negotiate (albeit monologic) roles with his interlocutor suggests that his serial monologism is inherently dialogic.

IV Lucrezia as Analyst

Throughout his utterance, Andrea aims to achieve Lucrezia's confirmation. In the following section I shall argue that he unwittingly attempts to apply to Lucrezia the role of a Lacanian analyst. Addressing her as an at least potentially benevolent interlocutor capable of confirming his speech, Andrea constructs his utterance for her like an analysand producing free association for his analyst in the hope of achieving anamnesis. However, Andrea's attempts to construct a continuous and coherent narrative are, for the most part, unsuccessful. As he speaks, he tentatively creates the illusion of having reached conclusions. These are often marked by exclamation marks, indicating points at which he waits for Lucrezia's response (for example, when he states "Oh, I'll content him, — but tomorrow, Love!" [10], "There's what we painters call our harmony!" [34], and "I feel he laid the fether: let it lie!" [52]). However, Andrea's pauses fail to bring about anamnesis. Primarily because Lucrezia fails to respond, but also because his conclusions are simulated rather than real endings, frustrated transitions rather than satisfactory solutions, Andrea is propelled into ever new narrative stances in an ongoing attempt to achieve a meaningful narrative with which he might be content.

Although Lucrezia emerges as a reluctant interlocutor for the most part, she paradoxically does fulfil the requirements of an analyst: Lacan insists that the analyst must remain silent during the analysand's free association. Yet there are several points at which she does react to Andrea's speech, some of which I have already discussed. Lucrezia's responses are necessarily inscribed in Andrea's utterance, for, as Martin has pointed out, interlocutors in dramatic monologues are unable to respond directly (150). Andrea reiterates her replies, interpreting them as he includes them in his argument. He also refers to gestures made by Lucrezia, incorporating them into his utterance and interpreting them at the same time. Occasionally Lucrezia's responses are less overt. For example, when Andrea says "Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape" (46), his "Eh?" seems to function as a response to a possible interjection from Lucrezia. If she has said or done something at this particular point, the effect of her

action has been an interruption of Andrea's reverie; read as a reply to Lucrezia's (possible) response, Andrea's "Eh?" entails his return to the issue at hand from which he appears to have been temporarily distracted. Another example of Andrea's incorporation of a possible response by Lucrezia occurs when he interrupts his utterance, presumably in the belief that Lucrezia may regard his suggestion as a deliberate affront:

A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
And had you not grown restless . . . but I know —
'Tis done and past. . . . (165-67)

In these lines Lucrezia's response can be understood to occur in the ellipses. The notion that ellipses indicate the site of an other's voice is suggested by Bakhtin (with reference to Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk*): "especially where ellipses appear, the anticipated responses of others wedge themselves in" (*Problems* 214). Andrea responds to Lucrezia's potential interruption by interpreting it as a direct denial of his suggestion that she was responsible for ending his "kingly days." He subsequently alters his speech by attacking her less directly, leaving his later statement open to her interpretation: "How could it end in any other way? / You called me, and I came home to your heart" (171-72).

Of course, Lucrezia's responses are inconclusive: the reader can never know for certain whether or how she has reacted. Although it seems reasonable to assume that she interrupts Andrea's speech at these and other points, the only evidence of her interjections resides in Andrea's subsequent speech, where the extent to which Andrea is aware of the ways in which Lucrezia's interjections construct his utterance is also unclear. What does become clear is Andrea's own inability to draw definitive conclusions from what he interprets as Lucrezia's responses. Lacan implies that in order for the analysand to achieve anamnesis, he must recognize the analyst's interruption as an acknowledgement that his speech has gained meaning. Yet Andrea remains uncertain about Lucrezia's responses, often incorporating them into his

utterance as ambiguous interjections. Consequently, Andrea's free association is marked by his desire to achieve a response from his interlocutor which he might then recognize as a meaningful punctuation.

Andrea produces pauses in his utterance in which he hopes for, expects, or fears a response from Lucrezia. However, overall, Lucrezia's responses fail to support the views which he tentatively puts forward, for she seldom responds when and as required by his speech. In fact, when she does react the ambiguity of her replies and gestures tends to unsettle him. For example, Andrea incorporates Lucrezia's response in the fourth line into his utterance ("You turn your face") as confirmation of his rights as speaker and indeed, Lucrezia appears to give him her attention from that point on — albeit attention characterized by indifference. Yet at the same time, her gesture implies disloyalty, and Andrea's interpretation of the gesture ("but does it bring your heart?") suggests that he is aware, although reluctant to admit openly, that she favours others over him. Thus, when Lucrezia turns her face (which we can reasonably assume she actually does), she at once confirms and unsettles Andrea.

Lucrezia's smile is the most favourable response she provides, although as Andrea interprets it, it becomes an ambiguous marker of her recognition. Lucrezia's face, the medium for many of her responses, repeatedly eludes Andrea's ability to interpret it as a meaningful intervention. Andrea likens Lucrezia's face to the silver moon, which all others appropriate as their own object, but which ultimately defies possession (29); he casts her face as an object of others' gazes, thus undermining the exclusive possession of her which he seems to desire (30); Lucrezia's face is the site of her smile (33) which becomes increasingly ambiguous (204, 222); Andrea even constructs Lucrezia's face as the (transcendental) inspiration he claims he perceived when in France (162-64). Finally, when Lucrezia presumably slips her hand out of Andrea's as she prepares to leave, her face becomes an other and another's face:

One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them. . . . (230-32)

While Andrea develops his construction of Lucrezia's face throughout his utterance as an ever-shifting image, overall it becomes the metaphor for his inability to control fully his interlocutor's responses. Because by his own admission he at most gains possession of her face but never her heart (4), Lucrezia's face becomes the symbol of Andrea's inability to provoke her into responding to him in a favourable, confirmatory, and conclusive way.

I have suggested that Lucrezia's responses produce ambiguity in Andrea's speech, and in the third section of this chapter ("b. Lucrezia as Model"), I alluded to Andrea's difficulty in interpreting her first smile (33). He initially perceives it as a favourable response to his preceding utterance; yet immediately afterwards he also incorporates it into his utterance as a rejection. Realizing that Lucrezia's smile might be a response to his suggestion that she is free in a way that he is not ("While she looks — no one's: very dear, no less" [32]), Andrea subsequently resorts to images of enclosure, using these as a means of articulating his own comparative lack of freedom, but presenting them in the most favourable light possible. Andrea is ultimately unable to incorporate Lucrezia's first smile as a successful and unambiguous punctuation to his utterance.

However, Lucrezia's later smiles have an entirely different effect on Andrea. He appears to have struck a chord of approval when he claims "all I care for . . . Is, whether you're — not grateful — but more pleased" (198-202). Allowing that Lucrezia might challenge this statement, or respond to it unfavourably, he quickly acknowledges the possibility of its invalidity: "Well, let me think so" (203). To Andrea's surprise Lucrezia smiles: "And you smile indeed!" (203). Feeling confirmed, if not in the entire utterance then at least in his ability to please his wife, Andrea brings his narrative to a temporary end: "This hour has been an hour!" (204). To Andrea's surprise, she smiles again. Urged on by this unexpected double acknowledgement, Andrea becomes momentarily enthusiastic and hopeful. In effect, he constructs Lucrezia's double smile as a meaningful punctuation to his free association.

He responds by attempting to construct a pleasant image of the future on the basis of what he perceives to be a successful (because acknowledged) situation in the present:

If you would sit thus by me every night
I should work better, do you comprehend?
I mean that I should earn more, give you more. (205-7)

In these lines Andrea presents a future with which he might live comfortably, for he resolves within that illusory future all outstanding problems he has been trying to come to terms with throughout the poem. He describes a future in which Lucrezia might voluntarily sit with him in the harmony suggested earlier (13-19), simultaneously allowing for her independence: she might choose to "sit thus by [him] every night" (205). Should she comply, he might achieve his artistic goals: "I should work better, do you comprehend?" (206). In such an environment Andrea would be more than happy to fulfil the contract he had suggested before was detrimental to his art and his self-esteem: "I mean that I should earn more, give you more" (207). Referring to the present, Andrea expresses contentment, implying that the bland greyness of his life has been resolved, a protective and enclosing darkness having taken its place:

See, it is settled dusk now; there's a star;
Morello's gone, the watch-lights show the wall,
The cue-owls speak the name we call them by. (208-10)

Morello, which had represented his dependence on Lucrezia and her indifference towards him, is dissolved into insignificance. Andrea's construction of the future and present allows him to address Lucrezia with a more intimate term than before (and after), as "love" (with a lower-case "l") rather than as the otherwise stilted and artificial "Love," (which in all other instances appears with a capital "L," as in lines 10, 49, 58, 120, 242, 267): "Come from the window, love, — come in, at last" (211).

Having constructed a satisfactory version of the future and the present, Andrea now tries to recall his past in such a way that it might cohere with his construction of future and present:

Come from the window, love, — come in, at last,
 Inside the melancholy little house
 We built to be so gay with. God is just.
 King Francis may forgive me: oft at nights
 When I look up from painting, eyes tired out,
 The walls become illumined, brick from brick
 Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold,
 That gold of his I did cement them with!
 Let us but love each other. (211-19)

God, who had previously failed to inspire him (79) now becomes "just" (213), causing him to reconsider his past actions, and absolving him of the blame he now suggests has plagued him in the past. By implication, Andrea seems to believe that if he acknowledges his guilt (which he does in this passage by articulating his crime), he might dispense with it. King Francis may also forgive him if he shows remorse at his past actions. Andrea's crowning glory will be Lucrezia's present and continuing recognition of his version of the past, present and future. All she need do is recognize and confirm the loving reciprocity of their relationship for his image to be complete: "Let us but love each other" (219).

Read in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this passage (205-19) suggests that Andrea has achieved anamnesis, even if only temporarily. Interpreting Lucrezia's double smile as a meaningful intervention, he locates himself within his history, constructing a future in terms of the present which is continuous and consistent with his construction of the past. Andrea fulfils the criteria of a Lacanian analysand who has achieved anamnesis:

What is realized in [his] history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. ("Function and Field" 86)

Andrea's rendition of the past, present and future might have been successful, allowing him to establish a favourable conclusion to his preceding attempts to construct a meaningful narrative for his analyst, Lucrezia. But instead of giving him the confirmation he seems to have hoped for at the end of line 119, Lucrezia does what he has feared all along: she shatters his illusion. She interjects, forcing him to acknowledge that the smiles which had allowed his (temporary) anamnesis to be constructed in the first place had not been addressed to him at all, but to her "Cousin," whose whistle presumably only she had heard (because she had been standing closer to the window than Andrea). Lucrezia's destructive interjection occurs at the climax of Andrea's monologue: "Let us but love each other" (219). But her confession discounts any possibility of his achieving full anamnesis:

Must you go?
That Cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you — you, and not with me? Those loans?
More gaming debts to pay? you smiled for that? (219-22)

Repeating Lucrezia's confession, Andrea paraphrases it as a series of questions, suggesting incredulity and horror at her statement. In fact, by repeating Lucrezia's utterance Andrea does what he has hoped she would do for him: *he confirms her* narrative. Because Lucrezia has now decided to confront him with her infidelity, she prohibits any subsequent attempt Andrea might make at veiling what until now had only been implicit in his utterance: that she only remained in the room because she had been waiting for her lover, that she had lacked interest in her husband and had therefore refused to acknowledge him, that he has failed to reverse her indifference towards him, that the money he earned for her directly assisted her adultery, and that her continued presence prohibits any attempt he might make to conceal that which he cannot bring himself to confront. In other words, Lucrezia refuses to adopt the role of sympathetic analyst.

However, although Andrea's speech attests to his knowledge of Lucrezia's motives, which having been articulated can never be refuted, he still tries to repress

knowledge of her disloyalty. Ignoring the implications of Lucrezia's confession, Andrea continues:

Well, let smiles buy me! have you more to spend?
While hand and eye and something of a heart
Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
I'll pay my fancy. (223-26)

In an attempt to rescue a modicum of self-respect while at the same time refusing to admit that Lucrezia's smile was not intended for him, Andrea resorts to the notion of a transaction between himself and Lucrezia (detailed in lines 1-34), but his present capitulation is more damning than the earlier one. Whereas previously he had attempted to name his price (that she adopt the role of a loving wife), he now suggests that he will be satisfied if paid only with smiles. This new transaction simultaneously reverses and reinforces the earlier one. The presently constructed relationship differs from the former in that Andrea now begs for a reward he has already lost (rather than attempting to coerce Lucrezia into paying him in ways which had been possible); at the same time the dynamics remain similar in that he still concedes to what he constructs as Lucrezia's dominant and potentially subversive voice, and still attempts to produce roles which he hopes she might accept:

Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint, were I but back in France,
One picture, just one more — the Virgin's face,
Not yours this time! I want you at my side
To hear them — that is, Michel Agnolo —
Judge all I do and tell you of its worth. (226-33)

Yet in light of Lucrezia's confession (219-22), Andrea's suggestion of a future return to France is unconvincing. Further, any attempt he makes to repress knowledge of Lucrezia's confession is unsuccessful. His speech only leads him back to the Cousin, whose presence, we might reasonably assume, he would prefer to ignore:

As Andrea ceases to address Lucrezia and attempts to relieve himself of all responsibility, he incriminates himself to a greater degree than before, presenting his crimes more bluntly, in more detail, and without any suggestion of the remorse evident in his earlier description (211-18):

The very wrong to Francis! — it is true
 I took his coin, was tempted and complied,
 And built this house and sinned, and all is said.
 My father and my mother died of want.
 Well, had I riches of my own?

Yes,

You loved me quite enough, it seems tonight.
 This must suffice me here. (247-59)

Following this new construction of his past, Andrea tries to link it to a meaningful future, but this new version of the future lacks the optimism and fervour of his earlier anamnestic narrative. Now, any optimism is deferred to an uncertain, transcendental realm which neither he nor Lucrezia are able to confirm, and which is only possible in death:

In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover — the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So — still they overcome
 Because there's still Lucrezia, — as I choose. (260-66)

Constructing his own response to his new rendition of the future ("So —" [265]), Andrea implicitly claims the place left open by his analyst and validates that position by insisting on his own free, independent will ("as I choose"). Yet his own interruption fails to confirm his new narrative of past, present and future (246-65), and he remains unconvinced and dissatisfied by his (present) attempt to produce a coherent, meaningful version of himself. He acknowledges the inadequacy of his present situation: "This must suffice me here" (259).

At this point Andrea's utterance is interrupted by an unexpected voice which he immediately acknowledges: "Again the Cousin's whistle!" (267). Although Andrea knows that the whistle is not addressed to him, he nevertheless incorporates it as a meaningful response to his own utterance. Paradoxically, the Cousin's whistle is the only interruption in Andrea's speech which appears both welcome and timely. Although incapable of confirming Andrea, the whistle does allow him to create the illusion that his second, simulated narrative (lines 246-65) has been confirmed. In other words, the Cousin's whistle allows him to conclude his speech, bringing his monologue to an end but not to a meaningful conclusion.

In this section I have suggested that "Andrea del Sarto" can be read as the speaker's attempt to achieve anamnesis by casting his interlocutor in the role of analyst. For the most part, she fails to acknowledge his speech, and as a result, he is unable to construct a continuous and meaningful narrative about himself. Andrea fails to coerce Lucrezia into the roles of wife, model, art critic, muse, and analyst. However, in his monologue we can identify roles which he produces as he speaks, and which are confirmed by his utterance. These are not roles he consciously desires, or is necessarily even aware of. In the following section I suggest that Andrea constructs himself and Lucrezia as slave and master.

V Andrea's Hegelian Slavery

A number of critics recognize Andrea's dependency on Lucrezia, and some refer directly to his enslavement to his wife. Curry, for example, sees Andrea as a sensitive soul whose working day has just come to an end, and who now grapples with the transition between the world of ideals with which he engages when he paints, and the real world which confronts him through his wife's presence. Curry exclaims: "What a woman is beside him, his greatest curse, but one whose willing slave he recognizes himself to be! What a weak acquiescence, and what a fall!" (76). Shaw sees Andrea's bondage not so much in terms of the woman (as Curry's reference to Andrea's "fall" implies), but in terms of what Andrea sees as he gazes at her. In Shaw's view Andrea is bound "to a

special visual segment of experience — his 'moon' Lucrezia" (146). Stephen C. Brennan sees Lucrezia as representing different aspects of Andrea's state of mind at different times during his utterance, while her role is always that of a dominant other. In Brennan's view, Lucrezia is first described in terms of "Andrea's complete subjection to a woman who does not love him" (36-37); later she becomes the necessary condition of his salvation. Yet throughout the poem, according to Brennan, Andrea is unable to escape the "destructive influence of Lucrezia" (47). Finally, many critics would agree with Ingersoll's view that Andrea is a "prisoner for life," who consequently accepts Lucrezia as a "comforting 'fetter' that allows him to shed responsibility for his action now and to resign himself to doing whatever pleases her" ("Autumn Songs" 76). Within that comfort lies the paradox that Andrea is aware, in Ingersoll's view, that having accepted Lucrezia "he started down the road to ever greater debasement of his manhood and his art" (76). This awareness destroys any hope of freedom the speaker might have had; given his present (and implicitly self-imposed) incarceration, he is continually forced to assess the extent to which he has fallen from an ideal to which he no longer has access.

If we read "Andrea del Sarto" in terms of Hegel's and Kojève's theories, we can explain the psychological processes which produce Andrea's dependency as a result of the way he addresses Lucrezia rather than as a result of a fall from grace, as is implicit in the above readings. Like all Hegelian subjects, Andrea projects himself on to his other in the hope that he will return to himself as a confirmed subject. Yet his continued dependence on Lucrezia suggests that in Kojève's terms he represents a conscious rather than self-conscious subject who in contemplating the object is absorbed by it:

The man who contemplates is 'absorbed' by what he contemplates; the 'knowing subject' 'loses' himself in the object that is known. Contemplation reveals the object, not the subject. (3)

Yet Andrea also addresses Lucrezia as another consciousness. Hegel and Kojève suggest that the difference between conscious and self-conscious subjects resides in the objects of their desires. Human desire directed at an object will only produce consciousness, while desire directed at another's desire can constitute the subject as a self-conscious being. Andrea emerges as a liminal subject. He addresses Lucrezia both as object and as another consciousness. In particular, when he speaks to her as an artist Andrea regards her in terms of her physical body, addressing her as object:

My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!
 — How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
 Even to put the pearl there! (26-28)

But had you — oh, with the same perfect brow,
 And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth,
 And the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
 The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare —
 Had you, with these the same, but brought a mind! (122-26)

Yet Andrea also addresses Lucrezia as another consciousness. I have argued that one of Andrea's main objectives is to acquire Lucrezia's recognition of him as a valid and worthy husband and artist. In attempting to achieve his objective, he directs his desire at her recognition. Following Kojève, then, Andrea also emerges as a being who "wants to be 'desired' or 'loved,' or, rather, 'recognized' in his human value, in his reality as a human individual" (6).

However, in order to achieve full self-consciousness, subjects must not only direct their desire at another's desire. They must also engage in a struggle, and acknowledge that in that struggle they have risked their lives:

Human Desire . . . must win out over this [animal] desire for preservation. In other words, man's humanity 'comes to light' only if he risks his (animal) life for the sake of his human Desire. It is in and by this risk that the human reality is created and revealed as reality. . . . And that is why to speak of the 'origin' of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of the risk of life. (Kojève 7)

Andrea refuses to engage in a struggle with Lucrezia which would endanger his survival. Rather, he continually concedes to her, from the moment he begins to speak and agrees to paint for her (1-10) until the end of his utterance, when he gives her permission to leave with her "Cousin" (267). Further, although for the most part of his utterance Andrea demonstrates a desire to obtain Lucrezia's recognition and to become a self-conscious being, at the end of his speech he resorts to a state of mere consciousness. He is still recognizable as a person (Hegel 233), but he appears to revert to a condition of experiencing only his own projections of himself onto the world in an unreflective and irrational manner (Hegel 74):

In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance —
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover — the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So — still they overcome
 Because there's still Lucrezia, — as I choose. (260-66)

In effect, at the end of his utterance, Andrea disengages with the dialectic process of negation which alone could establish the conditions for achieving self-consciousness. He also discounts any possibility of a battle with Lucrezia by constructing his (potential) future monologically, and by relieving her of her function as his interlocutor.

Andrea's refusal to engage in battle can also be read as the slave's refusal to precipitate the conditions which might lead to overthrowing his master. As he speaks to Lucrezia, Andrea addresses her as his master. He constructs Lucrezia as the only interlocutor capable of confirming him in such a way that he might achieve a satisfactory narrative about himself. Throughout his utterance, Andrea mentions others who presumably could, under different circumstances, also function as interlocutors: Lucrezia's friend's friend, God, the Legate, Michelangelo, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, King Francis, and the Cousin. Yet Andrea is unable to establish his own position in relation to these others by addressing them as notional interlocutors. Rather, they represent voices at one remove: there is always Lucrezia who functions as

an intermediary between them and Andrea. For example, when Andrea describes his long festal year at Fontainebleau he constructs a situation in which he was revered by the King of France and indeed by the entire French court:

I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
I painting proudly with his breath on me,
All his court round him, seeing with his eyes. . . . (151-59)

Yet even reminiscing about grander days, Andrea posits Lucrezia as the ultimate recipient of his work, against whom he measures its success:

And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
This in the background, waiting on my work,
To crown the issue with a last reward! (162-64)

Similarly, Andrea seems less concerned with others' appraisals of his work than with Lucrezia's final judgement. As Slinn has pointed out, even until the very end Andrea is intent on gaining Lucrezia's approval: he "can fancy painting one last picture of someone else, but he cannot imagine doing it without [Lucrezia] there to hear the judgement" (*Fictions* 63). Thus, Andrea's enslavement to his wife permeates his apperception: he needs her as his interlocutor in order to establish roles in the first place, and subsequently needs her confirmation of these. In my reading, Andrea emerges as slave because he implicitly constructs Lucrezia as his master, and himself as dependent on her.

In Hegel, and particularly in Kojève, the slave eventually achieves power over his master. Kojève suggests that in order to overcome the master the slave must at an earlier stage have experienced the "primordial terror":

It is not sufficient to be afraid, nor even to be afraid while realizing that one fears death. It is necessary to live in terms of terror. Now, to live in such a way is to serve someone whom one fears, someone who inspires or incarnates terror. . . . And to serve a Master is to obey his laws. (27)

If we read Andrea as a slave who fears Lucrezia, but does not live in terror of her, we can show why he is unable to escape his enslavement. At times, he attempts to possess and dominate her, particularly when he addresses her as the object of his paintings; further, he applies roles to her which I have suggested are designed to function monologically, excluding her (potentially masterful) voice. Andrea's utterance often surreptitiously challenges Lucrezia's position. This is the case, for example, when in the early lines of the poem he implies that she is an ungrateful and overly demanding wife, or when he later attempts to blame her for his own failures as an artist.

Kojève argues that fear (as opposed to terror) will only allow the slave a freedom which "still remains within the bounds of Slavery" (28). The slave who experiences fear will never escape his enslavement:

This man, therefore, remains fundamentally bound to the given World. At the most, he will want to 'reform' it — that is, to change its details, to make particular transformations without modifying its essential characteristics. This man will act as a 'skillful' reformer, or better, a conformer, but never as a true revolutionary. (29)

The parallels between Andrea and the fearing (but not terrorized) slave are striking. Read in terms of Kojève's theory, Andrea emerges as capable of skilfully reforming his world, but his monologue also suggests that he has found a comfortable, or at least tolerable, balance in the status quo. He conforms to what he views as social norms, attempting to construct himself in roles which he believes are sanctioned by his social peers. In fact, Andrea describes his artistic limitations in terms of his inability to overcome the given world, claiming of other painters that "Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know, / Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me" (83-84). Also, he is unable to overcome the "essential characteristics" of his world, characteristics of which Lucrezia is the most dominant. Andrea refuses to engage in an actual struggle with her, and although he attempts to coerce her into appropriating particular roles, his acts of coercion are tentative and non-threatening. As Langbaum has pointed out, whenever Andrea makes an accusation he "has not even the moral

courage to make his accusation squarely, so as to antagonize [Lucrezia] and cause her to defend herself" (150). Instead of seeing his challenges through, Andrea withdraws them immediately, and although traces of them remain in his further utterance, the fact that he is prepared to back down only serves to confirm Lucrezia's mastery over him.

Hegel and Kojève also insist that the master becomes dependent on the slave, and to a certain extent Lucrezia does display signs of dependency. For one, the success of her transaction (with her friend's friend) is dependent on Andrea's acquiescence (1-10). Further, it could be suggested that she remains predominantly silent throughout the monologue because she realizes that she must not provoke Andrea into regretting his earlier decision to paint for her. Although she refuses to confirm his constructions of their relationship, she does not explicitly refute them unless insulted (Shaw 153). She allows Andrea to speak, and her motives for doing so may be founded on an unconscious knowledge that she needs his compliance. For Lucrezia, silence is an effective means of dealing with Andrea: by refusing to indicate her position she avoids a struggle, simultaneously ensuring her continued mastery. Lucrezia's decision to enlighten Andrea about her allegiance with the "Cousin" may be seen as a potentially dangerous act. However, in the final analysis her mastery is strengthened by her confession. She gains Andrea's assertion that he will continue to support her, even when confronted with such an overt challenge to his status as husband and to his manhood. For Andrea, the only way out of his predicament is to enter into another battle with Lucrezia, but he repeatedly avoids contention. Lucrezia also resists any potential battles by remaining silent and by answering him with what Martin has termed her "vacuous smile" (140). Both Andrea and Lucrezia remain dependent on the original battle which had established them as slave and master. Thus, although Lucrezia is unfaithful, she is to some extent still dependent on the marital relationship with her husband: her freedom (financial and otherwise) depends on his relative lack of freedom.

Yet Lucrezia represents the master who, having subjected the slave, finds herself unconfirmed by him. For Lucrezia, Andrea has become an unessential consciousness against whom she is now unable to test and validate her own self-consciousness. If we read their marriage in terms of a relationship between a master and slave, Lucrezia is just as limited by their marriage as Andrea is, although not in the same way: he no longer has the capability of confirming Lucrezia, while she no longer has the desire to confirm him. In effect, they have reached an impasse. However, for Lucrezia there is freedom outside the marriage. Although she remains dependent on Andrea's ability to provide her with goods and to construct her as his master, she can enact her independence in relation to the "Cousin" and her social peers. Andrea has no such means of escape. He has become, to apply Hegel's words, "dependent, and [his] essence is life or existence for another" (234).

In this chapter I have shown how Andrea attempts to construct roles for Lucrezia in order to define himself in relation to her. If we read his monologue in terms of the theories outlined in Chapter Two, we can show how his attempts to manipulate Lucrezia into complying to his constructions are unsuccessful. Andrea does inadvertently produce roles which characterize him and his wife, namely those of slave and master. The final irony in Andrea's monologue results from the discrepancy between the roles he wishes to construct and the ones which implicitly come into being as he addresses his interlocutor in an attempt to locate her and himself in relation to her.

CHAPTER FIVE

SPEAKING FOR HORSEFALL: MR SLUDGE, THE MEDIUM

I Introduction

In Chapter Four I read "Andrea del Sarto" in terms of the roles the speaker applies to his interlocutor, and the ones he attempts to appropriate by analogy. We could profitably read "Mr Sludge" on the same basis. Sludge constructs his interlocutor as a coercive and manipulative mentor, as a fool (albeit a dangerous one), as his confessor, as a typical representative of a moderately affluent society, as his master, and as his accomplice. (This chapter distinguishes between the confessant, the person who makes a confession, and the confessor, the person who hears it.) For example, the way Sludge describes him, Horsefall bears at least equal guilt and responsibility for the tricks and lies Sludge admits to. Proving Horsefall's guilt does not exonerate Sludge completely, but it allows him to argue that all humans are fundamentally opportunistic:

I tell you, sir, in one sense, I believe
Nothing at all, — that everybody can,
Will, and does cheat: but in another sense
I'm ready to believe my very self —
That every cheat's inspired, and every lie
Quick with a germ of truth. (1320-25)

By analogy, Sludge's simplistic democracy allows him to reduce or at least modify the severity of the initial charges (of cheating and lying) brought against him by his erstwhile mentor. Thus, he constructs Horsefall's guilt ("it's your own fault more than mine" [84]) as a means of mitigating his own.

Like Andrea, Sludge shifts through a series of roles which he appropriates in relation to the ones he constructs for Horsefall. Thus, Sludge presents himself as a victim of social forces, as a member of a lower socio-economic group, and as society's reluctant slave; he also implies that he is Horsefall's and his peers' intellectual superior, suggesting that his audience wished to be duped, and was willing to believe anything he said. Yet despite the fact that we can identify a series of roles in Sludge's

monologue, there is a significant difference between Andrea del Sarto's way of speaking and Sludge's. I have suggested that Andrea speaks in order to gain an understanding of his own position in relation to his wife. Throughout his speech, Andrea seems intent on eliciting Lucrezia's responses in order to gain her confirmation of any one of the sets of roles he presents her with. Andrea appears to believe that Lucrezia's confirmation will allow him to achieve a peaceful equilibrium — at least for that particular evening, and ideally for longer. The same cannot be said of Sludge. Once Sludge has established the extent to which his relationship with Horsefall has changed since Sludge has been caught cheating (I shall argue that he does this in the initial 82 lines), he speaks confidently. He makes no attempt to gain his interlocutor's approval, although he does seem obliged to respond to Horsefall's occasional interruptions and gestures, incorporating them into his utterance in ways similar to Andrea's. As I read the poem, Sludge emerges as a self-assured speaker not primarily concerned with searching for a sense of his own identity (which he seems to believe is not in question), and only peripherally interested in his interlocutor's responses.

In the next (second) section I shall investigate the ways in which Mr Sludge has been discussed as a fundamentally despicable and morally degenerate character who reveals what critics regard as his immoral and unethical motives. In the third section I discuss the poem in four parts, providing a new reading of each part individually, and suggesting that Sludge constructs himself in his monologue in response to what he believes or intuits his interlocutor wants to hear.

II Sludge's Self-Revelation

Generally, commentators have judged Mr Sludge harshly, and their assessments warrant repetition here if only to illustrate the severity of their judgements.

Langbaum, for example, regards Sludge as Browning's most despicable character. In his view, Sludge is an "untrustworthy scoundrel" whose attempts to vindicate himself for his audiences (Horsefall and the reader) lead only to his final outburst, which reveals him as even more despicable than the reader previously presumed him to be

(Langbaum 185). King describes Sludge as mean, petty, small, crudely vulgar and lacking the necessary stature to be really evil (*Artifice* 123), while Shaw and Honan see him as a "spiritual confidence man" (Shaw 212) and an albeit reluctant "spiritual imposter" (Honan 135). Drew gives Sludge slightly more credit. He suggests that the speaker's claims regarding his spiritualist accomplishments are merely a result of his vanity. Sludge speaks in order to compensate for his "cowardice, deceitfulness, vanity and indulgence in debilitating fantasy" (Drew 145). Yet Drew also allows that Sludge, like Bishop Blougram, is not entirely unsympathetic. (Sludge is most commonly compared either to the Bishop or to Caliban.) After all, argues Drew, Horsefall is in part responsible for Sludge's trickery. Thus, Drew modifies the charges against Sludge by suggesting that his victims deserved no better: they "were poor creatures, and . . . he did little harm by his deception" (147). However, in Drew's view, as in Langbaum's and a number of others', the reader's sympathy is severely qualified by the last 26 lines of Sludge's speech. Drew understands these as constitutive of Browning's final insistence that the reader must not take Sludge's arguments at face value (148).

David F. Goslee's discussion illustrates links between Browning's biographical details and the poem. According to Goslee,¹¹ "Mr Sludge" is a difficult poem: Sludge emerges as a despicable person, but his views are nevertheless close to Browning's, for both appear to believe in "ideas of spontaneity, necessary incompleteness, special providence, personal revelation, art as the mirror of God's world" (Goslee 40). Browning used Sludge — according to Goslee an "unabashedly amoral opportunist" (44) — as a means of attacking his own public, his critics, and possibly even his wife (45). Finally, Thomas E. Fish sees Sludge as a morally degenerate solipsist with an animalistic nature (68-69) who awkwardly and unsuccessfully tries to gain Horsefall's sympathy. In the end, however, Sludge speaks with emotive sincerity, revealing the extent of his mercenary nature (75).

Those critics who discuss the interlocutor at all tend to have no more sympathy for him than for Sludge. (One notable exception is Langbaum, who reads Horsefall as Sludge's victim.) For example, King views Horsefall as a gullible fool. He maintains

that the reader sympathizes neither with Sludge nor with Horsefall. In King's view the reader's inability to respond emotionally to either character renders the poem less successful than other Browning monologues, although King also admits that the poem has a "certain intellectual subtlety" (*Artifice* 123). Shaw suggests that Horsefall is the co-creator of Sludge's world, stating that together Sludge and Horsefall create "a truth that is wholly human in construction, the preposterous excrescence of a bored society rotating its pleasures in aesthetic parody of the religious process" (213). Goslee provides the most vivid description of Horsefall. Implying that sympathetic interlocutors serve to highlight the extent of Browning's casuists' unworthiness, Goslee claims that Horsefall does not need to be sympathetic: Sludge convicts himself. Goslee describes Horsefall as a "tall, stupid, pompous, conventional, self-confident boor [who] seems to have antagonized Browning even more than did [Daniel Dunglas] Home" (43), on whom Browning is said to have based his Sludge character. Further, Horsefall represents "modern philistinism and podsnappery," which Goslee claims Browning and his circle saw as unsavoury traits typical of Americans (44).

As can be seen from the above summary, Sludge and to a lesser degree Horsefall have been assessed primarily on the basis of moral and ethical criteria. Critics generally understand Sludge's monologue as a confession, suggesting that the speaker unwittingly reveals more about his moral and ethical views and about himself than he initially intended to. Thus, reading the monologue in idealistic terms as the expression of an autonomous character's thoughts, emotions, and way of reasoning, many critics attempt to winnow apart the grain (the truth) from the chaff (Sludge's rhetorical ploys), as Drew puts it (148). For many commentators, Sludge's truth (and that of "Mr Sludge") resides in the speaker's apparent lack of regard for what they ostensibly posit as universal moral, ethical and social values. Typically, commentators therefore read the concluding 26 lines of the poem as a final confirmation of their preconceived judgements regarding the speaker. In their readings, the true Sludge is ultimately revealed as inherently flawed and objectionable, incapable of change, growth and remorse.

Slinn provides one exception to the general tendency of reading the poem idealistically. Slinn sees the poem as dealing with issues of identity and identity formation, rather than with the revelation of truths. In Slinn's view, the boundaries between illusion and phenomenal reality are deliberately blurred in "Mr Sludge." (Such blurring of boundaries might explain other critics' references to the difficulties they perceive when they attempt to read the poem in order to establish its true meaning [Drew 148; Goslee 40; Fish 75].) In Slinn's view, Sludge's dilemma is a question of self-conception. Accepting the role of medium which society has foisted upon him, Sludge realizes that he has surrendered his own individuality. He responds by constructing himself solipsistically, suggesting that all natural signs and omens occur for his benefit. In so doing, Sludge places himself at the centre of a fundamentally deterministic universe. However, such determinism denies precisely that individuality which Sludge desires. Thus, in Slinn's view, Sludge is trapped by "the paradox that to defend the value of his spiritual fraud is to deny himself the respect of a self-determining character" (*Fictions* 96). Slinn further suggests that "Mr Sludge" represents the function of pretence and illusion in self-conception, maintaining that for Sludge there is no "real self . . . only the fiction of a series of enacted roles, accompanied by a consciousness of their effect" (*Fictions* 99).

Despite Drew's reminder that Browning insisted the reader ought not take Sludge's monologue at face value, most critics believe that the speaker intermittently tells the truth about himself; and although they interpret his comments with differing results, they discuss certain (and various) passages of the poem as intentional and consequently as revelatory. The tendency to take Sludge's utterance at face value occurs even in Slinn's reading, which suggests that after line 797, when Sludge no longer needs to appease Horsefall, he means to be genuine ("even though integrity for him is rather a matter of wits and superiority than moral rectitude" [*Fictions* 95]). However, the suggestion that Sludge speaks honestly at times, and that the reader can discern when he speaks the truth about himself and when he lies, implies that he speaks about himself as an autonomous entity; in other words, such readings fail to take

into account the fact that Sludge also speaks for an interlocutor whose presence is overt and inescapable at least until the final 26 lines. On the basis of Slinn's suggestion that there is no real self to be revealed in the poem, this chapter proposes that Sludge's utterance can never simply be taken at face value as the unmediated utterance of an isolated, autonomous subject. Rather, we must read the monologue as an utterance produced for a particular interlocutor who resides with the speaker in a particular context.

I do not deny the well-established notion that Sludge's utterance represents a confession. However, in my view Sludge's apparent confession is an illusion which he creates for his interlocutor, rather than an expression of his true feelings and motivations. Neither do I reject the notion that Sludge reveals himself as he speaks. Yet in my reading, self-revelation is an illusion, a ploy used by Sludge as a means to satisfy what he constructs as his interlocutor's requirements, rather than an authentic disclosure of an essential, autonomous self. Of course, as with other interlocutors, the extent to which Sludge is aware of the manner in which he engages in dialogic processes cannot be ascertained, although he does seem more aware than other monologuists of the power of his speech and of its effects on his interlocutor. If we read the poem intersubjectively Sludge emerges as the product of the act of speaking for an interlocutor. In my reading, Sludge's speech incorporates his interpretation of Horsefall and of Horsefall's roles at the very least to the same extent that it incorporates his interpretation of himself and of his own roles.

III Re-reading "Mr Sludge"

Most commonly, in order to discuss "Mr Sludge," critics divide the poem into two parts, reading Sludge's outburst in the final 26 lines as a tag-on to the poem as a whole. Shaw, for example, distinguishes between the first part, in which Sludge engages in a dishonest attempt to blame society for his shortcomings, and the second part, which comprises a more convincing and honest defence of his own beliefs (Shaw 212). Shaw's definition is typical of the way in which the poem has been divided. However, most readings fail to recognize the significance of the first 82 lines of the

poem. In my view, the poem divides itself logically into four parts. In the first (lines 1-82) the speaker appears to struggle for his physical survival, and agrees to confess his sins to Horsefall. Part two (lines 83-792) represents the speaker's description of the past which he claims has led to his present situation. This past narrative is marked by continual attacks which Sludge aims at his interlocutor and his interlocutor's peers, and by Sludge's apparent attempt to blame them for his own sins. In the third part of Sludge's utterance (lines 792-1499), the medium seems to be attempting to reestablish the validity of spiritualism despite his earlier admission that he has misled his audience in the past. In part four (lines 1500-1525), spoken in Horsefall's absence, the speaker directs an attack at Horsefall which is more emphatic and more scathing than those which precede these lines. Sludge also seems to wish to discredit that which he has said during his monologue. As I read the poem, each of its four parts suggests a different dynamic between speaker and interlocutor. In order to show how Sludge's relationship to his interlocutor shifts during his monologue, I shall discuss each part separately.

a. Part One — Locating the Interlocutor

"Mr Sludge" opens with an obvious struggle between the speaker and his employer. In the first ten lines we learn that the medium has been caught cheating. The halting, tentative, yet emphatic manner in which he speaks leads us to suspect that he fears his employer's wrath, and that he is intent on defending himself against the charge brought against him:

Now, don't, sir! Don't expose me! Just this once!
 This was the first and only time, I'll swear, —
 Look at me, — see, I kneel, — the only time,
 I swear, I ever cheated, — yes, by the soul
 Of Her who hears — (your sainted mother, sir!)
 All, except this last accident, was truth —
 This little kind of slip! — and even this,
 It was your own wine, sir, the good champagne,
 (I took it for Catawba, you're so kind)
 Which put the folly in my head! (1-10)

Every word uttered by the speaker in these lines appears intensely sensitive (to use Bakhtin's words [*Problems* 205]) towards the interlocutor. After each clause, the speaker casts a glance at his interlocutor, anticipating his potential responses. Such glances are indicated by dashes and exclamation marks (and later by ellipses). These disrupt the argument, forcing the speaker to incorporate into his utterance what he believes to be the other's unspoken responses to his speech. Thus, Sludge's utterance emerges not simply as an attempt at self-defence, or an *apologia* as, for example, Fish has suggested (64). Rather, the opening lines, and indeed the entire monologue, emerge as fundamentally dialogic. To apply Bakhtin's discussion of Dostoevsky's *Poor Folk* (and there are a number of similarities between Dostoevsky's works — as Bakhtin deals with them — and Browning's monologues), our hero Sludge comes across as constantly aware of his interlocutor and of his potential responses:

The hero's attitude toward himself is inseparably bound up with his attitude toward another, and with the attitude of another toward him. His consciousness of self is constantly perceived against the background of the other's consciousness of him — 'I for myself' against the background of 'I for another.' Thus the hero's words about himself are structured under the continuous influence of someone else's words about him. (*Problems* 207)

In order to understand the dynamics of the struggle in which Horsefall and Sludge are engaged at the beginning of the monologue, we need to go back in time to investigate the events which precede their battle and which define the context in which Sludge's utterance now occurs — that is, we need to go forward in the monologue in order to show how Sludge constructs the sequence of events leading to Horsefall's accusation.

As Sludge describes the past, he had been coerced into becoming a medium by his mentor, although he does not deny the fact that he initially enjoyed the advantages of his newly found position in Horsefall's household: "I got up from my gorge / On offal in the gutter, and preferred / Your canvas-backs" (263-65). Constructing past events, Sludge implies that his function as medium began as something of a joke, a trick played by a mere boy in order to gain the attention of his parent's employer and friends. However, Horsefall's associates were immediately intrigued:

But let the same lad hear you talk as grand
 At the same keyhole, you and company,
 Of signs and wonders, the invisible world;

If he break in with, 'Sir, / saw a ghost!'
 Ah, the ways change! He finds you perched and prim;
 It's a conceit of yours that ghosts may be:
 There's no talk now of cow-hide. 'Tell it out!
 Don't fear us! Take your time and recollect!
 Sit down first: try a glass of wine, my boy. . . .' (130-43)

Soon, Sludge claims, he lost control of the situation, continually forced by his audience to embellish and expand what he now suggests was his original lie. Enthralled by the fact that he suddenly possessed a medium, Horsefall encouraged him, instructing him so that he might be more adept at convincing an audience better educated than him:

There, sir, that's your style!
 You and your boy — such pains bestowed on him,
 Or any headpiece of the average worth,
 To teach, say, Greek, would perfect him apace,
 Make him a Person ('Porson?' thank you, sir!)
 Much more, proficient in the art of lies. (164-69)

The way Sludge constructs his development as a medium, Horsefall even became his accomplice:

Sir, where's the scrape you did not help me through,
 You that are wise? (347-48)

Then, however, Sludge makes a mistake. His "little kind of slip" (7) causes the struggle with which Sludge's monologue begins. Sludge does not refer to his error until he is already well into his monologue. Then, resenting the fact that even biographers and historians are at liberty to create fictions while he as a medium is not (and implicitly blaming Sludge for this lack of freedom), Sludge laments:

But I, do I present you with my piece,
 It's 'What, Sludge? When my sainted mother spoke
 The verses Lady Jane Grey last composed
 About the rosy bower in the seventh heaven
 Where she and Queen Elizabeth keep house, —
 You made the raps? 'Twas your invention that?
 Cur, slave and devil! — eight fingers and two thumbs
 Stuck in my throat! (1470-77)

Given Horsefall's vehement reaction to his discovery (16-18, 1476-77), it can reasonably be presumed that he was previously unaware that he had been cheated by Sludge. Now, as the two encounter each other at the beginning of the monologue, their discourses clash. Horsefall believes himself to have uncovered the truth. He consequently substitutes his new version of Sludge (as a fraud) for his old belief in Sludge's powers as a medium. Initially, Sludge appears uncertain about the extent to which Horsefall has changed his mind about him. Consequently, these early lines (1-82) represent not so much an attempt by Sludge to defend himself against Horsefall's accusations, as an effort to assess Horsefall's present views about him.

In general, critics have paid little attention to the opening lines of the monologue, tending to view them as no more than an introduction to what they often regard as Sludge's subsequent diatribe against Horsefall and his circle. Yet if we read the poem intersubjectively, we can see how Sludge continues throughout his monologue to address Horsefall on the basis of the conclusions he draws from this early clash between them. In order to ascertain Horsefall's present view of him, Sludge adopts a series of tactics, shifting from one to another as he attempts to locate Horsefall. He begins by denying the charges brought against him, maintaining that this "last accident" (6), this "little kind of slip" (7), was the "first and only time" (2) he cheated. He also tries to blame the wine he has been drinking, and by implication Horsefall for having provided it: "and even this, / It was your own wine, sir, the good champagne . . . Which put the folly in my head!" (7-10). He quickly realizes that Horsefall remains unimpressed: "You still inflict on me that terrible face? / You show no mercy? . . . You'll tell?" (11-15). Still Horsefall appears unmoved. Sludge reacts aggressively and indignantly: "Go tell, then! Who the devil cares / What such a rowdy chooses to . . ." (15-16). But this tactic has an altogether undesirable and unexpected effect: "Aie — aie — aie! / Please sir! your thumbs are through my windpipe, sir! / Ch — ch!" (16-18). Once again, Sludge has misread and misrepresented Horsefall. He subsequently attempts another line of action, trying to invoke Horsefall's sympathy (and possibly remorse) by flattering him (22-24), and by constructing their present

relationship in terms of a lost friendship (26-27). Horsefall remains silent, forcing Sludge to concede even further:

Though, 'twas wrong.
I don't contest the point; your anger's just:
Whatever put such folly in my head,
I know 'twas wicked of me. (27-30)

Yet Sludge is not prepared to give in immediately. He attempts to regain credibility as a medium by suggesting that some spirit owes him a grudge (30-39), and by trying to manipulate Horsefall into helping or allowing him to invoke Horsefall's deceased mother (40-51). His tactic fails again. Although Horsefall temporarily appears amused ("Why, now your face clears! I was sure it would!" [40]), he resists Sludge's argument. Instead he enlightens Sludge that his own foot had caused the creak which Sludge would construct as a sign from his mother: "Eh? Oh! 'Twas your foot, / And not a natural creak, sir?" (50-51).

At this point Sludge seems to realize that he can no longer fool Horsefall the way he has in the past. Sludge suggests a deal: he will confess, if Horsefall fulfils certain of his demands:

What? If I told you all about the tricks?
Upon my soul! — the whole truth, and naught else,
And how there's been some falsehood — for your part,
Will you engage to pay my passage out,
And hold your tongue until I'm safe on board? (55-59)

Although these lines could be read as Sludge's repetition of a suggestion made by Horsefall, it seems more likely that the idea is Sludge's, for the speaker seems to feel a need to justify his request for a passage out of Boston: "England's the place, not Boston — no offence!" (60). Finally, Sludge seems to have read Horsefall accurately. His employer agrees, and after finalizing the details of his payment Sludge is free to speak his monologue.

The transaction which Horsefall and Sludge agree upon occurs as a result of a physical struggle from which Sludge quickly retreats; but more importantly, their agreement follows a struggle for dominance of one conception of the truth over another. If we read these opening lines in terms of Hegel's master-slave model, we can investigate the dynamics established in the opening lines between speaker and interlocutor which inform the remainder of Sludge's speech. Sludge begins his utterance from an obvious social and financial disadvantage which suggests that in the past he has held the position of slave in relation to Horsefall. In the present, in order to avoid Horsefall's wrath and any further physical attacks, he is constrained to continue constructing Horsefall as his master. Thus, he addresses Horsefall as "sir," pleads with him, and flatters him in order to placate him after being attacked (18-27). Sludge even tentatively begs Horsefall's forgiveness: "You'll promise to forgive me? — or, at least, / Tell nobody of this? Consider, sir! / What harm can mercy do?" (43-45).

The deal itself which Sludge proffers also seems to place Horsefall in a dominant role. In the past, Horsefall had paid Sludge well for the services he received, presumably in order to keep his medium in his service. Now, Horsefall disposes of Sludge by the same financial means: in effect, he pays Sludge to confess his sins and then to leave. Although Sludge negotiates a reasonably generous payment for himself, he is consequently still constrained to accept his pending dismissal (should it be insisted upon), and to create at least the appearance that he is complying with his part of the bargain; that is, he must construct his subsequent speech in such a way that Horsefall reads it as a truthful confession. And although he can make himself comfortable in Horsefall's home in the same way he had in the past, he must still defer to his employer: "May I sit, sir? This dear old table, now! / Please, sir, a parting egg-nog and cigar!" (76-77). Consequently, because Sludge constructs Horsefall as his superior we might easily read the interlocutor as the ultimate victor of this initial struggle.

But Horsefall's mastery (as Sludge constructs it and as Horsefall seems to take it for granted) does not give him exclusive power over Sludge. Rather, the medium

implicitly assumes a position of authority over his mentor, as his at times commanding tone suggests: "Look at me" (3), he states, drawing Horsefall's attention to his excuses, and "Answer, then!" (51) when he requires Horsefall's acquiescence. The speaker also implies that he is adept at anticipating his other's reactions: "Why, now your face clears! I was sure it would!" (40). Later Sludge emphasizes his belief that knowledge is power: if a person is able to tell "some one little thing / Of some one man" (534-35) he becomes "that man's master" (537). Thus, Sludge's claim that he has accurately assessed Horsefall here and elsewhere (for example, in lines 265-83) acts as a means of demonstrating control over his interlocutor, albeit in a surreptitious way. Finally, as I have already suggested, Sludge defines the terms of his contract with Horsefall (55-59). And although he appears to make concessions by agreeing to confess, he later modifies his confession to suit his own purposes, as will be shown.

Sludge's assumption of partial power allows us to read him as a Hegelian-Kojévian slave who has achieved a state of empowerment through his labour. Such power, argue Hegel and Kojève, results from the slave's production of objects for the master's consumption:

The Slave, in transforming the given World by his work, transcends the given and what is given by that given in himself; hence, he goes beyond himself, and also goes beyond the Master who is tied to the given which, not working, he leaves intact. (Kojève 23)

Hegel and Kojève agree that the slave who produces for the master emerges as the more pure self-consciousness, while the master emerges as dependent on the slave and on his work:

. . . the Master's 'truth' is the Slave and the Slave's Work. Actually, others recognize the Master as Master only because he has a Slave; and the Master's life consists in consuming the products of slavish Work, and in living on and by this Work. (Kojève 20)

In the past, Sludge produced narratives about the spirits for Horsefall. Of course, Horsefall was not aware of the fictional nature of Sludge's productions when he

participated in his séances. Yet in terms of the constitution of consciousness through mastery and slavery, it is irrelevant whether the object produced is actual or merely perceived to be so. What matters is that the master is provided with what he considers to be an object which can and will satisfy his desire: "the Master has only to enjoy the thing that the Slave has prepared for him, and to enjoy 'negating' it, destroying it, by 'consuming' it" (Kojève 18). Paradoxically, however, "the man who behaves as a Master will never be satisfied" (Kojève 20).

Horsefall's eventual dissatisfaction emerges in the present utterance. Now implicitly aware of the power Sludge had held over him in the past, Horsefall resists all attempts Sludge makes to recapture the dominant position he had enjoyed through his labour as a medium. Initially, Sludge attempts to continue functioning as a medium by invoking Horsefall's deceased mother, also referring to "a thick, / Dusk, undeveloped spirit . . . a negro's . . . Or else an Irish emigrant's" (30-33). Horsefall's refusal to accept these narratives ("All to no use? No sort of hope for me?" [53]), as well as his anger, is understandable: by exposing Sludge's trickery he has also exposed his own former willingness to be cheated. Realizing that Horsefall will no longer accept him as medium, Sludge subsequently dispenses with his attempts to continue performing as a medium, instead suggesting an alternative role for himself. He agrees to appropriate the role of confessant. However, read in Hegelian terms, Sludge's confession emerges as a cunning ploy aimed at sustaining precisely that power which Horsefall's discovery has the potential of destroying.

Sludge realizes he can no longer produce utterances about spirits for Horsefall. He now proposes to tell "about the tricks," insisting that he will produce for Horsefall "the whole truth, and naught else" (55-56). In effect, he proposes to produce a product for Horsefall's consumption which he labels the "whole truth." In so doing, he anticipates what his master wishes to hear (and possess). Yet if we read Sludge's present utterance as another object produced for Horsefall-as-master, we must also doubt Sludge's claim to the essential truthfulness of his present narrative. Later in his

monologue, Sludge states that his productions in the past were comparable, if not superior, to those produced by fiction writers:

And all this might be, may be, and with good help
Of a little lying shall be: so, Sludge lies!
Why, he's at worst your poet who sings how Greeks
That never were, in Troy which never was,
Did this or the other impossible great thing!
He's Lowell — it's a world (you smile applause),
Of his own invention — wondrous Longfellow,
Surprising Hawthorne! Sludge does more than they,
And acts the books they write: the more his praise! (1434-42)

His productions were fictions nevertheless, appropriate to the requirements of Sludge's audience, which accepted them on the basis of Sludge's ability to conceal their fictionality:

When you buy
The actor's talent, do you dare propose
For his soul beside? Whereas my soul you buy!
Sludge acts Macbeth, obliged to be Macbeth,
Or you'll not hear his first word! (648-52)

Sludge's present monologue emerges as different from his past productions only in content but not in its claim to truth, nor in its function as an object produced for his master. For Sludge, the change in his situation has entailed a slight change in the product, but not in his role. Or to put it another way, he has successfully reinterpreted his earlier role (as medium-slave) to meet the new requirements: he is still producing a product for his master's consumption — and he continues to receive payment for his services, as he had in the past. Horsefall seems to accept Sludge's ploy in the same way he had in the past, failing to realize that Sludge's present monologue is merely an alternative product produced for him as master and willing interlocutor.

Thus, as I read the initial passage of the poem, Sludge's utterance emerges as something other than a confession — if confession is understood as the expression of fundamental truths spoken by an autonomous and authoritative subject, as has been suggested by commentaries on the poem. Instead, Sludge's monologue constitutes one

final performance produced by a slave whose master (the slave originally intuitively) requires him to produce a confession. Sludge's anticipation of his master's wish and his continued function of working slave afford him a certain amount of power over his master. At the same time, Horsefall emerges as partially dependent on Sludge's continued function as the producer of goods for his consumption. As the two emerge in the monologue they still depend on the ordinary conditions of what we might presume was a struggle fought in the past between a boy and his parent's employer. Yet that is not to suggest that nothing has changed since Sludge's trickery has been discovered. The present situation is both similar to and different from the situation in the past. It is similar in that Sludge is still producing a narrative for Horsefall, and is producing it on the same terms as he always has. Yet it is different in that Sludge now anticipates an end to his relationship with Horsefall. Sludge's anticipation of the termination of his employment affords him a freedom he has not enjoyed in the past. However, his pending dismissal also represents the possibility of a loss of power, both for Sludge as empowered slave and for Horsefall as dependent master.

If we base our understanding of "Mr Sludge" on an Hegelian-Kojévian reading of the opening lines, Sludge's monologue represents a *grand finale*, a final production of a narrative produced for his interlocutor. For Sludge, the monologue also serves as a final chance to test his rhetorical powers and the extent of his dominance over his master, and also to gain what financial benefits he can from his erstwhile mentor. For Horsefall the monologue represents a final show of his mastery over his (former) employee. It also contains the possibility of allowing Horsefall to save face following his realization that he has been deceived by his socially inferior employee. Further, the monologue possibly provides Horsefall with a chance to give Sludge an opportunity to redeem himself and to reinstate the earlier status quo which had been beneficial to both. In the utterance which follows, Sludge can be seen to articulate his interlocutor's perceived desires as well as his own.

b. Part Two — Constructing a Confession

Although Sludge has proposed to confess in the first part of his utterance (55-57), the second part of his argument (lines 83-792) is surprising on three counts. First, as a confession it is unusually hostile and aggressive towards the confessor, Horsefall. Secondly, Sludge manages to construct his confession on the basis of a narrative which describes his interlocutor's past to a much greater degree than his own. Thirdly, and in my view most surprisingly, Horsefall accepts Sludge's provocative charges against him without serious opposition, apparently interjecting twice only — and then not emphatically.

The second part of Sludge's argument comprises a series of attacks against Horsefall and his social peers. A number of critics describe this passage as a diatribe, suggesting that it represents an attempt by the speaker to exonerate himself by blaming Horsefall for his cheating. Indeed, Horsefall emerges as an objectionable and blameworthy character. For example, when Sludge describes how he became a medium, he constructs his former audience (Horsefall and friends) as fools duped by a mere boy, conceited, and gullible on one count (spiritualism) while shrewd on all others:

You're prigs, — excuse me, — like to look so spry,
 So clever, while you cling by half a claw
 To the perch whereon you puff yourselves at roost,
 Such piece of self-conceit as serves for perch
 Because you chose it, so it must be safe.
 . . .
 But let the same lad hear you talk as grand
 At the same keyhole, you and company,
 . . .
 If he break in with, 'Sir, / saw a ghost!'
 Ah, the ways change! He finds you perched and prim;
 It's a conceit of yours that ghosts may be. . . . (86-140)

As Sludge describes them, Horsefall and his circle emerge as hypocrites. Horsefall is further charged with having ruined an innocent: "I've felt a child" (391); "It's too bad, I say, / Ruining a soul so!" (402-3). And while Sludge suggests that he himself might have put an end to his cheating, he also claims that Horsefall forced him to continue:

Where may one stop? Nowhere! The cheating's nursed
 Out of the lying, softly and surely spun
 To just your length, sir! I'd stop soon enough:
 But you're for progress. (404-7)

Sludge goes to great lengths to describe the evil-doing of his mentor. At the same time he seems to be trying to avoid implicating himself directly in past events. Until line 262 Sludge keeps himself entirely out of the argument, referring instead to a boy called David. While presumably David is Sludge ("Sludge, your boy!" [262]), the use of the boy as a means of describing himself allows the speaker to distance himself from his narrative. As he proceeds with his utterance, Sludge becomes more involved in his argument (573-604), but even at the end of this (second) part of his argument he is still primarily constructing his audience, and himself only by analogy:

These were my patrons: these, and the like of them
 Who, rising in my soul now, sicken it, —
 These I have injured! Gratitude to these?
 The gratitude, forsooth, of a prostitute
 To the greenhorn and the bully — friends of hers,
 From the wag that wants the queer jokes for his club,
 To the snuff-box-decorator, honest man,
 Who just was at his wits' end where to find
 So genial a Pasiphae! All and each
 Pay, compliment, protect from the police:
 And how she hates them for their pains, like me!
 So much for my remorse at thanklessness
 Toward a deserving public! (780-92)

These lines also demonstrate how Sludge tends to argue against Horsefall and his peers before presenting his own position in relation to what he constructs as theirs. Thus, rather than confessing in the idealist sense of revealing the truth about himself, Sludge constructs himself retrospectively in relation to his others whose actions and characters he constructs first.

If we read the second part of Sludge's utterance in terms of Bakhtinian dialogism, it could be argued that Sludge is trying to produce and validate himself as an independent being. Using the Underground Man (the protagonist in Dostoevsky's novella, "Notes from the Underground") as his example, Bakhtin claims that some

speakers attempt to establish themselves as independent beings by demonstrating in their speech that they do not require their others' responses. A speaker trying to establish his independence fears

. . . that people might think he is repenting before someone, that he is asking someone's forgiveness, that he is reconciling himself to someone else's judgment or evaluation, that his self-affirmation is somehow in need of affirmation and recognition by another. (*Problems* 229)

In the second part of his argument Sludge attempts to construct himself independently in two ways. First, he keeps himself out of his argument as much as possible, thus avoiding a presentation of himself which might entail Horsefall's judgement and evaluation, or even worse, his sympathy. Secondly, he actively refutes any suggestion that he is asking forgiveness of his interlocutor. He speaks indignantly and provocatively, stating quite plainly that he refuses to feel "remorse at thanklessness / Toward a deserving public!" (791-92).

Yet as might be expected, the dialogic model explains how full independence cannot be attained. Subjects who try to speak themselves as fully independent beings are no less dependent on their interlocutors than those who speak in an overtly dialogic manner. Those who attempt to establish their own independence by avoiding the other's judgement and evaluation are forced by the processes of discourse to anticipate (or construct in advance) that potential judgement and evaluation. And anticipation of the other's discourse is a fundamentally dialogic procedure:

. . . precisely in this act of anticipating the other's response and in responding to it he [the Underground Man] again demonstrates to the other (and to himself) his own dependence on this other. He *fears* that the other might think he *fears* that other's opinion. But through this fear he immediately demonstrates his own dependence on the other's consciousness. . . . With his refutation, he confirms precisely what he wishes to refute, and he knows it. (*Problems* 229)

Despite Sludge's apparent attempts to avoid the other's evaluation of him, he nevertheless anticipates it continually. Speaking in general terms, Sludge constructs his audience's negative evaluation of mediums:

Sludge, our friend,
Serves as this window, whether thin or thick,
Or stained or stainless; he's the medium-pane. . . . (323-25)

[Sludge] may cheat at times;
That's in the "medium"-nature, thus they're made,
Vain and vindictive, cowards, prone to scratch.
And so all cats are; still, a cat's the beast
You coax the strange electric sparks from out,
By rubbing back its fur; not so a dog,
Nor lion, nor lamb: 'tis the cat's nature, sir! (556-62)

As a result of his construction of others' derogatory views of mediums, Sludge directs his monologue at his interlocutor in an aggressive and equally derogatory way. Sludge's utterance emerges as a product of dialogic processes which constitute him and his audience to the same degree and in much the same fashion.

Sludge's "confession" emerges as a provocative attack aimed at his interlocutor and his peers. Yet surprisingly Horsefall does not interrupt him or attempt to silence him. Horsefall does speak (we assume) twice. He makes a tentative, and in Sludge's rendition, rather feeble attempt to demonstrate his wit: "There, sir, that's your style! / You and your boy . . . Make him a Person ('Porson?' thank you, sir!)" (164-8). Yet this interjection confirms rather than refutes Sludge's utterance. Later, Horsefall (again feebly) contradicts Sludge's imputation that David/Sludge had engaged in falsehood:

. . . I'm done for, bought and sold henceforth.
The old good easy jog-trot way, the . . . eh?
The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes,
The spinning out and drawing fine, you know, —
Really mere novel-writing of a sort,
Acting, or improvising, make-believe,
Surely not downright cheater. . . . (423-29)

Horsefall's interruption, implicit in Sludge's "eh?" (424), appears redundant, given that Sludge has already clearly stated that he has lied (57, 263); Horsefall's interruption could even be read as an indication that he is beginning to soften to Sludge's narrative, for he seems to argue against rather than with Sludge's implicit self-condemnation. For the most part, however, Horsefall withholds all judgement. Yet his silence is not incidental. Using the Hegelian-Kojévian and Bakhtinian models, we can suggest reasons for Horsefall's failure to interrupt what becomes an exceedingly unflattering description of him.

With regard to the first part of Sludge's utterance, I have argued that Horsefall emerges as the master, although his power is compromised by Sludge's covert power as the producing slave. As Sludge's master, Horsefall regards Sludge as an unessential consciousness. That is to say, he does not encounter him as a worthy other, capable of recognizing him. Horsefall-as-master, like the Kojévian master, is "recognized by someone whom he does not recognize. . . . [The Master] can be satisfied only by recognition from one whom he recognizes as worthy of recognizing him" (Kojève 19). Horsefall does gain recognition of his role as master from his peers, but because he regards Sludge as an unessential consciousness, and because he now believes himself to have revealed the truth about his slave, Horsefall's silence can be understood as indifference towards Sludge's speech. In Horsefall's view, he need not take seriously the content of an utterance produced by such an insignificant other. However, what Horsefall does need in order to affirm his position as master is the slave's labour. Read this way, although Horsefall refuses to take the accusations brought against him seriously, he nevertheless remains silent, accepting his slave's act of labour. The fact that Sludge speaks for him allows Horsefall to continue to conceive of himself as master. Horsefall's two interruptions and his predominant silence suggest that he is at least enduring, if not enjoying Sludge's performance, for it seems reasonable to suspect that he is listening attentively. We can consequently read Horsefall as an observer of a performance conducted by a character whose acting pleases, but who must not be taken

at his word. Horsefall unwittingly takes Sludge to be, in Slinn's words, like "any competent showman," providing "what the public wants" (*Fictions* 93).

Another way of accounting for Horsefall's silence during the second part of Sludge's utterance follows my earlier argument that Sludge manipulates the process of confessing to suit his own purposes. In the first part of his monologue he proposes to confess, but in fact he attacks Horsefall and his peers and deflects attention from his own actions. If we take the dialogic model to its extreme, suggesting that Sludge constructs his monologue for Horsefall's benefit at least as much as for his own, it could be argued that the confession which emerges (if we can talk about confession at all) is Horsefall's. Yet such a view raises the question of why Horsefall is constructed by Sludge in such a disparaging way, since it could be argued that if Sludge were producing a confession for Horsefall rather than for himself, he would presumably be aiming to fulfil his employer's expectations. Bakhtin's discussion of confessional self-accounting affords an answer.

Bakhtin suggests that the process of confession involves an attempt to speak only about oneself:

Confession as a self-accounting comprises only that which I myself can say about myself. . . . all moments transgredient to *self*-consciousness are excluded. In relation to these transgredient moments, that is, to the possible axiological consciousness of the other, confessional self-accounting assumes a negative attitude and contends against them for purity of self-consciousness — for the purity of one's solitary relationship to oneself. For the other's aesthetic approach and justification is capable of penetrating into my axiological relationship to myself and clouding its purity. (*Art* 141-42)

Of course, pure self-accounting is impossible in the dialogic model. By implication, contending with the other in order to construct purity of self already involves an anticipation of the other, and a consequent dialogic relationship to that other. What is at stake in Bakhtin's rendition of confessional self-accounting is the subject's firm belief that a state of pure self-consciousness is not only attainable, but desirable.

In an attempt to achieve a state of pure self-consciousness through confession, subjects try to dissociate themselves from the other, a process which Bakhtin suggests involves self-denigration. Discussing Dostoevsky's *Underground Man*, Bakhtin claims:

The destruction of one's own image in another's eyes, the sully of that image in another's eyes as an ultimate desperate effort to free oneself from the power of the other's consciousness and to break through to one's self for the self alone — this, in fact, is the orientation of the *Underground Man*'s entire confession. For this reason he makes his discourse about himself deliberately ugly. He wants to kill in himself any desire to appear the hero in others' eyes. (*Problems* 232)

To the extent that Sludge tries to construct his own independence from Horsefall and his peers by denigrating not only them but also himself (as a cheat and a liar), Sludge provides Horsefall with the illusion that he is confessing. But his utterance concerns Horsefall to a much greater degree than himself, suggesting that the confession is Horsefall's, not Sludge's. Consequently, Sludge's description of Horsefall needs to be much more scathing than his description of himself so that Horsefall is presented to himself as "deliberately ugly."

Sludge has been a medium for Horsefall in the past. In the present, the topic of his story has shifted: this narrative is no longer about spirits, but about Horsefall. Yet Sludge is nevertheless still functioning as a medium, mediating Horsefall to Horsefall. By implication, Sludge constructs Horsefall's own confession for him by producing him as utterly objectionable. As Bakhtin suggests, the goal of confession, a "solitary relationship to myself," causes subjects to try to liberate themselves by abasing themselves in front of their interlocutors:

. . . the *other* may be needed as a judge who must judge me the way I judge myself, without aestheticizing me; he may be needed in order to destroy his possible influence upon my self-evaluation, that is, in order to enable me, by way of self-abasement before him, to liberate myself from that possible influence exerted by his valuating position outside me and the possibilities associated with this position. . . . In this respect, any quiescence in my self-condemnation, any positive evaluation of myself (I am becoming better) is perceived as a falling away from the purity of my self-relationship, as a possession by the possible valuating *other*. (*Art* 142)

Thus, it could be argued that by abasing Horsefall before Horsefall, Sludge produces a confession for his interlocutor, allowing Horsefall to view himself as a liberated, independent being. Horsefall listens silently and attentively to what he possibly interprets as Sludge's "soberly objective definition of him[...], without exaggeration or mockery" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 232).

It is unlikely that Horsefall is aware that he is the primary subject of Sludge's narrative, for Sludge includes and abases himself throughout the monologue enough to create the illusion that the confession is his own. Further, it is unlikely that Horsefall is aware of the possibility that the "confession" is at least as much his as Sludge's. Yet he seems to accept, if not enjoy, the content of Sludge's speech. Consequently, Sludge seems to have assessed Horsefall accurately: by accepting Sludge's narrative without opposition Horsefall emerges as less interested in his employee than in himself and in what is ostensibly Sludge's liberating because confessional narrative about him. Read dialogically, the second part of Sludge's narrative comprises primarily the purgation of Horsefall's sins rather than of Sludge's.

c. Part Three — Horsefall's Casuistry

In the third part of his monologue (lines 792-1499), Sludge constructs a lengthy argument in favour of spiritualism and of his own role as medium. There are a number of ways in which we can account for Sludge's reasons for and method of arguing in favour of spiritualism and, more importantly, in favour of his abilities as a genuine "seer of the supernatural" (875). Sludge might simply be attempting to increase the monetary reward he hopes to receive from Horsefall by undermining Horsefall's present belief (and his own earlier admission) that he had cheated, although, as Langbaum has argued, "Sludge does not have to say all that to win his point" (Langbaum 187). It could be argued that Sludge wishes to reinstate himself as Horsefall's medium. Such a view is implicit in Drew's reading, which suggests that Sludge's real defence is to show his interlocutor that his lies make the truth more tolerable, and are

consequently useful and valid (Drew 145). We could also read this part of the monologue as an essay in rhetoric. Langbaum has convincingly argued that Sludge's real motive is the supreme test of his own ingenuity: the speaker seems intent on "re-establish[ing] with all the facts against him the validity of his discredited trade" (Langbaum 186).

Langbaum's argument is not entirely clear. His implicit view that Sludge speaks in order to investigate his rhetorical powers over his interlocutor implies that Sludge does not fully believe in spiritualism. Langbaum reinforces such a notion when he describes Sludge as an unreliable speaker (187). However, Langbaum also argues that Sludge has a sixth sense he cannot understand. In so doing, he demonstrates faith in Sludge's sincerity when the speaker claims "I've told my lie, / And seen truth follow, marvels none of mine" (1309-10). The impasse in Langbaum's argument is resolved if Sludge's subsequent argument — that he himself is perplexed about spiritualism — is taken at face value: "There's something in it all, I know: how much? / No answer" (1016-17). Sludge explains:

Suppose
I blunder in my guess at the true sense
O' the knuckle-summons, nine times out of ten, —
What if the tenth guess happen to be right?
If the tenth shovel-load of powdered quartz
Yield me the nugget? (1020-25)

Yet as Slinn has argued, while Sludge's logic in these lines is correct, his statement itself is functionally useless (*Fictions* 97). Consequently, the difficulty in Langbaum's reading, and indeed in a number of other readings, hinges on the arbitrariness of the ways in which critics set boundaries between the sincere and the merely rhetorical elements of Sludge's argument.

Some critics believe Sludge when he claims that he wants to "light up [his] own mind" (811). Drew, for example, maintains that Sludge learns more about himself as he speaks (147). Similarly, Fish sees this (in my reading third) part of Sludge's argument as a "more honest self-expression" than his earlier "deceptive self-defense"

(63). With this distinction, Fish states what is implicit in a large number of readings: that although Sludge's arguments are at best tenuous — superficially logical but functionally useless — Sludge nevertheless reveals a fundamental truth about himself.

In Fish's words:

At the outset of this argument, the incongruent imagery of Sludge's assertion that 'I somehow vomit truth today' [808] unconsciously exposes his casuistry. Yet there *is* truth in the 'vomit' of the remainder of his speech, for intermittently the medium seems to lose sight of his immediate apologetic purpose. . . . in giving Sludge transient moments of insight, Browning dramatically incorporates in the monologue an authorial perspective from which we must judge Sludge a moral degenerate. (68)

The views presented above tend to coincide in the notion that Sludge emerges as an ingenious but objectionable casuist. Indeed, there is every reason to view his arguments as specious. However, to define Sludge as a casuist, fundamentally flawed either in his powers of reasoning (in which case he is unaware of the fallacies he produces), or in his unethical desire to coerce his interlocutor (in which case he deliberately reasons fallaciously), suggests that he speaks in cognitive isolation. What is obviously of greater interest to this reading than determining whether (and how) Sludge deliberately or incidentally reveals himself is the way he anticipates Horsefall's response, constructing his utterance according to his own view of his interlocutor. In my reading of the third part of his utterance, Sludge continues to produce a narrative primarily for Horsefall's benefit.

In the second part of his monologue, Sludge had indicated that he has little regard for the ways in which Horsefall and his peers rationalize their actions and their beliefs. For example, he explains their (in his view) dubious means of accounting for spiritualism as a self-conceit (85-91; 140). According to the speaker, Horsefall and his peers base their entire belief in spiritualism on hearsay ("At least, the Pennsylvanian 'mediums' did" [280]), and on "one half-lie" (247). Yet should any observer doubt the veracity of spiritualism, or the authenticity of their medium, they justify their faith by fundamentally casuistic arguments after which,

Doubt succumbs!
 Victory! All your circle's yours again!
 Out of the clubbing of submissive wits,
 David's performance rounds, each chink gets patched,

Lies seven-feet thick about his first half-inch.
 Here's a choice birth o' the supernatural,
 Poor David's pledged to! You've employed no tool
 That laws exclaim at, save the devil's own,
 Yet screwed him into henceforth gulling you
 To the top o' your bent, — all out of one half-lie!

You hold, if there's one half or a hundredth part
 Of a lie, that's his fault, — his be the penalty! (235-49)

The way Sludge constructs his interlocutor and his peers, such "choice birth o' the supernatural" (243) emerges from a flawed and, in Sludge's view, ignorant mode of reasoning:

Your circle does my business; I may rave
 Like an epileptic dervish in the books,
 Foam, fling myself flat, rend my clothes to shreds;
 No matter: lovers, friends and countrymen
 Will lay down spiritual laws, read wrong things right
 By the rule o' reverse. (304-9)

Having constructed Horsefall and the company as fools who reason by such tenuous logic, Sludge now adopts precisely those methods of reasoning which he had earlier constructed as Horsefall's — and had mocked.

By adopting the same fallacious reasoning processes which he accuses his interlocutor of employing, Sludge covertly assumes that Horsefall will not notice the inconsistencies in his (Sludge's) argument. After all, in the speaker's view Horsefall is entirely unaware of the flaws in his own rationale until Sludge spells them out in what he covertly constructs as Horsefall's confession. Sludge, however, claims that he always knew the measure of his employer's (limited) intelligence:

I got up from my gorge
 On offal in the gutter, and preferred
 Your canvas-backs: I took their carver's size,
 Measured his modicum of intelligence,
 Tickled him on the cockles of his heart
 With a raven feather, and next week found myself
 Sweet and clean, dining daintily, dizen'd smart. . . . (263-69)

Sludge constructs Horsefall and his peers as fools. Consequently, when he shifts his argument from the "confession" of the second part to the "defence" of the third part, Sludge assumes that his interlocutor will overlook the ambiguities in what he says. He proposes:

You've heard what I confess; I don't unsay
A single word: I cheated when I could,
Rapped with my toe-joints, set sham hands at work,
Wrote down names weak in sympathetic ink,
Rubbed odic lights with ends of phosphor-match,
And all the rest; believe that: believe this,
By the same token, though it seem to set
The crooked straight again, unsay the said,
Stick up what I've knocked down; I can't help that.
It's truth! I somehow vomit truth today. (799-808)

Once again, Sludge lays claim to the truth, implicitly assuming that Horsefall will accept any truth he constructs as long as he argues it a way which Horsefall will recognize as logical and rational. Paradoxically, in so doing Sludge continues to address Horsefall as a fool, incapable of rational, logical thought, and incapable of ascertaining the flaws in Sludge's present "defence." In other words, Sludge turns what he had earlier constructed as Horsefall's fallacious method of rationalization (his and his peers' "rule o' reverse") back upon his interlocutor. (Sludge's use of the "rule o' reverse" has been discussed by Bege B. Neel, although in Neel it is a device used by Sludge alone "in order to create the most expedient image for exonerating himself at every opportunity," and as a means of "reversing for himself the standards of morality which he defines for his followers" [61].) In the third part of his monologue, the speaker presents his interlocutor with a series of tenuous and functionally useless arguments which he simultaneously assumes Horsefall will accept without challenge. Hence, Sludge appears to believe that Horsefall will be satisfied with an argument constructed in the same manner as (what Sludge has constructed as) Horsefall's own mode of reasoning.

In my view, Sludge does not appear to believe in what he says about spiritualism and about his role as medium. Rather, he still seems to be constructing a

fallaciously argued narrative for his interlocutor's benefit. For example, he argues that he had received a sign which had told him to confess if thrashed:

I live by signs and omens: looked at the roof
Where the pigeons settle — 'If the further bird,
The white, takes wing first, I'll confess when thrashed;
Not, if the blue does' — so I said to myself
Last week, lest you should take me by surprise:
Off flapped the white, — and I'm confessing, sir! (971-76)

In light of the extent to which Sludge had gone to avoid confessing after his thrashing (18-55), his present explanation for his reasons for confessing fails to convince.

Rather, his claim that he decided to confess in advance appears as an argument which follows the "rule o' reverse" (309), a rhetorical tactic which Sludge accuses Horsefall and his associates of using. The way Sludge appropriates it, the rule of reverse allows him to construct causes retrospectively on the basis of present effects. And because Sludge is still producing a narrative for Horsefall by that rule, it is unlikely that Sludge had received a sign, much less decided to confess in advance. Further, he remains detached from his argument. He seems little moved when he realizes that Horsefall has failed to accept this part of his argument:

What, sir? You won't shake hands? 'Because I cheat!
'You've found me out in cheating!' That's enough
To make an apostle swear! Why, when I cheat,
Mean to cheat, do cheat, and am caught in the act,
Are you, or, rather, am I sure o' the fact? (1280-84)

Fish has read these lines as the manifestation of Sludge's "spiritual bankruptcy" which even Horsefall seems to sense, claiming of the above lines that in his "reaction to Horsefall's continuing rejection of his apologia, Sludge is barely able to suppress his bad temper until Horsefall is out of hearing" (Fish 72). Yet as I read these lines, they demonstrate quite the reverse. Sludge seems little affected by, much less surprised at, Horsefall's refusal to shake hands with him, subsequently adding to the above lines:

(There's verse again, but I'm inspired somehow.)
 Well then I'm not sure! I may be, perhaps,
 Free as a babe from cheating. . . . (1285-87)

Such a casual admission of doubt as the best defence against the charge that he is a fraud suggests to me that Sludge is to a large extent indifferent to the effect his utterance is having on his interlocutor. He regards Horsefall as a fool, whose powers of reasoning are far more limited than his own. And Horsefall seems to support Sludge's views about him, remaining for the most part silent.

It seems fair to say that Sludge at least constructs the illusion that he believes in spiritualism and in his own powers as a medium. (This view is implicit in Mermin's reading, which suggests that Sludge can never be sincere in his speech because fraud and reality are confused in his utterance; however, he can, and successfully does simulate sincerity [Mermin, "Speaker and Auditor" 152-53].) Sludge's belief in spiritualism and his sincerity are illusions created for an interlocutor who is incapable of realizing the illusory nature of Sludge's narrative. And because Sludge conducts his argument in terms of what he believes to be Horsefall's method of reasoning, we could provocatively argue that Horsefall, not Sludge, emerges as the casuist.

In the third part of his utterance Sludge provides his master with a narrative which has the potential of restoring the master's faith in spiritualism. It also provides Horsefall with ammunition to counter any possible accusations or adverse judgements made later by his peers. In the end, Horsefall not only pays Sludge, but adds a bonus to the agreed amount. Thus, Horsefall is satisfied to the extent that he accepts the product of Sludge's labour as a genuinely produced object made available by his slave for his consumption. However, Sludge fails to convince Horsefall that he is a genuine medium, or that he should continue working for Horsefall. Sludge makes a final essay to determine the extent to which he has duped his interlocutor:

You'll not let me speak,
 I well know, and I've lost the right, too true!
 But I must say, sir, if She hears (she does)
 Your sainted . . . Well, sir, — be it so! (1495-98)

But Horsefall remains unconvinced, forcing Sludge to make a hasty retreat in case Horsefall should reconsider the payment. Sludge quits while he is ahead; but although he appears satisfied with his payment, the final 26 lines suggest that he is dissatisfied with the utterance he has produced for his interlocutor.

d. Part Four — An Attempt at Independence

The final lines of Sludge's argument mark a decisive shift in the way the speaker constructs his monologue. Generally, critics view these lines as the final revelation of the speaker's true self. For example, Johnson suggests that the "last extraordinary diatribe . . . reveals Sludge as the unregenerate charlatan he is" (99). Similarly, Drew believes that the ending of the poem qualifies our sympathy temporarily established during the persuasive second half of the monologue. In Drew's view, these final lines ensure that "we are not misled into taking all [Sludge's] arguments at face value" (148).

In the final 26 lines of his speech, the speaker attempts to fabricate possible slanderous versions of his mentor:

You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag,
 In just such a fit of passion: no, it was . . .
 To get this house of hers, and many a note
 Like these . . . I'll pocket them, however . . . five,
 Ten, fifteen . . . ay, you gave her throat the twist,
 Or else you poisoned her! (1506-11)

Such narratives about Horsefall were never possible in his presence. During the first three parts of the monologue Sludge's implicit need to continue acting as Horsefall's slave, even if only for financial gain, had controlled his speech. Now, he believes he is at liberty to speak without the controlling presence of an interlocutor. In an apparent

attempt to discredit his earlier statements constructed for an interlocutor who was also his master, Sludge now attempts to produce a self which is in full control of his utterance, and possibly even of his master's future. In other words, he attempts to overcome his slavery by speaking monologically, denying Horsefall's separate being, and remaining deaf to his possible responses. Paradoxically, in order to convince himself that his speech is monologic, and that it is defiantly and radically opposed to his interlocutor's, Sludge creates the illusion that he is still speaking to Horsefall:

R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp!
I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering! Oh what, you're the man?
You're satisfied at last? You've found out Sludge? (1500-3)

Demonstratively attacking his interlocutor, Sludge presumes that he speaks as an independent entity, uninfluenced by others. He suggests that he knows that his earlier speech had constituted a story constructed primarily for Horsefall. Now, he insists, he will construct his own: "my turn, sir, next! / I too can tell my story" (1504-5). Yet the means by which he attempts to construct a new story is indicative of the way he reasons throughout his monologue, with a constant anticipatory glance towards his interlocutor. Uttering possible slanderous stories about Horsefall, he tests these one after another in order to determine which version might succeed, tentatively trying to locate the extent to which such stories might be deemed true. Thus, although he assumes that he can now speak monologically, Sludge ostensibly addresses a new interlocutor. In order to test the possible versions of Horsefall (and of his own position in relation to Horsefall's), Sludge unwittingly anticipates the responses of a notional other, who in Sludge's final lines represents the future recipient of his story, possibly a generalized member of Horsefall's social environment or even a potential future employer.

Sludge seems unaware that he remains dependent on an other, constrained to construct his narrative about himself always in anticipation of an other's response.

Misrecognizing the extent of his need for an interlocutor, Sludge insists that leaving Horsefall and Boston will provide him with a liberty not experienced before:

An end of him! Begin elsewhere anew!
 Boston's a hole, the herring-pond is wide,
 V-notes are something, liberty still more. (1522-24)

Yet for Sludge, such liberty is a mere illusion. Without realizing, he anticipates his future freedom in terms of a new enslavement. Implying that he will now have to find a new master, he asks his notional interlocutor: "Beside, is he the only fool in the world?" (1525).

Sludge constructs his final 26 lines as though his speech were discrete and unaffected by others' opinions. He speaks as though he has the final word. Yet Bakhtin suggests that speakers never exclusively or discretely own their words. Further, no word can be the ultimate word, for any word which purports to be final is still spoken in anticipation of another's response: there is always another's word which follows any utterance and towards which it is implicitly directed (*Speech Genres* 152). Thus, even in the very last line of Sludge's utterance, a social voice breaks through. As he concludes his monologue, Sludge confines his future self to the role of medium from which he purports he wishes to escape.

CHAPTER SIX

CALIBAN'S DIALOGIC MONOLOGUE

I Introduction — Satire and Singularity of Self

This reading of "Caliban upon Setebos" is intended as a test case of another of Browning's monologues in which there is no obvious interlocutor. As is the case with "Porphyria's Lover," "Caliban's" lack of an obviously present interlocutor has caused difficulties for critics attempting to define its form. Consequently, this poem is often classified as a soliloquy rather than as a dramatic monologue. Yet despite their similarities, "Caliban" begs a reading which is quite different from that of "Porphyria's Lover." While the lover speaks in isolation, focusing his narrative exclusively on his relationship with Porphyria, Caliban produces a web of relationships between the inhabitants of his island, taking his own specific place in the order he creates in his society. This chapter investigates the extent to which these others inform Caliban's utterance, and the extent to which they can be regarded as interlocutors.

In this section I shall describe ways in which critics have read "Caliban." In the second section I shall suggest that Caliban assumes the stance of a monologic speaker. At the outset of his utterance, he insists that his isolation is the necessary precondition for his speech. Yet despite his own early claims, I shall argue that he engages in a form of dialogic interaction with those others who populate his narrative. The dialogic aspects of Caliban's utterance will be discussed in the third section. In the fourth section I shall show how Caliban unwittingly addresses a notional interlocutor who functions as an observer to the monologue he produces. In the fifth section I shall investigate the ramifications of my dialogic reading of "Caliban," particularly with reference to the past tendency to discuss the poem in terms of satiric intent.

There has been a tendency in past criticism to approach "Caliban upon Setebos" by attempting to identify its satiric target. In his *Focusing Artifice* King suggests that Browning obviously intended to satirize eighteenth- and nineteenth-century natural

theologians, for the epigraph "suggests that a man who today reduces God to his own image unwittingly reduces himself to the level of Caliban" (124). A similar view is implied by Shaw (199) and Honan (137). Drew, however, refuses to posit one single religious target in the poem:

It is clear that we are to reject the way his [Caliban's] mind works and his home-made Godhead, but in favour of what? Is the poem directed against 'natural religion'? Or against the doctrines of evolution? Or against Calvinism? Or against orthodox theology? Or against anthropomorphism in religion? Or against the Higher Critics of the Bible? (150)

Rejecting theories of evolution as targets of satire, Drew suggests that "Caliban" addresses and challenges a number of religious dogmas, concluding that "the poet's targets are widely dispersed, too widely in fact for the complete success of the poem" (154).

Implicit in Drew (and in other discussions which attempt to define the poem's satiric targets) is the notion that Browning intended "Caliban" to be didactic. In these critics' views, the poem presents the reader with a character whose beliefs in natural religion (or Calvinism, or orthodox theology, or anthropomorphism) are dubious, if not erroneous, forcing readers to reassess their own religious beliefs, and to reject, or at least question, whichever faith they consider to be challenged by the poem. Drew makes the most overt claims as to Browning's didactic intent, lamenting the fact that while with "Caliban" Browning has discredited a wide range of religions, he has failed to guide the reader to a positive alternative (154).

More recently, critical attention has shifted away from attempts to discover which specific religious ideas Browning had intended to question. In keeping with the critical move towards reading monologues in terms of the speaker's psychological processes, a number of critics have argued that in "Caliban" Browning has successfully revealed the fallacious *process* of reasoning by which certain beliefs have come into existence. Such is the case in Wendell V. Harris' discussion. Harris aims to broaden the "perspective against [sic] which we view [the poem's] satire" (95), directing his

focus not at specific ideologies, but at the entire history of "the great majority of Western theological structures based on reason rather than revelation," including Plato and Jeremy Bentham (96). Terrell L. Tebbetts takes Harris' argument one step further: "If the poem is satiric, then, it is so in a very special way" (370). Like Harris, Tebbetts emphasizes the "processes that lead thinkers to untenable ideologies, processes at work in Browning's day and still at work in ours, when the processes produce new content" (370). Jeff Karr suggests that Browning "contrasts the world views of Paley and Darwin in order to focus on the fundamentally flawed *process* of natural theology" (38-39, Karr's emphasis), while in William Butts's reading, "Caliban" becomes a type of Menippean satire, which "focuses satire on the speaker's mind and how it works rather than on the usual identifiable butts of satire — people, events, places, beliefs" (25).

In one sense, these more recent readings allow for more fluid and complex discussions of the poem. However, in another sense, although Harris, Tebbetts, Karr, and Butts reject earlier attempts to isolate specific satiric targets within the poem, they nevertheless covertly assume that Browning wished to alert his readers to some form of fallacious reasoning. Thus, both older discussions of the poem as satire and those more recent discussions which identify the process of rationalization as the poem's satiric target implicitly refer their readers to Browning (an implicitly didactic satirist).

Discussions of "Caliban" share a second feature. Those who raise the question about an interlocutor at all agree that Caliban speaks in physical and psychological isolation. For example, Arnold Shapiro contrasts Caliban's lack of desire for an interlocutor to the Psalmist's longing for communion with God as He is represented in Psalm 50, and "whose message is for all mankind" (59). Thomas P. Wolfe sees Caliban's use of the third person pronoun as a means of widening the reader's context, in the absence of an interlocutor, "by 'socializing' the speaking event" (10). In Slinn's reading, Caliban is his own auditor (*Fictions* 88), while Erickson suggests that the speaker satisfies his need for an auditor by projecting himself into nature, only to find

that his own nothingness is returned to him (219). Finally, Joseph A. Dupras discusses "Caliban" as a soliloquy, claiming that the eavesdropping reader ultimately has exclusive judgement over Caliban: the "interpretive relationship to a speaker differs from the one in a dramatic monologue, where a fictitious auditor silently shares the responsibility of deciding meaning and consequences" (75).

II Appropriating Monologic Speech

Caliban begins his monologue by describing his environment, positioning himself at the centre of the scene:

['Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire,
With elbows wide, fists clenched to prop his chin.
And, while he kicks both feet in the cool slush,
And feels about his spine small eft-things course,
Run in an out each arm, and make him laugh:
And while above his head a pompion-plant,
Coating the cave-top as a brow its eye,
Creeps down to touch and tickle hair and beard,
And now a flower drops with a bee inside,
And now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch, —
He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross. . . . (1-12)

The way Caliban describes his immediate surroundings, the natural objects which he refers to gravitate toward him. They exist for his benefit only, meeting his present physical and emotional needs. As one critic has stated, the "biological world seems to be conspiring for Caliban's pleasure" (Wolfe 11). Caliban's pleasure results from his knowledge that he has isolated himself from what he later describes as (at least potentially) malevolent forces which habitually dominate him. For the moment his god, Setebos, is away (19), Prospero and Miranda are asleep (20), and the only living creatures present are some "small eft-things" (5) and a bee (10). Assured of the absence of all others capable of interrupting his blissful reverie, Caliban claims that he now might talk

. . . to his own self, howe'er he please,
 Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
 Because to talk about Him, vexes — ha,
 Could He but know! and time to vex is now,
 When talk is safer than in winter-time.
 Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
 In confidence he drudges at their task,
 And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe,
 Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech.] (15-23)

The confident and authoritative tone of Caliban's utterance in these lines belies the fear he has of his superiors which becomes evident later in his monologue. Caliban knows that he can only speak in an authoritative manner when he has no interlocutors capable of hearing, responding to and opposing his utterance. Thus, he considers his present situation to be both physically and psychologically safe. In effect, Caliban finds in the cave the ideal conditions for attempting to speak as though he were the centre of being, a position which temporarily allows him to dominate and control through his monologue all others whom he chooses to talk about.

In these initial lines Caliban assumes a speaking role which is superficially monologic. He insists on the absence of other consciousnesses and proposes to talk about Setebos (and by implication the island's other inhabitants) "howe'er he please" (15), assuming command of them through speech. Caliban engages in his reverie only because he is certain that he can speak about others as mere objects available to his consciousness. In Bakhtin's terms, Caliban's speech is deaf and finalized to others' potential responses. The utterance which he proposes to construct, like that of Bakhtin's monologic speaker, "closes down the represented world and represented persons" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 293). Thus, at the end of the opening (bracketed) passage Caliban affirms that his present situation will allow him to let his "rank tongue blossom into speech" (23), a speech which is deliberately rebellious, and which under any other circumstances would be prohibited, for "to talk about Him [Setebos], vexes" (17). As Caliban later confides, fearing Setebos he usually

. . . dances on dark nights,
 Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
 And never speaks his mind save housed as now:
 Outside, 'groans, curses. (266-69)

Throughout the main part of his monologue (lines 24-283) Caliban continues to use his isolation as a means of speaking "howe'er he please" (15). He talks deliberately in order to undermine the power he believes is usually held over him by others, and in order to establish a relative position of power for himself. Caliban's attempt to produce and validate a powerful centre of being from which all others can be dominated through speech is comparable to the Duke of Ferrara's assumption of control over his world. In Bakhtinian terms, each of these characters represents his world "as an objectified world, a world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 9). Yet while the Duke bases his power on what he believes to be his elevated social position, we can read Caliban's speech as a result of a desire to create order out of the chaos he perceives in the world which surrounds him, as a number of critics have suggested.

The most significant character in Caliban's monologue is Setebos, Caliban's god. As he speaks about his god, Caliban assumes a position of power over Setebos in two ways: first, he rebelliously speaks about Setebos in his absence, believing that the god would not only prohibit such speech but would severely punish Caliban for talking about him the way he does. By defying Setebos' prohibition, Caliban infers that he places himself in the very real danger of being destroyed by Setebos. His description of a pipe functions as an analogy: Caliban claims he would destroy a pipe he has made if it were to exert its power over him. The pipe is superior to him in its ability to catch birds, and would draw Caliban's wrath upon itself only if it were to speak:

Put case such pipe could prattle and boast forsooth
 'I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
 I make the cry my maker cannot make
 With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine!
 Would not I smash it with my foot? So He. (122-26)

Anticipating his own act of destruction, Caliban reinforces his disobedience, simultaneously assuming a (temporary) role of self-empowering defiance against Setebos. Of course, neither Caliban nor the pipe are in any real danger: Caliban's

speech remains unheard (at least, Caliban believes until the end that it does), and the pipe would never be able to state its superiority. Hence, because Setebos is absent Caliban's intention to vex through speech is a mere sham (Slinn, *Fictions* 88). Yet Caliban nevertheless creates the illusion of empowering himself through speech, deliberately attempting to assert his own independence in relation to a god whom he believes would view any attempt at independence as an affront.

Secondly, Caliban attempts to empower himself through speech by describing Setebos in terms of his own experiences, drawing parallels between his own actions and emotions and Setebos'. Caliban surreptitiously constructs Setebos as a being very similar to himself, suggesting that the god's weaknesses and limitations are comparable to his own. For example, the way in which Caliban patterns his arguments which explain and define his god allows him to conceal any differences between Setebos and himself which might disrupt his own empowerment. Seven times Caliban makes an authoritative statement about Setebos; he then provides an example from his own experience in support of his claim; and finally he asserts the validity of the original statement by means of the reductive and incontrovertible "so He." For instance, Caliban believes that his god created most, but not all natural objects, implying further that Setebos is limited by a feeling of unease:

'Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon.

'Thinketh He made it, with the sun to match,
But not the stars; the stars came otherwise;
Only made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.

'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease. . . . (25-31)

In order to explain what he believes to be Setebos' limited capabilities, Caliban compares him to

. . . an icy fish

That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived,
 And thaw herself within the lukewarm brine
 O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
 A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave;
 Only, she ever sickened, found repulse
 At the other kind of water, not her life,
 (Green-dense and dim-delicious, bred o' the sun)
 Flounced back from bliss she was not born to breathe,
 And in her old bounds buried her despair,
 Hating and loving warmth alike. . . . (33-43)

Yet although Caliban creates the illusion that he is constructing Setebos in terms of a fish he has observed, what becomes evident is the fact that the fish already constitutes Caliban's evaluation of it on the basis of his own experiences of hot and cold, salt and fresh water, love and hatred. Caliban sees no flaw in his argument, reducing Setebos, the fish and by implication himself to similarity, made manifest in the final assertion "so He" (43). To the extent that he precludes any possibility of difference, Caliban thus monologizes the characters he describes, forcing them to correspond to his own "single and unified authorial consciousness" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 9).

Caliban's speech is monologic in the sense that, for the most part, it closes itself to the possibility of alternative perspectives. Only twice does Caliban mention an opinion which is at odds with his own, and in both cases he colonizes that view, leaving the reader with the impression that he had mentioned it only as a means of reinforcing his own ideas. Caliban describes the way his dam, Sycorax, had passed on her knowledge about the Quiet and about Setebos to him: "His dam held that the Quiet made all things / Which Setebos vexed only" (170-71). Immediately after, however, Caliban repudiates his mother's opinion: "'holds not so. / Who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex" (171-72). Introducing his own opposing view, Caliban colonizes and monologizes his mother's voice: he displays not a hint of doubt in his own opinion, and he precludes any real contention with his mother's. Similarly, he describes her belief in an afterlife:

His dam held different, that after death
 He [Setebos] both plagued enemies and feasted friends. . . . (251-52)

This time Caliban has already stated his own contrary view in advance: "'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop" (250). Yet immediately following his description of his dam's view, Caliban refutes it in a manner which appears assertive and authoritative: "Idly!" (253). Such an emphatic affirmation of his own opinion monologically cancels out the view he believes his mother had held, thus adding force to Caliban's own argument.

Monologically appropriating those others he mentions in his monologue, Caliban creates a world akin to Bakhtin's "monologic artistic world" which

. . . does not recognize someone else's thought, someone else's idea, as an object of representation. In such a world everything ideological falls into two categories. Certain thoughts . . . gravitate toward the author's consciousness, and strive to shape themselves in the purely semantic unity of a worldview; such a thought is not represented, it is affirmed. . . . Other thoughts and ideas — untrue or indifferent from the author's point of view, not fitting into his worldview — are not affirmed; they are either polemically repudiated, or else they lose their power to signify directly (Bakhtin, *Problems* 79-80)

In Caliban's "monologic artistic world," thoughts tend to gravitate toward Caliban's consciousness, and very few other thoughts and ideas appear in his speech. Setebos' views gravitate towards Caliban's own consciousness. His dam's view, however, is "untrue or indifferent" from Caliban's. Consequently, he polemically repudiates it, thus reinforcing his own authoritative stance.

Caliban's monologism is also evident in his use of language. Unlike other monologues Caliban's flows smoothly, without the interruptions which occur, for example, in Andrea's, Sludge's or even Porphyria's lover's utterances, that is, without those repetitions, ellipses and reservations which indicate speakers' (unconscious) anticipations of and contentions with others' voices. Bakhtin suggests that such interruptions are indicative of others' words or accents which force themselves into the fabric of speakers' utterance. When these are lacking, as is the case in "Caliban," "the overwhelming influence of another's word" is held at bay, causing the discourse to

"appear[...] on the surface monologic" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 245). In "Caliban" there is little obvious syntactical evidence that the speaker is contending with others' voices.

Caliban further monologizes his utterance by speaking in an authoritative manner. For example, when he describes Setebos' reasons for creating the beasts of the island and the island itself, he precludes any possibility that his assumptions might be false:

He made all these and more,
Made all we see, and us, in spite: how else?
He could not, Himself, make a second self
To be His mate; as well have made Himself:
He would not make what he mislikes or slights,
An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains:
But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be. . . . (55-62)

Such an apparently logical and rational construction of Setebos fails to take into consideration any possible, alternative myths of origin.

Recognizing the reductive manner by which Caliban forces all others, and particularly Setebos, to cohere to his own worldview, a number of critics have discussed his utterance in terms of a crippling and inescapable circularity. Shapiro's discussion of Setebos as a mirror image of Caliban (56, 62) initiated a trend towards reading the poem in terms of enclosure and circular reasoning. Shapiro suggests that the world Caliban creates is merely a replication of himself, and concludes that the speaker is unable to escape the prison of his self (62). Similarly, Wolfe regards Caliban as a character trapped in an "eternally recurring cycle . . . of self-assertion and self-abasement in an attempt to control and appease the powers that be" (18). Slinn refers to the order Caliban produces as an "ironic circularity which discovers only himself" (*Fictions* 85), while Shavero explains Caliban's psychological state in terms of Freudian obsessive repetition, "the involuntary copying of a repressed (inaccessible or pragmatically non-existent) original" (9). However, these readings implicitly posit "Caliban" as a dramatic representation of a singular, autonomous consciousness who controls the way he describes his environment. Caliban's

predicament, in these critics' views, is a direct result of his inability to recognize the circular means by which he constructs his god (and his world) in his own image, and himself in the image of his god (and of his world).

III Dialogic Disruptions

Strange as it might initially seem, to read "Caliban" as the utterance of a monologic speaker subtly undermines the idealist assumptions implicit in readings which discuss the speaker in terms of circularity and self-reflection. Subjective idealism posits subjects as autonomous and discrete from all others and from the divisive properties of language. Similarly, monologic speakers attempt to colonize or monologize those others who enter the parameters of their discourse, although they are for the most part unaware of the extent to which they do so. However, as I have suggested in my reading of "Mr Sludge," any attempt to cancel out other, opposing voices inevitably entails an anticipation of those other, opposing voices, and such anticipation is fundamentally dialogic. Nichols' general comment about "threatened" monologuists provides an apt description of the way in which Caliban unwittingly anticipates others' voices: "Every one of Browning's 'threatened' speakers implicitly acknowledges heteroglossial variation (the voices that would undermine his utterance) and seeks, as a result, a priority for his own version of reality" (35). In "Caliban," the speaker does not believe himself threatened at the time of speaking. However, he constructs himself in terms of Nichols' "threatened" speaker. If we read "Caliban" in terms of Bakhtin's distinction between monologic and dialogic speech, we can show that although Caliban takes a singular, authoritative and autonomous consciousness for granted, such a consciousness can only ever be an illusion, even for a speaker as isolated from all social others at the moment of speech as Caliban. After all, Caliban speaks, and any act of speech, no matter how committed to monologism, forces subjects to engage in dialogic processes. As Voloshinov states:

. . . all speech is dialogic speech, directed at another person, at his *understanding* and at his real or potential *response*. This orientation towards 'the other', the listener, inevitably assumes that account has been taken of the *socio-hierarchical interrelationship that exists between speakers*. . . . This social orientation will always be present in any human utterance. . . . ("Stylistics" 122)

Caliban assumes a monologic stance, but his speech nevertheless emerges as the product of dialogic interactions with others. By implication, these others emerge as interlocutors, if not individually, then at least collectively. Like any speaker, Caliban can never completely divorce himself from the context out of which he speaks. His narrative reflects the logic and the laws of the linguistic signs he uses, signs which are produced by the social group to which he belongs (Voloshinov, *Marxism* 13). Caliban emerges as a product of the society which, according to *The Tempest*, introduced him to language in the first place.

Caliban's monologic assumption that he speaks "to his own self, howe'er he please" (15), is disrupted as soon as he has pronounced it. Claiming that he will speak about Setebos "howe'er he please," he simultaneously takes monologic control and engages in a dialogic struggle with Setebos. He subsequently anticipates his god's response to the utterance he is about to construct: "Because to talk about Him, vexes" (17), further contending with what he constructs as Setebos' voice. Alluding to the god's discontent when his subjects speak about him, Caliban then presents his own stance in opposition to Setebos': "Could He but know! and time to vex is now" (18). Similarly, Caliban constructs himself dialogically in relation to Prospero and Miranda, implying that if they were to hear his speech, they would immediately comprehend it as an affront to them:

Moreover Prosper and Miranda sleep
In confidence he drudges at their task,
And it is good to cheat the pair, and gibe. . . . (20-22)

Of course, Caliban does not realize the extent to which his utterance constitutes a response to others' words and views and is therefore informed by the island's other

inhabitants. But if we read the initial passage dialogically, we can show how throughout his utterance Caliban constructs himself by engaging in a dialogic battle with his superiors. For the moment, he cannot but win this battle: his others are absent and unable to hear him. "How can he 'vex' if no one overhears?" Shapiro has asked (58). Yet despite the fact that his utterance cannot have the effect he aims to produce, Caliban still constructs himself dialogically as vexer because he anticipates the possibility that his speech could cause offence to his superiors.

Caliban's utterance is also dialogic in another sense. As he attempts to control the world he constructs through monologic speech, Caliban unwittingly reproduces the *"socio-hierarchical interrelationship that exists between speakers"* (Voloshinov, *"Stylistics"* 122) — that is, between the residents of the island. If, as has been suggested, Caliban's utterance were hermetically circular or self-reflexive, he would be unable to conceive of his environment in terms of the social structures of power which in fact inform his monologue throughout. Johnson, for example, has suggested that Caliban "can only construct God in his own capricious and spiteful image" (98). But such a claim posits an innately capricious and spiteful Caliban whose isolation allows him to separate himself completely from all "socio-hierarchical interrelationships." Such a view, of course, echoes Caliban's original statement that he "talks to his own self, howe'er he please" (15); yet as I have shown, Caliban's claims to exclusive autonomy and authority are not borne out by his speech. In my reading of the poem, Caliban emerges as capricious and spiteful as a result of the discursive processes in which he engages as he adopts the language, and with it the logic and laws, of the island. The social hierarchy produced by Caliban's utterance emerges as the product of "prolonged social intercourse among members of a given speech community" (Voloshinov, *Freudianism* 79). Voloshinov claims further that the very language which speakers appropriate "sets constraints on the utterance's possibilities," suggesting that no speaker can produce a self in language which is entirely a product of his own, implicitly autonomous consciousness (Voloshinov, *Freudianism* 79). In "Caliban" the

social language which sets constraints on the speaker's assumption that his monologue is liberated from the influence of others becomes evident in his description of his relationship to others on the basis of hierarchical assignments of power.

Hierarchical structuring of relationships between people and gods is predominant in Caliban's utterance. He places the Quiet over Setebos, Setebos over Prospero, and Prospero over himself. Thus, Caliban puts himself at the bottom of the hierarchy of humans and gods, but claims a position above the animal world: his subordinates, in order of power, are an ounce, a four-legged serpent (which he claims is "Miranda and [his] wife" [160]), a tall pouch-bill crane ("his Ariel" [161]), and last, a "sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared . . . and calls . . . Caliban" (163-66). Caliban's tendency to structure his world in terms of a hierarchical distribution of power has been well established in commentaries on the monologue. Erickson, for example, suggests that "Caliban supposes that all parts of creation belong to a hierarchy and that the relationships between the levels of this order are relations of dominance" (218). Erickson further maintains that Caliban has fashioned "the world's laws and its gods from a projection of himself; instead of coming to terms with others and so with himself by appreciating others for what they are, Caliban tries to put himself in their place and constructs the world from various versions of himself" (Erickson 219). Such a view, expressed in similar ways in a number of discussions, appears to distinguish between the real world and Caliban's real others ("what they are"), and Caliban's misguided, impure representations of these. By implication, Erickson considers Caliban to have misrepresented his others because Caliban understands them only in terms of a projection of his own innately limited psyche onto them. What is at stake in my reading is the notion that the island's laws and its gods form the foundation of Caliban's utterance — laws and gods that are always subject to Caliban's interpretation, but which he simultaneously can never escape. Because Caliban constructs his present act of vexing others on the basis of prior experiences of being vexed by others (for example while observing Prospero at his books [152]), we cannot read him as master of a discrete and autonomous consciousness. Caliban is

producer of his environment and of his superiors and inferiors, but at the same time he is also a product of them.

Despite Caliban's suggestion that he is in complete control of his utterance, and despite his assumption of a monologic stance, he nevertheless engages in a struggle with others' opinions about him. Caliban constructs himself in a manner which is comparable to Bakhtin's description of Dostoevsky's Underground Man. Bakhtin identifies dialogic processes in the way the Underground Man constructs himself in relation to what he perceives as others' opinions about him:

In each of his thoughts about [the world, nature, society] there is a battle of voices, evaluations, points of view. In everything he senses above all *someone else's will* predetermining him. It is within the framework of this alien will that he perceives the world order, nature with its mechanical necessity, the social order. His own thought is developed and structured as *the thought of someone personally insulted by the world order*, personally humiliated by its blind necessity. (*Problems* 236)

A predominant feature of Caliban's utterance is his strong feeling that his status on the island and even his everyday actions are predetermined by others' wills. Setebos is his primary master. As Caliban describes Setebos, the god made him (and others) purely for sport:

[He] did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be. . . . (61-62)

Who make them weak, meant weakness He might vex.
Had he meant other, while His hand was in,
Why not make horny eyes no thorn could prick,
Or plate my scalp with bone against the snow,
Or overscale my flesh 'neath joint and joint,
Like an orc's armour? Ay, — so spoil His sport!
He is the One now: only He doth all. (172-78)

A sense of disempowerment is also evident in Caliban's despondent claim towards the end of his monologue that Setebos' unpredictable will is inescapable:

So long as He lives, keeps His strength: no change,
 'Believeth with the life, the pain shall stop.

. . . He doth His worst in this our life,
 Giving just respite lest we die through pain,
 Saving last pain for worst, — with which, an end.
 Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
 Is, not to seem too happy. (243-57)

Caliban also sees himself as at the mercy of Prospero's and Miranda's wills, forced to drudge for them, and able to observe Prospero only from a distance and from a position of seclusion: "Himself peeped late, eyed Prosper at his books" (150). His only means of counteracting his own lack of power is to assert his will on his inferiors in a similar way and to rebel through speech against his superiors when they cannot hear him.

As he speaks, Caliban also appears increasingly "*insulted by the world order*, personally humiliated by its blind necessity" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 236), again indicated by his construction of Setebos. Alluding to the god's original act of creating the island and those residing there, Caliban suggests that many of Setebos' creations have capabilities which are superior to the god's. Caliban initially suggests that Setebos vexes his creatures because he recognizes their strengths. By analogy, Caliban presents himself as a being with strengths which his god is unable to match:

He would not make what he mislikes or slights,
 An eyesore to Him, or not worth His pains:
 But did, in envy, listlessness or sport,
 Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be —
 Weaker in most points, stronger in a few,
 Worthy, and yet mere playthings all the while,
 Things He admires and mocks too, — that is it. (59-65)

Yet as Caliban's monologue proceeds, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied, presenting Setebos' wrath as justified only in a limited way, and only to the extent that it is an inevitable effect of the god's envy:

Oh, He hath made things worthier than Himself,
 And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
 Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
 They they, unless through Him, do naught at all,
 And must submit: what other use in things? (112-16)

Eventually, Caliban alludes even more directly to what he perceives as Setebos' injustices. His utterance displays resentment with regard to his present situation and to the way Setebos had initially created him and continues to treat him (173-78). Finally, Caliban becomes downright indignant at the way his god has habitually and arbitrarily punished him:

'Wove wattles half the winter, fenced them firm
With stone and stake to stop she-tortoises
Crawling to lay their eggs here: well, one wave,
Feeling the foot of Him upon its neck,
Gaped as a snake does, lolled out its large tongue,
And licked the whole labour flat: so much for spite. (205-10)

Yet however authorial and commanding Caliban's tone appears when he vents his anger at his situation, by constructing himself as insulted by Setebos he ostensibly engages in a dialogic interaction with his god. He structures his own thought as "the thought of someone personally insulted by the world order" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 236), an order in which (according to Caliban) Setebos holds a key position. Prospero and Miranda also belong to the world order which Caliban constructs as determined to insult him. He resents the way his earthly masters force him to work for them (21), implying that they take his labour for granted: even as he speaks Prospero and Miranda are in "confidence he drudges at their task" (21). Thus, as a result of the way he considers himself injured by his masters (Setebos, Prospero, and Miranda), Caliban treats his own underlings in the same cruelly insulting manner, for example by blinding a sea-beast he has caught and which he has given his own name:

Also a sea-beast, lumpish, which he snared,
Blinded the eyes of, and brought somewhat tame,
And split its toe-webs, and now pens the drudge
In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban;
A bitter heart that bides its time and bites. (165-67)

Caliban's monologue emerges as imbued with a hidden dialogicality. In Bakhtinian terms, his speech "is populated — overpopulated — with the intentions of

others" (*Dialogic Imagination* 294). Although Caliban remains unaware of their implicit presence in his speech, others enter the arena of his assumed isolation; as Caliban speaks, his word, like Bakhtin's dialogic word, is

. . . 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. (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 276)

Dialogic processes can also be observed in the way Caliban pits others' positions of power against each other. For example, he anticipates, without reaching a conclusion, the relationship between Setebos and the Quiet:

Ask, for that,
What knows, — the something over Setebos
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance. (128-131)

'Conceiveth all things will continue thus,
And we shall have to live in fear of Him
So long as He lives, keeps His strength: no change,
If He have done His best, make no new world
To please Him more, so leave off watching this, —
If He surprise not even the Quiet's self
Some strange day, — or, suppose, grow into it
As grubs grow butterflies. . . . (241-48)

As Caliban ponders the past and future outcomes of struggles between the island's two highest authorities, his utterance weaves in and out of their discourses. Caliban's own discourse also merges with Prospero's and Miranda's: he never questions his position as their slave, although he complains about their treatment of him, and insists that merely observing Prospero causes his own vexation (152). Further, following Bakhtin's description of the dialogic word, Caliban recoils from what he constructs as Prospero's privileged position, constructing it as an arbitrary assignation of Setebos' favour ("He favours Prosper, who knows why? . . . What Prosper does?" [203, 216]). Finally, the speaker both recoils from and intersects with his dam's views regarding

the Quiet and Setebos, articulating her opinions only as a means of establishing his own position in relation to his god.

Throughout his monologue, Caliban unwittingly produces traces of alien voices, subordinating himself to some and dominating others. Yet it seems too strong a claim to suggest that Setebos, Prospero, Miranda, the Quiet and Caliban's dam, let alone the island's beasts, function individually as interlocutors. As Wolfe has claimed with reference to Caliban's use of pronouns, the speaker is unable to differentiate himself completely from others (9). As I read the poem, Caliban displays a tendency to merge rather than to contend with or oppose others' views and ideologies. Nevertheless, there is evidence in his monologue that as Caliban speaks he engages in a dialogic interaction with voices other than his own.

IV Caliban's Notional Interlocutor

A number of critics mention the absence of an interlocutor in "Caliban." For example, Erickson maintains that Caliban "is without another being against which he can properly define himself, that he has no one to love, and that to supply his need for an audience he has projected himself into all the nature around him, only to gain a vision of his own nothingness" (219). Shapiro suggests that Caliban desires no audience, claiming further that Caliban is so afraid that he might be overheard that he refers to himself in the third person, keeping his "I" well hidden (Shapiro 59). While I agree that Caliban fears that he might be heard more than anything else at the time of speaking, psychologically he seems to desire an interlocutor, as Erickson suggests. Wolfe holds that Caliban's (and "Caliban's") lack of an interlocutor is overcome by Browning's use of the third person pronoun which the speaker intermittently uses as a means of objectifying himself. Browning's unusual use of pronouns in this monologue has the effect of "enlarging our context of awareness by 'socializing' the speaking event" (Wolfe 9-10). In Wolfe's view Caliban unwittingly splits himself between an "observing ego and a participating ego, an 'I' and a 'he,' a perceiving subject and the perceived object" (10). Reading Wolfe's distinction between an observing and a

speaking Caliban dialogically, we can identify a notional other who goes unrecognized by Caliban, but who is nevertheless a fundamental constituent of his speech.

As Caliban speaks his monologic rendition of himself and of his others, he posits a notional interlocutor. Like the notional interlocutor in "Porphyria's Lover," Caliban's functions as an observer of the situation he narrates. Yet Caliban's interlocutor is more compliant than the one I have identified in "Porphyria's Lover." In "Caliban," the notional interlocutor is more akin to the envoy in "My Last Duchess" who is needed by the Duke as confirmer of the powerful, authoritative position the speaker attempts to inhabit.

Caliban constructs himself for an other, possibly another self, who will approve of his act of vexing such magnificent others as Setebos, Prospero and Miranda. Caliban seems to construct a notional interlocutor as a means of gaining moral and emotional support. His other emerges as a sympathetic and acquiescent addressee who engages with Caliban's speech, and who is willing to allow Caliban to argue a case for his own psychological validity in a way Caliban's other potential interlocutors (the island's inhabitants) do not. For example, Caliban involves his notional interlocutor in a hypothetical situation. Constructing the interlocutor as an accomplice to his acts of speech, Caliban describes how he might make a clay bird and give it life, an action which, of course, he is unable to undertake. However, he plays out the role of creator for his notional interlocutor, whom he implicates in his utterance:

Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
Able to fly? — for, *there, see*, he hath wings,
And great comb like the hoopoe's to admire,
And *there*, a sting to do his foes offence,
There, and I will that he begin to live. . . . (77-81, emphasis added)

Caliban uses this hypothetical scene in order to describe and justify Setebos' actions. The notional interlocutor consequently validates and supports Caliban's rendition of Setebos (57-67), and at the same time supports Caliban's act of speaking about a god who forbids his subjects to talk about him.

Caliban also substantiates his monologue by addressing his other with rhetorical questions in order to add weight to his argument:

Were this no pleasure, lying in the thyme,
Drinking the mash, with brain become alive,
Making and marring clay at will? So He. (95-97)

Later he uses a similar ploy as a means of substantiating his representation of his god:

Oh, He [Setebos] hath made things worthier than Himself,
And envieth that, so helped, such things do more
Than He who made them! What consoles but this?
That they, unless through Him, do naught at all,
And must submit: what other use in things? (112-16)

Such rhetorical questions do not require an answer. In fact, as shown in my discussion of "Andrea del Sarto," rhetorical questions often preclude a response, reinforcing rather than questioning the speaker's authority. Speakers gain power and authority through their use of rhetorical questions by creating the illusion that their statements are produced for others, when in fact they function as monologic affirmations.

Addressing rhetorical questions at a notional interlocutor who is unable to respond, Caliban cancels out any potential alternative, oppositional responses to his claims, and in so doing confirms his views regarding his similarity to Setebos and Setebos' similarity to him.

In another passage Caliban directly refers his notional interlocutor to an external source (the Quiet), suggesting that the interlocutor substantiate Caliban's own claims regarding Setebos' limitations by comparing Setebos' unease to the Quiet's peaceful state of feeling "nor joy nor grief" (133):

But wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?
Aha, that is a question! *Ask, for that,*
What knows, — the something over Setebos. . . . (127-29, emphasis added)

Of course, the interlocutor will never be able to ask the omnipotent Quiet, but by referring his other to the Quiet for an answer, Caliban also substantiates his representation of Setebos as inferior and limited. Caliban's rhetorical ploy of addressing a notional interlocutor allows him to produce himself as vexing his superior, demonstrating his god's limitations before a benevolent audience. The implicit presence of an interlocutor is further illustrated when Caliban addresses him in the second person, advising him to avoid punishment by acting in compliance with (what Caliban assumes to be) Setebos' wishes:

. . . well, never try the same way twice!
Repeat what act has pleased, He may grow wroth.
You must not know His ways, and play Him off,
Sure of the issue. (222-25)

Caliban constructs a notional interlocutor in order to test the validity of his speech. Unlike the envoy, whose presence imposes boundaries on the Duke's monologue, Caliban's interlocutor places no limitations on Caliban's utterance: Caliban can address and construct his other as he pleases, and consequently his notional interlocutor emerges as a paradigm of the most sympathetic interlocutor Caliban is capable of imagining. By contrast, the Duke's obvious interlocutor constrains the speaker's utterance to the extent that the Duke must address him in such a way that (at the very least) the envoy is not forced to interject. In other words, the Duke is continually constrained to cast a sideward glance at the envoy, and to anticipate the envoy's potential reactions to his utterances. Caliban, however, is indeed free to speak "howe'er he please."

The interlocutor who emerges from Caliban's utterance resides in the space which would be held by an actual interlocutor. Addressing a notional interlocutor who emerges as a sympathetic acquaintance, Caliban tries to understand his position in society by trialling his assumed role of vexer of the more powerful inhabitants of the island. Of course, the notional interlocutor cannot respond, and Caliban's utterance

consequently remains unconfirmed, as does Caliban in the simulated role of authorial speaker.

Caliban's monologic utterance illustrates the propensity of any act of speech to anticipate potential responses from others, although most speakers, like Caliban, remain unaware of the extent to which others' voices inform and indeed partly produce their speech. Caliban's monologue also alludes to a speaker's need for confirmation, although again, Caliban does not seem aware of the processes by which he attempts to glean meaning from his monologue. Thus, although Caliban discounts the possibility of any response from an interlocutor, his speech is patterned according to the ways in which speakers gain an understanding of themselves and their situations through speech. In a way which is reminiscent of Andrea's final (self)punctuation, "So" (265), Caliban brings each of his arguments to a conclusion with the assertion "so He." Producing his own confirmatory response in this manner, he simulates the presence of an interlocutor, allowing himself to believe that each of his arguments is valid and has gained meaning. Such a simulation indeed provides Caliban with the illusion that he has produced a satisfactory understanding of his situation: because he creates the impression that he speaks as he pleases, confirming his authorial position himself, Caliban is able to believe that he has established and validated an authoritative and (at least temporarily) empowered position. However, the final 12 lines of his monologue disrupt the illusory meaning Caliban has created in the main part of his monologue.

Caliban's narrative is eventually interrupted by the intrusion of a potentially destructive and malevolent natural force (a storm) which he identifies as a sign from Setebos. Further, he suddenly realizes that his assumption that he had spoken in isolation was erroneous. A raven, which he claims is Setebos' messenger, has overheard his monologue and has brought Setebos' wrath upon him: "not a bird — or, yes, / There scuds His raven that has told Him all!" (285-86). Suddenly faced with overtly present interlocutors capable of hearing him, of becoming vexed, and of punishing or even destroying him, Caliban denounces his earlier speech: "It was fool's play, this prattling!" (287). In an attempt to reverse the (potential) effects of his

subversive monologue, Caliban is now forced to concede his monologic stance. Because his isolation has been destroyed, he becomes more aware of opposing voices, engaging more obviously in a struggle with Setebos which he believes is crucial to his survival:

Ha! The wind
Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
And fast invading fires begin! White blaze —
A tree's head snaps — and there, there, there, there, there,
His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!
Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!] (287-95)

Aiming to placate Setebos by offering to torture himself, Caliban articulates the conditions of his survival. These cast him as insulted by his god yet again. The intervention of perceived actual interlocutors thus commits Caliban to a dialogic interaction from which he now emerges as disempowered, and which has the effect of highlighting the illusory nature of his earlier monologic speech.

V Conclusion

When critics claim that "Caliban" represents Browning's attempt, successful or not, to construct a satire on religious dogma, they implicitly suggest that the poem is intended as an exercise in didacticism. In order to demonstrate Browning's didactic intentions, they focus on the relationship between Caliban, the reader and the poet. The designation of the poem as a satire infers that the reader is meant to mock, ridicule or at least oppose the protagonist and his views which, of course, radically differ from Browning's. Identifying Caliban as an infantile or mentally deficient character, the reader ought to reject Caliban's (usually religious) views or rational processes and must simultaneously assess her own beliefs and the ways in which she has obtained these. Yet readings which emphasize didactic intent tend to neglect the other inhabitants of Caliban's island, suggesting that these exist only as extensions or projections of the speaker's implicitly authoritative and autonomous (if limited) consciousness. To

reiterate the premise made at the outset of this study, critics who adhere to the view that Browning's intentions still provide the key to our understanding of his monologues tend to believe in their own ability to separate Browning's views from, for example, Caliban's. Critics who discuss "Caliban" in terms of satiric intent thus commit the "intentional fallacy." In readings based on idealist assumptions, Caliban emerges as the sole producer of a world which is flawed because the speaker's psyche and powers of reasoning are equally flawed.

If we read the poem in terms of dialogism, however, we can show that Caliban is as much a product of his environment as he is its producer. As he speaks about his god and the other residents of the island, Caliban ostensibly engages in a dialogic interaction with their absent voices. His monologue emerges out of a complex web of discourses which makes up the hierarchical social structure of the island. Caliban's way of rationalizing the forces, natural and otherwise, which he observes on the island is consequently a product of the interactive social processes in which he is inevitably involved as a member (capable of speech) of the island's community.

Dialogue, as Bakhtin has argued, produces dialectics: "Every thought and every life merges in the open-ended dialogue. . . . Dialectics is the abstract product of dialogue" (*Problems* 293). As Caliban speaks he merges with the open-ended dialogue of the island. He engages in a dialectical process of attempting to locate himself by negating others. He is thus forced to anticipate, or rather construct in their absence, others' voices. These, however, simultaneously construct him, forcing him to negate them as a means of establishing his own position. Yet Caliban's negation of others' voices does not cancel these out or render them obsolete. Rather, despite Caliban's claims to autonomy, traces of others' contending voices, constructed by Caliban and at the same time constructing him, continue to reside in his utterance as the limitations of the island's discourse which he is unable to overcome.

If we read "Caliban upon Setebos" dialogically, we can further show how the poem dramatizes the speaker's latent desire to construct himself monologically. In "Caliban" monologic speech becomes a means of psychological survival in the face of

forces which he believes have the physical power and possibly the inclination to destroy him. Caliban's monologic speech allows him temporarily to deal with what he perceives to be the disadvantageous conditions of his own existence, and to give that existence a meaning otherwise denied him by his masters. Bakhtin has implied that the temptation to construct a monologic and idealist version of oneself is naturally great:

. . . everything that enables me to be myself, that renders me a determinate human being, as opposed to all other human beings . . . is an *object* of cognition as well, rather than a *subjectum* of cognition. . . . Nevertheless, what makes idealism intuitively convincing is the experience I have of myself, and not the experience I have of the other human being. (*Art* 39)

Yet despite Caliban's best attempts to construct others as mere objects available for observation and capable of being controlled through his monologue, he cannot fully divorce himself from the social context in which he lives. Thus, as Caliban speaks he unwittingly produces interlocutors who are also subjects: he engages in a dialogue with voices whose potential (if not actual) presence he anticipates, and he posits a notional interlocutor as a means of validating and confirming the utterance — and the self — he produces as he speaks.

This discussion of "Caliban" thus concludes my reading of dramatic monologues in terms of intersubjective and discursive processes. "Andrea del Sarto" and "Mr Sludge" provided examples of dramatic monologues where the speakers' utterances are limited by the responses and lack of responses they believe they gain from their obviously present interlocutors. "Porphyria's Lover" and "Caliban" provided examples of poems without interlocutors. "Caliban" is an important poem for my purposes, then, because even in the absence of all actual others, the speaker nevertheless unwittingly engages in a dialogic interaction with anticipated voices.

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