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PAINTING AND PROSODY: ROBERT BROWNING'S (RE)PRESENTATION OF
FRA LIPPO LIPPI AND ANDREA DEL SARTO

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Masters of Art in Art History

By

Ana Schnellmann

Saint Charles, Missouri

July, 2020

PAINTING AND PROSODY: ROBERT BRO

by

Ana Schnellmann

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of

Arts in

Art History and Visual Culture

at

Lindenwood University

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ABSTRACT

PAINTING AND PROSODY: ROBERT BROWNING'S (RE)PRESENTATION OF FRA LIPPO LIPPI AND ANDREA DEL SARTO

Ana Schnellmann, Master of Art History

Thesis Directed by: Steven J. Cody, PhD

This paper examines the ways in which all art interpretation is revising and re-presenting the art and artists in question. When Robert Browning wrote *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto* as part of his collection *Men and Women*, he drew on the histories provided of them by Giorgio Vasari. Browning used Vasari's stories as a base from which to personify the artists and use them in a sense as synecdoches representing the ways religious art is received and viewed. Religious art is meant to elevate the soul. That elevation may take place through the artist's rendering religious figures as accessible, everyday humans to whom the viewers can personally relate. It can also arise from viewing religious figures as mystical and mysterious people we wonder at but to whom we cannot relate. In the Renaissance and in the nineteenth century, critics, theorists and artists questioned the purpose of art, particularly religious art: was art to provide a key to quiet contemplation of the divine or to help humans more closely relate to the religious figures who served as models for action? Through his dramatic monologues, Browning revisits this question by using specific poetic techniques to match in his lyrics his ideas about these artists, and their works, and he also shows how art can manifest the complexities of love and passion. Ultimately, through *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning gives us a *paragone* in poetry, but one which is not answered or resolved. The readers of the poems, like viewers of paintings, become part of the discussion and debate. Extrinsic meaning is endlessly deferred in favor of awareness of the shifting psychological states of the artists. Browning's prosody, then, serves as verbal brushstrokes to re-present the works of Lippi and Andrea. By so doing, Browning allows his readers to confront the ways in which we all recreate and appropriate artists and their work.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to all those teachers and mentors who taught me that our reach should always exceed our grasp.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. James Hutson, Director of the Art History program at Lindenwood, for his part in helping me rediscover the joys of learning and teaching. I would also like to thank Dr. Steven Cody, my committee chair, as well as Dr. Esperanca Camara and Dr. Jeremy Carnes, committee members, for their guidance and invaluable assistance in shaping my critical understanding of the Italian Renaissance in general and of Fra Filippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto in particular. Many thanks as well to Nancy Messina in aiding me to find elusive sources and to Susan Edele of the Writing Center for her help in formatting and editing this work.

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Introduction

The interplay between the creation of art and the theory of art is a symbiotic one in which one influences and shapes the other. Art is not, of course, created in a vacuum; its very existence is dependent on an audience, on buyers and sellers who trade in not just the art but the ideology. It follows that the interpretation of art is largely dependent on the contexts of the dominant interpretive communities of any given time. Through his examination of Quattrocento and Cinquecento Italian art, particularly the work of Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto, and his presentation of the art and artists in his eponymous dramatic monologues, Robert Browning embeds his questions and philosophies about art, particularly religious art, into his visions of these two Renaissance painters. Through his use of meter and rhyme in the genre of dramatic monologue, Browning personifies these artists and their beliefs, merging fact and fiction and imagination and discourse.

The dramatic monologue genre often presents an internal psychological dilemma that may or may not be resolved. In Browning's interpretation, Fra Lippo Lippi's frenetic energy as he paints "saints and saints and saints" shows the reader a man who longs for freedom while still finding safety in monastic structure; similarly, Browning's presentation of Andrea del Sarto's careful perfectionism in his painting reflects his innate caution as well as Andrea's seemingly implicit belief that spiritual matters must transcend the physical world. In his monologues featuring the above painters, Browning matches his poetic technique to his preconceived and fiercely held ideas and theories about these artists. Browning relied heavily and nearly absolutely on Vasari's accounts of Lippo and Andrea. Vasari's ideas, as well as the art theories that emerged in the nineteenth century were used by Browning as a springboard from which he could

explore and develop his own theories about the purpose and efficacy of art and its relations to prosody.

Through his monologues, Browning addresses the question as to whether it is the tension, movement, and apparent energy of Fra Lippo Lippi or cool, careful colors and technique in Andrea's work, or, perhaps, the fusing and the merging of the two, that gives us a window to experiencing the wonder of God. In essence, Browning's prosody creates the artist, and his dramatic monologues are imaginative paintings of the painters themselves. Although both monologues employ iambic pentameter, Browning uses techniques such as enjambment, alliteration, abrupt switches in the meter, and onomatopoeia in *Fra Lippo Lippi* whereas in *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning rarely strays from the meter, maintains a quieter tone, and uses descriptors such as "silver-grey" and "placid." Both painters, however, are seen by Browning as men who are striving to make art that allows the viewer to experience some connection with the divine. Lippi, for instance, cries out, "Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash / And then add soul and heighten them all three fold?" Like Lippi, Andrea is frustrated: "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey, / Placid and perfect with my art; the worse!" As Browning makes dramatic monologues to assert and question philosophical and artistic values, so Lippi and Andrea do the same through their paintings. Browning's dramatic monologues become paintings of the painters, and the specific paintings mentioned in the monologues are portrayed as dramatic monologues in and of themselves.

Literature Review

Through his dramatic monologues, Browning explores dramatizes humanity and explores what it means to be human. Browning's dramatic monologue typically displays a person, almost always a man, in a state of some sort of psychological crisis which may or may not be

resolved by the end of the poem. Additionally, the genre is characterized by an audience, usually speechless, who reacts silently to the words of the speaker. Sometimes, as with the guards in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the audience can be perceived to be sympathetic, and other times, as in *Andrea del Sarto*, the listener, in this case Andrea's wife, is simply disinterested. Sometimes, the speakers in the poems, such as in *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover*, are simply sociopathic. In the former poem, the speaker has murdered his wife because she "too soon made glad," and he has commissioned a painting of her so that nobody may look upon her face without the Duke's permission "(since none puts by / The curtain I have drawn for you but I." In the latter, the lover "found / A thing to do, and all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around, / And strangled her." The last line of that poem is "And yet God has not said a word!" The audience in the poems reacts to the speaker, then, sometimes with sympathy, as with *Fra Lippo Lippi*, sometimes with horror as realization dawns, as with *My Last Duchess* and *Porphyria's Lover*, and sometimes with quiet witness, as with *Andrea del Sarto*. The reader of the monologues also is not only listening to the speaker but is observing the reactions of the observer. The external as well as internal audience becomes part of the speaker's psyche. Indeed, the genre of the dramatic monologue is quite similar to a viewer's internal reaction when studying a painting. Whereas Tennyson, Browning's contemporary, focused on important and mythological figures, Browning often used his imagination to focus on actual historical figures such as Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto, the subjects of two of dramatic monologues included in his work *Men and Women*.

Critics such as Richard Benvenuto and Mabel Major focus on Browning's interest in Florentine Renaissance painting, and note his disinterest in architecture, perhaps because he sees painting as more fluid and more personal. Nineteenth-century art critics, including J.A.D. Ingres,

Tommaso Minardi, A.F. Rio, and Wilhelm Wackenroder, emphasize the aesthetic experience when viewing art, particularly Renaissance art. To them, art's purpose was to bring into sharper focus the highest and best parts of ourselves. Minardi's and Rio's would have been well known to Browning, thus helping him develop his theories on how art and poetry merge and represent one another; Minardi argues that individual morals and values take precedence over the technical perfection while Rio asserts that it is beauty that leads to spiritualism. Other critics with whom Browning would have been familiar included Mrs. Anna Jameson who believed Raphael was the pinnacle of perfection, the Shakespeare of art; Andrea del Sarto, she opined, was somewhat vulgar and unfulfilled. Mrs. Jameson, a well-known art scholar and a friend of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, was not only part of the cult of Raphael but was clearly deeply influenced by Vasari's account. Browning addresses the concerns and ideas of these critics, showing through his dramatic monologues *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto* that there is more than one way in which spirituality can be transmitted through art.

Later in the nineteenth century came Walter Pater and his idea of art for art's sake. Although Browning would have been familiar with this movement, Browning believed deeply, as early twentieth-century biographer C.K. Chesterton, would tell us, that art should have a purpose beyond simple aesthetic pleasure. Browning would have agreed with Pater, and agreed strongly, that art is successful when art brings a harmony or an understanding among the artists and the viewers, or, in his case, poems and the readers. Works such as Walter Pater's *Renaissance* will be helpful here as we explore what Brad Bucknell describes as Pater's "paradoxical idealization of art" where the art, artist, and viewer merge.¹ Pater characterizes the

¹ Brad Bucknell. "Re-reading Pater: The Musical Aesthetics of Temporality," *Modern Fiction Studies*, no. 3 (1992): 598.

Renaissance as “a many-sided but yet united movement, in which the love of the things of the intellect and the imagination for their own sake, the desire for a more liberal and comely way of conceiving life, make themselves felt.”² Joshua Taylor’s collection of works by nineteenth-century art theorists, including Minardi and Rio, will be invaluable in studying the thoughts of Browning’s contemporaries, and works such as Erik Gray’s will be helpful in exploring the relationship between art and emotion in Browning’s collection of dramatic monologues.

As Gray points out, Browning’s poetry is less about a specific subject than it is about inchoate psychological truth and individual experiences with the problems of both perception and perfection. Browning recreates Fra Filippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto using the lenses of art history and, in particular, Vasari’s accounts of these artists, but he also allows Lippi and Andrea to speak for themselves. By so doing, Lippi and Andrea transcend the roles they were given by Vasari. Paul Barolsky notes that Vasari is commonly known as the father of art history, and he argues that art history is a highly subjective and imaginative field; how Vasari “imagined ‘reality’” has become “part of the historical record.”³ Vasari’s accounts, although embellished, have served for centuries as a foundation on which art history is laid. To make sense of our own perceptions, we redraw and represent art and artists according to our own philosophies and worldviews as does Browning in writing his monologues.

Vasari describes Lippi as a man who gave in often to “bestial desires,”⁴ who “boldly threw off his monk’s habit at the age of seventeen,”⁵ and who enjoyed love affairs up to his

² Walter Pater, *The Renaissance* (1873) (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011), 7.

³ Paul Barolsky, *Why Mona Lisa Smiles and Other Tales by Vasari* (University Park: Pennsylvania UP, 1991), 4.

⁴ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, 193.

⁵ Vasari, *Lives*, 192.

death.⁶ Lippi is hardly presented as a person to whom theology and monastic restraint were appealing. Later scholars continue Vasari's narrative. In examining Fra Filippo Lippi, for instance, art history scholars such as Peter Parshall, Leo Steinburg, and Eliot Rowlands describe Lippi as a young artist who had not so much a vocation for religious life as a need for its financial and social stability, and Browning's poem certainly reflects this view in Lippi's description of monastic life: "'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful, / the warm serge and the rope that goes all round, / and day-long blessed idleness beside!" Browning also references Lippi's carnal appetite: "And here you catch me at an alley's end / Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?" Although Browning uses his poem to continue Vasari's account, Browning does not imply that interest in the fleshly pursuits make Lippi less of a skillful painter; also, fleshly pursuits like those of Lippi do not imply lack of spirituality or faith. Rather, Browning wonders whether it is this energy, this love of the flesh, that can show us the literal spirited flesh: "If you get simple beauty and nought else, / You get about the best thing God invents; / That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed, / Within yourself". Licentious behavior and a lust for all life could add to, not detract from, spiritual awakening and experience, and, as critics such as Megan Holmes and Rudolf and Margot Wittkower assert, Lippi's licentious behavior would not necessarily be at odds with his portrayals of religious subjects. Still, his manner of conveying religious experience is sharply contrasted with the quieter methods of Andrea del Sarto.

In contrast to Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto is described by Vasari as a technical virtuoso, a painter who is in technique superior to his contemporaries, but who lacks spirit and boldness. Many critics admire Andrea's draftsmanship, and certainly the skills of Andrea were

⁶ Vasari, *Lives*, 198.

admired and celebrated in the Renaissance. Again, Browning matches his portrayal of the painter with Vasari's words, but again, in the poem, Vasari's conclusions are questioned. Critics such as Antonio Natali assert that the "'real' Andrea del Sarto is precisely the opposite of the personage handed down to us by critical tradition."⁷ Natali tells us that Vasari himself served an apprenticeship in Andrea's workshop and thus would have far more complex knowledge of Andrea than Vasari put in his biography of that artist.⁸ Whereas Vasari characterizes Andrea as timid and somewhat lackluster, we can see through the careful reading of Browning's *Andrea del Sarto* that the speaker in the monologue is actually very confident about his skill and knows his technique surpasses that of even Raphael which seems to be a rebuttal to Vasari's characterization of the painter. All the same, in the poem, Andrea longs for a specific sense of the spiritual, a way to more closely portray a God for which he yearns but cannot imagine. This humility and yearning demonstrate a deep spirituality in Andrea. Of other painters, he notes, "There burns a truer light of God" "In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain." Too much thought, it seems, can interrupt experience. Yet, Andrea's skill does not equate an absence of passion, as Vasari would have us implies when he writes of a "certain timidity of spirit and a sort of humility and simplicity in his nature made it impossible that there should be seen in him that glowing ardour and boldness."⁹ Although Vasari claims there was "softness and harmony" in the paintings of Andrea, particularly the *Noli me tangere*," he claims as well Andrea was a man of little spirit although he did grant him a "lofty intellect."¹⁰ From this description, one

⁷ Antonio Natali, *Andrea del Sarto* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999), 8.

⁸ Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 11.

⁹ Giorgio Vasari, quoted in *Art in Tuscany*, www.travelingtuscany.com/art/andreadelsarto.htm (accessed May 24, 2020).

¹⁰ Giorgio Vasari, quoted in *Art in Tuscany*, www.travelingtuscany.com/art/andreadelsarto.htm (accessed May 24, 2020).

would imagine a diligent craftsman skilled especially in *colore* but not a passionate man, not a man burning with yearning. Yet, the skills and contemplation used by Andrea in his works is spiritual in and of itself, and the idea that “a man’s reach should exceed his grasp” shows further the passion and frustration of a deeply spiritual painter. In *Andrea del Sarto*, as in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, Browning sets up a question as to what art and what kinds of art can result in a deeper connection with the divine. Critics such as Steven Cody note that art is meant to augment contemplation and worship, not distract from it,¹¹ and Natali asserts Andrea was a strong, bold, innovative, and deeply spiritual artist.¹² It is not only possible but probably that Andrea’s technical prowess demonstrated not a lack of faith but a celebration of and meditation on it. Again using poetical techniques, Browning creates a vision of Andrea according to Vasari’s description of him, but also integrates a sense of spiritual yearning and questioning, what one might call “holy desire,” in the speaker.

Although Vasari’s work was widely known in the Renaissance, certainly he was not alone in the field of art theory and art criticism. Writers such as Leon Battista Alberti, Christoforo Landino, and Francesco Bocchi commented on the works of Lippi and/or Andrea, providing a window for contextual analysis. As Browning was deeply interested in all aspects of art in the Italian Renaissance, it is likely he would have been very familiar with the writers named above, as well as others. Alberti believed that painting was a liberal art that had the same importance of rhetoric. As Browning uses the humanistic *ut picture poesis* trope, he treats the paintings in his monologues as rhetorical pieces, particularly in using his poetic technique to mirror their pictorial techniques. Alberti emphasized the need for balance and discipline in art,

¹¹ Steven Cody, “Andrea del Sarto’s Noli me Tangere: Sight, Touch, and an Echo of St. Augustine.” *Arion*, no. 2 (2018): 37.

¹² Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 35.

something for which both Lippi and Andrea were celebrated and something that Browning uses in the meter and rhyme of his dramatic monologues. Landino praises Lippi's use of *composizione* and *varietà*, and Bocchi gives extremely high praise to Andrea, particularly on his use of *costume*, or his use in portraying permanent aspects of character in his paintings. In his monologues, Browning gives us carefully balanced prose and integrates *varietà* and *costume*. Browning also shows interest in the commercial aspects of art. Eve Borsook traces the Renaissance commission and reception of Lippi's Prato murals, adding to our understanding of the marketing and socio-political use of art and artists, a concern that is addressed by Browning in his monologues. In *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the speaker casually but also ostentatiously, drops the name of Cosimo d'Medici and makes it clear Lippi and his patron are well able to pay off the guards. He gives the guards money with instructions to "Bid your hang-dogs go / Drink out this quarter-florin to the health / Of the munificent House that harbors me / (And many more beside, lads! More beside!) / And all's come square again." In *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning mentions Andrea's giving money to his wife so she may pay her lover's gambling bets and he acknowledges he did wrong to the King of France: "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." The relationship between art and money and artist and patron is in both poems made clear.

Browning uses prosody and technique in a manner similar to a painter's use of brushstrokes and color. Critics such as Frances Carleton, S.S. Curry, Major explore in detail the efficacy of such prosody. Scholars such as Linda Hughes, Robert Langbaum, Richard Kennedy with Donald Hair, Ekbert Faas, and Jonathon Herapath with Emma Mason all investigate the genre and purpose of the dramatic monologue which came to prominence in the mid-nineteenth century. Their work will be useful in exploring why the dramatic monologue is such a powerful

tool for Browning to explore and present his ideas about the formation of and philosophy of Lippi and Andrea.

Browning was deeply interested in psychology and in the art of the Italian Renaissance. It is not surprising, then, that in his dramatic monologues about Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto, he merged the two as in his monologues he was eager to explore the psychology of differing figures without casting judgment. What formed these painters, these men? What of them and their passions, yearnings, and questions are inherent in their works? Some critics, including Gregory Tate, Hughes, Kennedy and Hair, and Langbaum focus specifically on the psychology of Victorian poetry. Also important in Browning's work is the reaction of the reader and the hypertextual aspects that cause the reader to participate, sometimes unwillingly, in the dramatic monologue genre. Formalists who employ coherence, correspondence, and quantifiable data can be juxtaposed with nineteenth-century critics such as Rio, Wackenroder, and Minardi who focus their studies on the inherent spirituality and psychology of art. Vasari in many ways laid the foundation for the discipline of art criticism, and it is not surprising that subsequent critics from the Renaissance on have integrated perception with interpretation. Similarly, Antonio Natali integrates historical context with his interpretations of Andrea's work.

Barolsky's work, particularly his articles on Vasari and the reading of Vasari, will add to the intersection of fiction and fact in the monologues as well as give insight to Browning's approach in making his study of Lippi's and Andrea's paintings fit his notions of them according to his understanding of Vasari's accounts. For instance, in contrast to the frenetic energy of Browning's Lippo Lippi, Browning's Andrea del Sarto is stolid, "silver-grey," and restless in his knowledge that his spiritual energy is not evident in his work despite his technical perfection. Yet, it is this perfection that can, in the words of late eighteenth-century art critic Wilhelm

Wackenroder, result in “a silent, eternal message of the dignity of the species.”¹³ By exploring the accounts of the personalities Lippi and Andrea, and comparing those accounts with the techniques in Browning’s dramatic monologues, we will be able to question the contradictions as well as the unseen parallels between the two men as they are presented by Browning.

Methodology

To understand Browning’s dramatic monologues *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, it is necessary to understand their context. Because my main focus is on Browning’s re-presentation of these artists in the context of his time, I will first explore and summarize art theory of the nineteenth century. To do so, I will use primary sources from the Romantic and Victorian periods to discuss how Browning through his monologues may have been participating in the active discussion about the efficacy and purpose of religious art. Close reading of the poems themselves will be an important method in this work, particularly in demonstrating how Browning consciously used poetic techniques to, in a sense, paint word pictures of Lippi and Andrea. I will also compare and contrast Renaissance reception of Lippi and Andrea with their reception in the nineteenth century. New Historicist exploration of the painters and their places both in Italian Renaissance and English nineteenth-century art theory and criticism will be used to further demonstrate my main arguments.

As well, I will give close readings of Lippi’s *Tarquinia Madonna and Child* (1437), the *Coronation of the Virgin* (1439), and *The Feast of Herod* (1452-66) and compare the style of the paintings with the style of the poem in which they are mentioned or alluded to. Just as these paintings manifest a dynamic human interaction, so too does Browning’s *Fra Lippo Lippi* give

¹³ Wilhelm Wackenroder, “Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk” (1797) In *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, edited by Joshua Taylor (California: University of California Press, 1987), 129.

us an almost frenetic energy. A close reading of *Fra Lippo Lippi* will show how Browning employs techniques such as enjambment, dashes, and hard alliteration. Browning is replicating, in words, meter, and poetic technique, his understanding of Lippi. Similarly, I will explore how Browning's poetic techniques in *Andrea del Sarto* reflect his understanding of that painter. Because the Lucrezia in the poem is used as Andrea's model for many Madonnas, I will use two Madonna paintings, the *Madonna of the Harpies* (1517) and the *Medici Holy Family* (1529). The former is a very well-known painting with which Browning was likely very familiar. In addition, Browning presents Andrea as a painter of deep spirituality and high intellect, and by deconstructing the style and iconography of the *Madonna of the Harpies*, I hope to show Browning's emphasis on Andrea's intellect and spirituality. The *Medici Holy Family*, though less well-known, perhaps, is important for this thesis because I can contrast its quiet effect with the more dynamic human interaction in the *Tarquina Madonna*. Andrea made the painting for Ottovino d'Medici and, when the patron could not pay because of the siege of Florence, Andrea would not sell it elsewhere. This generosity of spirit, not unusual with Andrea who was truly pious and often worked for a nominal fee or donated his wages to the Church, adds depth to the kindly manner in which he is treated by Browning and adds credence to the argument that Andrea is not, in fact, a failed or despondent man as readers of *Andrea del Sarto* often assert. The methodology will rely heavily on close reading of primary sources, but will also integrate speculation about theology as well as the purpose of art both in the Italian Renaissance and in the nineteenth century.

Robert Browning: Painting the Painters

The question of what art consists of and what makes art beautiful is one that cannot be resolved. The creation and interpretation of art relies on many factors and interplays, including

the interplay among creator, patron, and audience. Nor is an interpretation ever complete; the signified shifts ceaselessly under the signified as the new interpretive communities supplant the previous ones. Art and the study of art was important to nineteenth-century writer and poet Robert Browning, but also important was exploring how the audience, both actual and implied, affects and in some way effects the meaning of art. In the Italian Renaissance, as in the medieval period, religious art, as Michael Baxandall explains, had a trifold purpose: to instruct the simple folk, to illustrate the mystery of the incarnation, and to present the lives of the saints in a way through which the audience could better relate to them and access them.¹⁴ Baxandall goes on to paraphrase John of Genoa as saying religious art serves “to excite feelings of devotion” through our “sense of sight.”¹⁵ These feelings of devotion were distinct from theological dogma and practices. The excitement and the devotion laid the foundation for a higher understanding of spirituality, or, more accurately, for a more engaged heart and soul, and Browning, in his dramatic monologues, explored this question at length.

In nineteenth-century England, the Renaissance debate between worldliness and spirituality was echoed by art critics searching for a way to codify the good and beautiful. Primary in these debates was the question of whether beauty led to good or good led to beauty, and Browning, as an avid student of art, art history, and art theory, would have been familiar with these debates and the work of those who wrote about them. When the Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768, interpretative communities were privileged or deprived. As the Romantic era supplanted the Neoclassical time, the emphasis turned from the didactic to the sublime. Art was still meant to improve the viewer, but not in a societal sense.

¹Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974), 3.

¹⁵ See Baxandall, *Painting and Experience*, 41.

Instead, the new emphasis was on the aesthetic experience. Wilhelm Wackenroder, a self-described “art-loving monk,” scorned those who approached art with more emphasis on intellect than emotion. In actuality, Wackenroder was not a monk, but a lawyer who “wrote about a triangular relationship between art, nature, and religion,” and who believed that the role of the artist was “to infuse his work with ‘universality, tolerance, and human love.’”¹⁶ Wackenroder, who had rather a cult following, wrote in 1797 that “Picture galleries are taken for annual fairs where new wares may be judged in passing, praised, and scorned. They should be temples where in calm and silent humility and in exalting solitude one may admire great artists as the most noble of mortals, and where in long, uninterrupted contemplation of their works one may warm oneself in the sun of the most enchanting thoughts and emotions.”¹⁷ To appreciate, or, more accurately, to encounter art, one must be in a state of grace. In Wackenroder’s words, “You must wait, as with prayer, for the blessed ours when the favor of Heaven illumines your inner being with superior receptivity.”¹⁸ Wackenroder’s ideas influenced the Nazarene movement which was founded in 1809 during the Romantic period. The Nazarenes, called such because of their long hair, loose robes, and monastic affect, lived and worked in a former monastery and believed that the purpose of art was not to imitate but to transform. They believed that the path to being a great painter lay in following the path of virtue; art, to them, was a higher calling, and artists belonged to a higher, more sensitive, order of humans.¹⁹ The paintings of the Nazarene Brotherhood focused on nature as well as religion as both were sources of inspiration.

¹⁶ Petra ten-Doesschate Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2006), 163.

¹⁷ Wilhelm Wackenroder, “Outpourings from the Heart of an Art-Loving Monk” (1797), in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, edited by Joshua C. Taylor, (Berkeley, California UP), 1987), 137.

¹⁸ Wackenroder, “Outpourings,” 137.

¹⁹ Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 163.

As the Romantic era merged into the Victorian one, the Nazarene question remained as to whether novelty and technique could weaken the spiritual power of art, and the emphasis for many writers remained firmly on the visceral and inchoate effects of art. A.F. Rio, for instance, was a Frenchman who in 1836 wrote that art could excite “mysterious and exalted sentiments” which would impart a “foretaste of celestial blessedness on the soul that experiences them.”²⁰ This exaltation, Rio goes on to say, is a mark of predestination; only the elect are capable of having such feelings and experiences, and when this aesthetic experience occurs, art “appears in her true light as the daughter of heaven; and that alone she is raised to her highest power.”²¹ According to David DeLaura, “Rio’s role was to bring into the arts the polemical point of view of neo-Catholicism.”²² Too much naturalism, Rio thought, would destroy the “‘centre of unity’ from which earlier Italian painting had proceeded.”²³ Worldliness or naturalism could displace spirituality, mystery, and excitement, and these are the feelings that make art great. Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a winner of the Prix de Rome and later the director of the French Academy from 1834-41, believed beauty came from within and was manifested by those capable of higher thought and feeling. Akin to Rio, he writes, “Art lives on elevated thoughts and noble passions. Let us have character, let us have warmth! One does not die of warmth: one dies of cold.”²⁴ Ingres’ contemporary, Tommaso Minardi, advocated disciplined study for the aspiring artist, but he also advocated Purism which held, as one of its three key points, the idea that “one

²⁰ A.F. Rio, “The Poetry of Christian Art,” (1836), in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, edited by Joshua C. Taylor, (Berkeley, California UP, 1987), 110.

²¹ Rio, “The Poetry of Christian Art,” 110.

²² David J. DeLaura, “The Context of Browning’s Painter Poems: Aesthetics, Polemics, Histories,” *PLMA* 95, no. 3 (May, 1980): 367.

²³ DeLaura, “The Context of Browning’s Painter Poems,” 367.

²⁴ J.A.D. Ingres, “On Art and the Beautiful,” in *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, edited by Joshua C. Taylor, (Berkeley, California UP, 1987), 110.

must avoid all manner, grand or otherwise, in order to render both a moral and visual truth.”²⁵ The international Purist style that ensued was “a chaste mixture of intensive observation and fifteenth-century manner,” notes Taylor, and the Victorian Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, founded in 1848 and thus contemporary to Browning was founded on Purist principles.²⁶ The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, or PRB, was modeled after the Nazarene movement and was made up of young men, including Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais, and William Henry Hunt, who “scorned the middle-class taste for eclecticism, sentimentality, and cheap sensationalism,” and who “criticized the Royal Academy for bending to these mediocre tastes, and for allowing the standards of painting to erode.”²⁷ Like the Nazarenes, the PRB believed religious subjects had an inherent spirituality that could be understood or felt by all viewers regardless of their individual faiths. However, in contrast to the Nazarenes, the religious figures in PRB paintings were often shown as regular human beings to whom viewers could relate, as opposed to the more idealized figures of the Nazarenes. If we compare the diptych *Shulamit and Mary* (1811) by Franz Pforr (Figure 1) with Pre-Raphaelite painting, *Christ in the Carpenter Shop* (1849-50) by Millais (Figure 2), for instance, we see that in the latter, the religious figures are not idealized but are shown as simple, everyday folk whereas in the former, the figures are presented in an idealized manner. Although the figures in Pforr’s painting are biblical, they represent a contrast of Overbeck’s artistic ideas with those of Pforr.²⁸ Millais, in contrast, captures the chaos, noise, and mess of a carpenter’s shop. Here, the iconography is clear; the wound in Christ’s hand foretells his crucifixion, and the water carried by the young John the Baptist alludes to his future

²⁵ Joshua Taylor, editor, *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, (Berkeley, California UP, 1987), 173.

²⁶ Taylor, *Nineteenth-Century Theories of Art*, 175.

²⁷ Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 337.

²⁸ Chu, 165.

occupation. We also see a white dove on a ladder which represents the Holy Spirit perhaps on the ladder of salvation, and the carpenter's triangle situated above Christ's head which may reflect the Trinity. Despite the clear Christian iconography, the figures in the painting are not romanticized or idealized, a fact which was shocking to some Victorian viewers. Charles Dickens, for instance, "called the Christ child 'a hideous, wry-necked, blubbering, red-haired boy in a nightgown' and found the Virgin 'so horrible in her ugliness that [. . .] she would stand out from the rest of the company as a monster in the vilest cabaret in France or the lowest gin shop in England.'"²⁹ The soft, gentle, subtly symbolic work of Pforr can be contrasted with the startling sight of humanity in the Millais painting. The Nazarene painting can be seen as similar in style to some of the paintings of Andrea del Sarto, such as the *Noli me Tangere* (1510) (Figure 3) and the PRB work is comparable to some works of Lippi's, such as *The Feast of Herod*, (1452-66) (Figure 4). The quiet contemplation of Andrea's figures contrast sharply with those showing "life's flash" in the works by Lippi, but Browning shows us how the works of each artist can reach the soul.

In *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning juxtaposes the two painters. Lippi is presented as an energetic monk of rather loose morals who paints "saints and saints and saints" whereas Andrea is presented as a much quieter and contemplative man. In these poems, Browning provides a sympathetic observation of the two artists. Traditionally, the genre of the dramatic monologue has four characteristics: one speaker, a person or people hearing the speaker, some psychological interplay between the speaker and listener(s), and a specific occasion that serves as the *Kairos* of the monologue.³⁰ The psychological interplay between the

²⁹ Chu, *Nineteenth-Century European Art*, 338.

³⁰ Robert Langbaum, "The Dramatic Monologue," in *Robert Browning's Poetry*, edited by Andrew Stauffer (New York: Norton, 2007), 524.

speaker and his audience is often one of balanced sympathy and judgment. The genre also draws in the reader as the reader becomes aligned with both the speaker and the audience. Each reader, then, comes to a singular understanding of the speaker, the listener, and the theme of the poem. Indeed, as Erin Nerstad points out regarding dramatic monologues, “The inner standing-point is the key element of what [Dante Gabriel] Rossetti calls the ‘emotional influence’ of the dramatic monologue. This ‘emotional influence’ is not just the poem’s ability to elicit an emotional reaction; the poem also ‘employs’ emotional influence in that it is formally structured by the ability to see through the speaker’s point of view.”³¹ The form of the poem literally embodies the speaker; the speaker becomes the poem, and the poem becomes the speaker.

The dramatic monologue is distinct from an oration because the themes of the dramatic monologue are not revealed in specific lines. Because the psychological states of the speaker (as well as those of the listeners and readers) shift suddenly and sometimes subtly, an absolute interpretation of the monologue remains elusive. The meaning of the monologue is received, not explained; a momentary understanding of or sympathy for the speaker results from joining the listener and hearing the speaker just as the listener does. In the words of S.S. Curry, “the real truth of the monologue comes only after comprehension of the whole. It reserves its truth until the thought has slowly grown in the mind of the hearer.”³² Browning’s monologues are certainly not didactic. Instead, they give the reader an *in toto* experience which is characterized by Ekbert Faas as a “subjective objectiveness” that fuses “dramatic, epic, and lyric elements.”³³ Hugh

³¹ Erin Nerstad, “Decomposing but to Recompose: Browning, Biblical Hermeneutics, and the Dramatic Monologue,” *Victorian Poetry* 50, no. 4 (2012): 544.

³² S.S. Curry, *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue* (New York: Haskell House, 1965), 15.

³³ Ekbert Faas, *Retreat into the Mind: Victorian Poetry and the Rise of Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988), 4.

Holman defines the dramatic monologue as a “lyric poem which reveals a ‘soul in action’ through the conversation of one character in a dramatic situation. The character is speaking to an identifiable but silent listener at a dramatic moment in the speaker’s life.”³⁴ The poem leads to the speaker’s truth, and the truth is not always palatable. We readers may be amused, as the night guard seems to be, by Lippo Lippi’s antics, or we may share Andrea’s sad sense of yearning at the last line of *Andrea del Sarto* that reads, “Go, my Love,” or we may recoil in horror when we realize the speaker of *Porphyria’s Lover* had “found / A thing to do, and all her hair / In one long yellow string I wound / Three times her little throat around, / And strangled her.” When we read the monologues, we observe the speaker and the listener(s) and we draw not intellectual conclusions, but rather have emotional reactions. The aesthetic experience of reading a dramatic monologue, particularly one of Browning’s, then, is very much akin to the act of viewing a painting.

Not coincidentally, the collection *Men and Women*, in which *Andrea del Sarto* and *Fra Lippo Lippi* appear, was published in 1855. The painter poems were written in 1853, two years after Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett were married. The couple moved to Pisa, Italy in 1846 and moved soon thereafter to Florence where they were immersed in art and the study of art and had a life described by G.K. Chesterton as “uneventfully happy” and included a “succession of splendid landscapes, a succession of brilliant friends, a succession of high and ardent intellectual interests.”³⁵ Chesterton goes on to remark of Browning’s dramatic monologues about painters: “These Browning poems do not merely deal with painting; they smell of paint. They are the works of a man to whom art is not what it is to so many of the non-

³⁴ Hugh C. Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3rd edition (Indianapolis: The Odyssey Press, 1972), 172.

³⁵ G.K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (1903) (Gutenberg E-book #13342, 2004), 38.

professional lovers of art, a think accomplished, a valley of bones; to him, it is a field of crops continually growing in a busy and exciting silence. Browning was interested, like some scientific man, in the obstetrics of art.”³⁶ To Browning, the past continued into the present and beyond. The meaning of paintings and poems would be endlessly deferred because the poems and the paintings would still grow, still move, under the eyes of the viewer or reader. In his dramatic monologues, particularly those that explore art and painting, Browning asserts the importance of aesthetic experience.

Much of Browning’s work revolved around painters, specifically Florentine painters of the Italian Renaissance who, to him, provided an aesthetic experience to the viewers of their works. Mabel Major notes that while Browning does not devote a single poem to a writer of the Renaissance, Italian or otherwise, there are no fewer than 228 references to Italian Renaissance art, and thirteen of Browning’s poems are specifically about Italian Renaissance art and artists.³⁷ Although Browning, according to Major, was well acquainted with the architecture of the Italian Renaissance, and although he does mention famous buildings such as the Campanile and the Duomo to give context to his work, not a single time is a building or an architect thematically important in Browning’s poetry, even buildings by geniuses such as Brunelleschi. Possibly, architecture was perceived as having less of an intimate connection with its viewer or user than painting, and painting provides more of an immediate window into the artist’s mind. One may marvel at the Duomo, for instance, but seeing a painting is a different and more intimate experience. Browning is even less interested in the sculpture of the Italian Renaissance; according to Major, there are only three poems that even mention sculpture of the Quattrocento

³⁶ Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, 38.

³⁷ Mabel Major, *Browning and the Florentine Renaissance*, (MA thesis, University of Missouri, 1917), 80.

and the Cinquecento and only six poems in his immense body of work that mention Italian sculpture at all, whether in the Italian Renaissance or in other times.³⁸ Although Browning does mention Michelangelo twenty times, each of those times is in reference to painting rather than to another medium. Thus, in using painting as a focus, particularly the painting of the Italian Renaissance, Browning uses the *ut pictura poesis* trope. His brushstrokes are his techniques in meter and rhyme, his color is his imagery, his shading is his punctuation. In *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning recreates the nineteenth-century debate as to whether passion or perfection result in the best art. He does not answer this question but rather draws the reader into an aesthetic experience when reading them. The reader becomes part of the poem and interpretation becomes appropriation—the reader, in other words, will “see” the speakers as themselves.

***Fra Lippo Lippi* and Life’s “Flash”**

Fra Lippo Lippi is traditionally read that Browning’s philosophy that naturalism is higher than technique in art although such an assertion is not necessarily true. Lippi is portrayed as vibrant, energetic, and roguish, and he is appealing to many readers. Many among us can relate to feeling trapped in our work, painting “saints and saints and saints,” and we long to slip out into the night air free to do what we like. Lippi’s paintings, readers say, have “life’s flash” and show soul. *Andrea del Sarto*, in contrast, is often read as the story of a failed painter, one who, as Vasari claimed, lacked spirit and boldness. The Andrea in the poem is discontent and frustrated. Even though he knows his technique is better even than Raphael’s, he is deeply jealous of his contemporary; he feels Raphael can transmit something he cannot, despite Andrea’s technical perfection. Richard Benvenuto gives one typical reading of the monologues when he writes,

³⁸ Major, *Browning*, 88-89.

“The different attitudes which the poems generate towards their speakers result from Browning’s use of Lippo and Andrea to construct a dialectic upon the nature of art and truth. The thesis of ‘Fra Lippo Lippi,’ that representational accuracy reveals soul, becomes the antithesis of ‘Andrea del Sarto,’ that representational accuracy obstructs soul.”³⁹ It seems, though, that Browning is not making a specific judgment about what type of art reveals most truth. Instead, he provides a word-painting of the painters and allows us, the viewers, to react and respond to the thoughts and questions of two very different artists.

Fra Lippo Lippi is first a poem of great energy. The punctuation alone is significant; there are no fewer than sixty-four exclamation points, thirty-nine question marks, sixty-nine em dashes, and eleven sets of parentheses. The reader, by virtue of this punctuation, gets caught up in sheer speed and energy of this long poem. Although its meter is largely blank verse, it has occasional and quick departures from iambic pentameter. The words are largely active and often use onomatopoeia as in the case of words such as “twinkle” and “flash.” There is regular use of alliteration through the monologue, including extended and emphatic phrases such as “wee white mouse, / *Weke, weke*,” “soul and sense of him grow sharp,” and “he learns the look of things.” All of these techniques heighten the reader’s observation. Indeed, Browning uses these concrete references to sights and sounds to drape, in the artistic sense, his thoughts. Colloquialisms such as “Zooks,” and “Boh” serve to guide the listeners’ reaction just as a spot of color in a painting may guide the eye. Browning’s poetic techniques in this monologue manifest, in Hughes’ words, “a kind of datum, a penumbra within which the dartings of the mind are contained.”⁴⁰ A penumbra, or partial shadow, literally “almost shadow,” is necessary for light to be perceived. It

³⁹ Richard Benvenuto, “Lippo and Andrea: The Pro and Contra of Browning’s Realism,” *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 13, no. 4 (Autumn 1973): 648.

⁴⁰ Linda Hughes, *The Many-Faced Glass* (Athens, OH: OUP, 1988), 17.

is material life that actually draws out the soul. Lippi, like the words he speaks, is perceived as a vibrant, active, colorful man unapologetically engaging wholeheartedly in the sights, sounds, and sex of his late-night forays. The arrhythmic nature of the poem mirror the ramblings of the speaker as the guards who listen stand by after releasing Lippi's throat from their "gullet-gripe." The quick words, darting lines, and abundance of action themselves form a moving portrait of the painter as a man of unresolved contradictions.

The setting of *Fra Lippo Lippi* is based on Giorgio Vasari's account of a time when Lippi's patron, Cosimo de' Medici, "locked him inside so that he would not leave the house and waste time," but driven by his "bestial desires," Lippi made a ladder out of bedsheet, "lowered himself out of a window" and "pursued his pleasures for many days."⁴¹ Lippi's most excellent painting, according to Vasari, is *The Feast of Herod* not only because of its well executed and beautiful poses but because Lippi "executed his figures somewhat larger than life" which "encouraged those who came after him to paint on a larger scale."⁴² Certainly, the speaker in *Fra Lippo Lippi* is himself larger than life in his energy, mischief, and charm.

Although Browning used Vasari's anecdote as the basis for the setting of *Fra Lippo Lippi*, he does not simply recreate Vasari's account in verse. Vasari describes Lippi as an energetic person, passionate about painting, but not very passionate about the Order of which he was a part. Vasari writes, "Filippo was so lustful that whenever he saw women who pleased him, he would give them all his possessions just to have them."⁴³ To again quote Vasari, "So greatly was he esteemed for his excellent gifts, that many circumstances in his life that were worthy of

⁴¹ Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, translated by Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 193.

⁴² Vasari, *Lives*, 197.

⁴³ Vasari, *Lives*, 193.

blame were passed over in consideration of his eminent talents.”⁴⁴ Holmes notes that nineteenth-century art critic Gaetano Milanesi worked hard to counter Vasari’s judgment of Lippi; “Milanesi refrains from characterizing (or for that matter judging) the painter’s behavior relative to his religious condition until he comes to the Lucrezia Buti affair.”⁴⁵ Of this affair, Milanesi posits an unhappy Lucrezia with whom Lippi was smitten, and the two later became a legitimate couple as both were released from their vows and Lippi was granted a dispensation from his order.⁴⁶ This assertion was countered by Padre Paolo Caioli in the twentieth century, a Carmelite who, according to Holmes, “the first to comb carefully the records of Lippi’s monastery,” records that showed Lippi’s family had long-standing associations with the monastery. Holmes cites Caioli as saying, “We would not want to maintain that even from the beginning he did not cultivate the religious life, but only that on occasion he considered intolerable the weight which is sweet to the soul truly given to God.”⁴⁷ Heartfelt adherence to the ways of the Carmelite order was not, in other words, related to Lippi’s spirituality as manifested in his work. Lippi’s extra-monastic activities, true or false as they may have been, were not a rejection of the sacred but perhaps a negotiation of how the sacred fits into the life of a lively man, which is a picture Browning gives us.

Frequently, in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, the speaker refers to the wonders of God: “—The beauty and the wonder and the power, / The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades, / Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!” There is no doubt that Lippi believes in and celebrates God. Although Lippi may be a knave, he, like other speakers in Browning’s monologues, is a theist.

⁴⁴ Vasari, *Lives*, 194.

⁴⁵ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 10.

⁴⁶ In Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 11.

⁴⁷ In Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 11.

As Chesterton notes, “loos and mean characters speak of many things feverishly and vaguely; of one thing they all speak of with confidence and composure, their relation to God.”⁴⁸

As a person who spent his formative years in the Carmelite monastery, Lippi would be a product of that place and tradition. The Carmine, as Holmes points out, was responsible for much of Lippi’s development as an artist: “Fra Filippo’s own convent, Santa Maria del Carmine, exposed him to a rich range of sacred images, rituals, and dramatic enactments,”⁴⁹ and although the Carmelites are a contemplative order, they were not distant from or separate from urban society.⁵⁰ Lippi’s life as a monk would not insulate him from urban life, and it certainly did not insulate him from learning to be a painter. Browning uses his imagination to consider how Lippi could have become the man he did, or, more accurately, how he became the painter Browning envisages.

Although Vasari writes that Lippi was “dense in his knowledge of letters and poorly suited for learning,”⁵¹ Holmes asserts that only wealthier *frati* who had the prior education and the money to pay for books, training, and traveling who entered the *studia* to obtain degrees.⁵² The *frati* pursued different paths according to their talents and inclinations, so although Vasari gives us an image of troublesome, somewhat rebellious boy when he writes of Lippi, “he never did anything but mark up his books and those of his fellow novitiates with crudely drawn figures,”⁵³ Holmes reminds us that only “four or five *frati* a year attended the Carmelite *studia*,”⁵⁴ and those four or five had the background and the money to pursue that education.

⁴⁸ Chesterton, Robert Browning, 93.

⁴⁹ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 20.

⁵⁰ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi* 24.

⁵¹ Vasari, *Lives*, 193.

⁵² Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 14.

⁵³ Vasari, *Lives*, 190.

⁵⁴ Holmes *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 14.

Lippi, then, was not so much a youth rebelling against learning and letters so much as a boy who would not have attended the *studia* in any case, a boy who was encouraged, in Browning's poem, to paint: "What if at last we get a man of parts, / We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese / And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine / And put the front on it that ought to be!' / and hereupon, he bade me daub away."

How Lippi achieved his training in painting has been a matter of spirited debate. Vasari writes that Lippi was able to observe the frescoes in the Brancacci chapel painted by Masaccio and Masolino, and it is notable that Lippi would have been at apprenticeship age at this time; the frescoes were executed between 1425 and 1428 when Lippi would have been a young friar. Scholars such as Holmes, however, question whether a one-on-one apprenticeship would have led to "the extreme facility we see in the early, securely attributed panel paintings—the Tarquinia Madonna and Child [. . .] and the Barbarini Altarpiece."⁵⁵ Although Shell argues that Masaccio's influence is clear in Lippi's use of linear perspective, he argues that Lippi found a way to evolve beyond Masaccio.⁵⁶ Lippi, according to Shell, takes Masaccio's "immobile masses in static space" and makes them evolve into "relationships of forms," which may be said to characterize Lippi's work in general. According to Holmes, this tension "suggests something about his artistic training. It points to a gap that may have existed, when he was learning to paint, between the technical, iconographical, and representational conventions in which he was trained."⁵⁷ Out of this gap, perhaps, came new inventions and conventions in portraying religious scenes.

⁵⁵ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 15.

⁵⁶ Curtis Shell, "The Early Style of Fra Filippo Lippi and the Prato Master," *The Art Bulletin*, 43, no. 3 (1961): 198.

⁵⁷ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 15.

The purpose of painting, again, was not simply to illustrate a story, but rather to excite an emotion or devotion. Lippi excites such devotion by showing religious figures in a state of dynamic human interaction, using pictorial space, imaginative iconography, and linear style. The linear perspective Masaccio implemented after its discovery by Brunelleschi brought about several questions for painters of religious art. According to Shell, the first question involved “the extent to which the potential of illusion in perspective could be exploited without offense to religious meaning.”⁵⁸ Moreover, the question was raised as to how to reconcile the disruption of the consistency in surface pattern made by recession in space. Lippi uses Masaccio’s innovation as a type of springboard from which he himself invents his own style of dynamic tension. In contrast to Masaccio’s “projection of immobile masses in a static space,” Shell argues, Lippi uses a relationship of forms, as we can see in the *Tarquinia Madonna*, (Figure 5) in which “movement into spatial depth and movement on the surface of the painting help to balance each other, but at the same time produce a dynamic tension.”⁵⁹ Masaccio’s figures interact with each other, but they do so in less of a dynamic manner than we see in the works of Lippi. In the case of the *Tarquinia Madonna*, for instance, the foot of the Christ child pushes out of the picture plane, and the figure of the Madonna leans to the viewer’s right while the left of the top half of the painting is shadowed and mostly bare. Yet, the perspective learned from Masaccio is used to great effect. As Holmes writes, “the corporeality of Lippi’s figures comes out of Masaccio—their bulk, weight, cast shadows, and physical actions and reactions.”⁶⁰ Lippi again is not a mere copyist of Masaccio. Through the tensions in the picture, Lippi has, as Shell notes, “introduced a subjective element which, despite the realistic setting, indicates to the viewer that the presences

⁵⁸ Shell, “The Early Style of Fra Filippo Lippi and the Prato Master,” 198.

⁵⁹ Shell, 198.

⁶⁰ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 18.

in it are not common or accustomed beings.”⁶¹ Lippi, in this work as in others, is commenting not only on the dynamic human interaction of the Virgin and Child but on their holiness as well.

Peter Parshall comments that “The Tarquinia *Madonna* possesses an undeniably polemical dimension that sets it apart.”⁶² Although the painting shows a throne, it is set in a bedchamber, and the aspects of architecture show an “iconographic rift between the humble and the divine.”⁶³ Parshall goes on to argue that the “activity of the Child and the gestures that bind the two figures together can [. . .] be traced to [. . .] the Byzantine Madonna type known as the *Eleousa*, or ‘Virgin of Tenderness.’”⁶⁴ In drawing upon this Cambrai model, “Lippi has converted a venerable holy image into one with a monumental sense of actual presence, right down to the appointments of the household and an allusion to birth.”⁶⁵ The holy figures are brought to life, adding to the spiritual significance of the humanity of the Madonna and Child, again showing Lippi’s skill in making holy figures accessible.

One of the paintings Browning has his speaker Lippi describe is the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 6). Like the *Tarquinia Madonna*, the *Coronation of the Virgin* juxtaposes the sacred and profane. This altarpiece is replete with figures; there are sixty in the Celestial Paradise, and a dozen figures are in the foreground, flanked by St. Ambrose and St. John the Baptist. The altarpiece is well known “as an extraordinary display of spatial and coloristic complexity.”⁶⁶ The complexity of the spatial construction itself may seem “anti-Albertian” but

⁶¹ Shell, “The Early Style of Fra Filippo Lippi and the Prato Master,” 199.

⁶² Peter Parshall, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Image of St. Luke,” *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 33, no. ½ (2007): 14.

⁶³ Parshall, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Image of St. Luke,” 14.

⁶⁴ Parshall, 19.

⁶⁵ Parshall, 19.

⁶⁶ Jeffrey Ruda, “Style and Patronage in the 1440s: Two Altarpieces of the Coronation of the Virgin by Filippo Lippi,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florence*, 28. Bd., H. 3 (1984), 367.

“serves (with the help of color groupings) to organize a huge array of figures.”⁶⁷ In fact, according to Ruda, the spatial irrationality of the painting gives “the viewer a perception of space that would be supernatural but not less than natural.”⁶⁸ As with the Tarquinia *Madonna*, the viewer witnesses human interaction and is drawn into the painting to become part of that interaction. All the figures in the *Coronation* show individualized physiognomy, and of the thirteen human figures in the foreground, not one is focused on the actual coronation: four have their eyes focused outside the picture plane, and few are paying attention to the main event. The kneeling figure on the right has been identified as the patron Francesco Miringhi⁶⁹ and the younger kneeling figure with his head in his hand on the left has been deemed by many to be a representation of Lippi himself.⁷⁰ The older kneeling monk on the left in white is probably St. Benedict, to whose order the Sisters of Sant’Ambrogia belonged; Benedict seems to be the only one entranced by the ceremony taking place.

The coronation itself seems set less in heaven than on earth, and the coronation itself is reminiscent of a nun’s taking her vows. God the Father has a very human physiognomy, and his crown tapers into something like a bishop’s mitre. Although he seems to have a slight halo, the Virgin does not, emphasizing again her humanity. Because the back of the Virgin is turned, she has a relationship with God but not with the viewers themselves. Interestingly, in the foreground, as Holmes notes, “The scale of the figures increases and the space between them widens.”⁷¹ This use of perspective should guide our eyes to the theme of the painting—the

⁶⁷ Ruda, “Style and Patronage in the 1440s: Two Altarpieces of the Coronation of the Virgin by Filippo Lippi,” 368.

⁶⁸ Ruda, 372.

⁶⁹ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 224.

⁷⁰ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 224.

⁷¹ Holmes, 224.

coronation of the Virgin—but the frank and lucid gaze of St. Theopista, as we can see in Figure 7, “guarantees that the viewer’s eye will come to rest upon her.”⁷² Saints Eustace and Martin also direct their gazes outside of the picture plane, but it is with St. Theopista that we connect. It is she, a human, who brings us into the painting rather than the Virgin who is the ostensible subject of the work. Briefly, as recounted by Holmes, Theopista’s story is this: Her husband Eustace was a convert to Christianity who saw, in a vision, Christ warning him that he would suffer terrible travails. To escape them, he and his wife, Theopista, and their two boys, boarded a ship bound for Egypt although he was unable to pay for his passage. The ship’s captain threw him and the boys ashore but, smitten with lust for Theopista, sailed away with her. The two boys were given up for dead as one was snatched by a lion and the other a wolf, and Eustace mourned the loss of his family. The sea captain who had taken Theopista died. Later, while employed at an inn, Theopista encountered her two grown sons who had been rescued by peasants and shepherds. The family was happily reunited and sailed back to Rome, but Eustace refused to pay homage to pagan gods. His family was thrown into the arena to be eaten by lions, but the lions would not touch them. The family was then burned alive in a bronze bull, but their bodies stayed intact and were buried. This story, Holmes explains, has a dual genesis in hagiography and romance, and it was a popular story in fifteenth-century Italy.⁷³ Theopista, a model wife and mother (who apparently fended off the advances of her sea captain) would be someone to emulate, but her life was not an insulated or quiet one. She is, further, patrician, as we can see by her fashionable clothes and stylish eyebrows. Her frank gaze, however, bespeaks something other than simple modesty—it shows self-awareness and strength, and perhaps it even signifies direct

⁷² Holmes, 224.

⁷³ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 217-218.

communication to the viewer who, in the Quattrocento, would believe that marriage and wifehood was a more noble and virtuous calling than being a nun.⁷⁴ Again, humans to whom other humans can relate seem to be the most central and most important in this painting. William Wallace explains, “Narrative requires a cast of characters playing identifiable roles, even if they remain anonymous,”⁷⁵ and certainly the *Coronation* shows us how Lippi gives us a narrative of human experience. Given the fact that the figure of God is presented prosaically, with, again, just a ghost of a halo, no hierarchy of scale, a modest, parted beard, and a skin tone nearly identical to other figures in the painting, one might be so bold as to assert that God himself, presented as human, may represent the idea that our own divinity is inherent in our own humanity. In this painting, humans are certainly in God’s image.

The *Coronation of the Virgin* is apparently the painting Lippi references when he says to the guard, “Give me six months, then go, see / Something in Sant’ Ambrogio’s! Bless the nuns!” He describes what figures he will include in the painting: “And then i’ the front, of course, a saint or two-- / Saint John because he saves the Florentines, / Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white / The convent’s friends and gives them a long day, / And Job, I must have him there past mistake, / The man of Uz (and Us without the z, / Painters who need his patience).” Here again the speaker refers to saints in human terms, and it is no wonder Lippi contrasts himself with Job. Holmes tells us “Lippi was no patient, mechanical practitioner. He lacked a certain discipline that would permit him to accept his own limitations and those of the medium in which he was working.”⁷⁶ He may have needed, but did not have, or perhaps even want, the

⁷⁴ See Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 229.

⁷⁵ Wallace, “Between Flood and Fire,” *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, 31, no. 2 (2012): 24.

⁷⁶ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 15.

patience of a Job. Yet, it is this very impatience, this need to push against limitations, that allowed Lippi to design forms that “appear infused with a potential energy, as though the figures and settings were always on the verge of animation and the lines [and color] threaten to reorient themselves in different combinations.”⁷⁷ Infused within the *Coronation of the Virgin* largely through the character of Theopista is life and its temptations and vagaries. Also infused is Lippi himself: Browning writes that Lippi inserted himself into the painting: “up shall come / Out of a corner when you least expect, / As one by a dark stair into a great light, / Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!-- / Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck—I’m the man!” The figure of Lippi himself in the painting wishes to escape, “caught up with my monk’s things by mistake,” when “steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing / Forward, puts out a soft palm—‘Not so fast!’ / --Addresses the celestial presence, ‘nay-- / He made you and devised you, after all, / Though he’s none of you!” Every person has a purpose, and Lippi’s is painting; even St. John could not make a painting brush of his camel’s hair: “We come to brother Lippo for all that, / Iste perfectit opus!” *Iste perfectit opus* means “the man caused the work,” or “he completed the work,” so without humanity, there could be no work, and no human perception of God. Faulty though Lippi and humanity in general may be, God is the creator—“he made you and devised you.” Here, we see Browning engage in the question of the creation of art, but also in the question of what makes up authentic spirituality. By making the figures in the *Coronation* so human and accessible, Lippi allows his viewer to relate to the divine, and by making Lippi himself human and accessible in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, Browning gives us a picture of a questioning, impulsive, dynamic human being.

In Lippi’s later fresco, *Feast of Herod* (Figure 4), we see again not only dynamic human tension but also the integration of several episodes in the *istoria*. This painting is described in

⁷⁷ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 15.

Fra Lippo Lippi as one in which many figures are readily identifiable by some of the viewers. The Prior himself is quoted as saying “Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts, / She’s just my niece. . . Herodias, I would say,-- / Who went and danced and got men’s heads cut off!” Other monks note “Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true / As much as pea and pea! It’s devil’s game!” The Prior, recognizing his “niece,” rebukes Lippi: “Your business is to paint the souls of men—Man’s soul,” and later, “Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head / With wonder at lines, colours, and whatnot? / Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!” The soul is unpaintable. Even the Prior stutters when he tries to clarify his point: “Man’s soul, and it’s a fire, smoke . . . no, it’s not . . . / It’s vapor done up like a new-born babe-- / (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth) / It’s . . . well, what matters talking, it’s the soul!” To Lippi, though, “If you get simple beauty and nought else, / You get about the best thing God invents: / That’s somewhat: and you’ll find the soul you have missed / Within yourself, when you return him thanks.” It is through life, Lippi believes, that we find beauty and that we find the soul. In this fresco, though, Lippi shows us many facets of the feast of Herod as well as the subthemes and settings of the event. Holmes writes that this fresco, like Lippi’s other later works, not only shows his *arte* and his *ingegno*, but also his mastery “at devising complex *istorie* on a grand scale, with multiple *effetti* distributed across the pictorial field and set deep within the pictorial space.”⁷⁸ The painting utilizes a linear perspective, and a step depicted in the center front provides a way for the viewer to enter the picture plane. On the far left is the head of St. John the Baptist, dripping blood, and held aloft by a dark, scarcely discernible figure. The background is also dark, showing cypress trees. On the far right, Salome presents the head of St. John the Baptist to her mother as a couple dances in the far right corner. In the near left side, Salome

⁷⁸ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, 118.

dances; the energy of her movement causes her robes to flow frantically as she kicks a red-shod foot high in the air. Herodias does not watch her daughter; instead, she watches her applauding husband. Although the figure of Salome is dynamic, there is an open space on the floor leading to the banquet table, so the viewer seems to be approaching King Herod directly. The movement of Salome is enhanced by the perspectival area empty of people. The human narrative, again, is evident, and the viewer is very much part of this dynamic, if sanguinary, event.

By the time Lippi began the murals of Prato cathedral, he was well established and highly sought after. Indeed, Eve Borsook writes of Lippi that “As one of the leading Florentine painters, his talents were almost constantly required by the Medici and members of their faction in Florence,” and “For Prato it was a notable achievement that the city fathers of this provincial town were able to obtain his services at all.”⁷⁹ The search for a painter began in 1452, and the city council wished to hire Fra Angelico, but Angelico’s visit to Prato was so brief, writes Borsook, that it is likely it was more of a polite gesture than a serious consideration of the job itself.⁸⁰ After a month-long search for artists, Lippi was chosen, at least partly because “Prato’s taste was for that style of fairy-tale narrative rich in ornament and detail of the kind then the rage in Florence.”⁸¹ Fortuitously for the Prato council, Lippi was not unwilling to leave Florence in 1452 largely because of “legal difficulties provoked by a quarrelsome apprentice and a disgruntled patron.”⁸² Twelve hundred florins were budgeted for the work which was to be completed in three years, but that plan was, as we see, overly optimistic, and the financial difficulties caused by delays and mismanagement required the revision of the original agreement

⁷⁹ Eve Borsook, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for Prato Cathedral,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 19, Bd., H. 1 (1975):1.

⁸⁰ Borsook, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for the Prato Cathedral,” 6.

⁸¹ Borsook, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for Prato Cathedral,” 10.

⁸² Borsook, 10.

with Lippi three times.⁸³ By 1456, the 1200 florins budgeted for the project were gone, and yet the decorations in Prato Cathedral were far from complete. As a result, a new agreement “stipulated that the total sum Lippi was to receive once the murals were complete was to be greatly increased but was not to exceed the for that time enormous fee of 1725 florins.”⁸⁴ As a twist to that agreement, Lippi was to be guaranteed sixty florins annually for the rest of his life once the murals were complete.⁸⁵ But less than a month later, Lippi ran off with his lover, the nun Lucrezia Guti, and twelve days after that event, the Medici demanded Lippi be released from his duties at Prato in order to paint a Madonna, and the committee suspended the painting of the cathedral for one year, and Lippi did not return to Prato until 1458.⁸⁶ In short, Lippi had enough freedom, enough patronage, and enough work to allow him to avoid slavish service to the Prato council, and, in addition, the types of work Lippi painted were in fashion. Thus, Lippi, due to markets and circumstance, had the time, the money, and the support to develop what Holmes calls “some of his most innovative and interesting compositions” which combined “dramatic vitality tempered by elegant and graceful figurations.”⁸⁷ By the end of his artistic career, Lippi had succeeded. He had the approbation of figures such as Landino, he had his lover and their small son, Filippino, and he had the respect and patronage of Florence’s most powerful family. His paintings, showing intense and dynamic human interaction, fulfilled the purpose of entertaining and informing the viewers and portraying the vital life force in religious events, showing the religious figures as real flesh-and-blood figures who manifested God, as Browning puts it, in their “flash” of life.

⁸³ Borsook, “Fra Filippo Lippi and the Murals for the Prato Cathedral,” 10.

⁸⁴ Borsook, 50.

⁸⁵ Borsook, 50.

⁸⁶ Borsook, 51.

⁸⁷ Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi, The Carmelite Painter*, 118.

Lippi insists repeatedly that soul lives in the body and can be manifested by the body, an idea critic Benvenuto refers to as “incarnational art”: “For Lippo, realism means the primacy of the physical world, in which the artist can discover all the truth it is necessary for him to know.”⁸⁸ This theory of art echoes the Romantic idea that beauty and truth are inseparable and that one is found within the other. The Lippo Lippi in Browning’s monologue speaks of “Saint Lucy, I would say. / And so all’s saved for me, and for the church / A pretty picture gained.” The extraordinary or the super-sensuous is grounded in the sensuous and the real as we see again from these lines: “God’s works—paint any one, and count it crime / To let a truth slip,” and “we’re made so that we love / First when we see them painted, things we have passed / Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see: / And so they are better painted.” Lippi also claims that human community can enhance one’s idea of God, as humans help others in “Lending our minds out.” Observing and practicing exactitude is “meat and drink” for Lippi, and through this observation and exactitude, he celebrates all that is human and divine in us, as does Browning in *Men and Women*. Indeed, Browning, through his examination and projection of Fra Lippo, provides an apologia for realism as the way to spirituality—greater awareness of life can reveal the wonder of the soul and of the divine.

***Andrea del Sarto* and Reaching for the Divine**

Lippi’s manner of presenting religious figures is valid and effective, but in producing *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning posits another way of sympathetic seeing in regards to religion. Rather than making holy figures accessible to everyday humans, Browning’s Andrea, through the use of intellect and technique, shows them as beings to be wondered at rather than interacted with. The tone of the poem is more contemplative and quiet than *Fra Lippo Lippi*, and seemingly

⁸⁸ Benvenuto, “Lippo and Andrea: The Pro and Contra of Browning’s Realism,” 647.

more stable. In contrast to the frenetic beginning of *Fra Lippo Lippi* where the speaker exclaims, “I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!” *Andrea del Sarto* begins with the line, “But do not let us quarrel any more.” We begin with an emphasis on conciliation rather than confrontation, and this emphasis continues throughout the monologue to its very last line, also directed to the speaker’s wife in Andrea’s acceptance of her when he directs, “Go, my love.”

This calmness of Andrea’s contrasts with the frantic lines of Lippi. By looking closely at the punctuation Browning uses in the poems, we can see subtle differences arise between the two monologues. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, which is 367 lines in length, uses sixty-four exclamation points, thirty-nine question marks, sixty-nine dashes, and eleven sets of parentheses. *Andrea del Sarto*, which consists of 267 lines, has forty-five exclamation points, thirty-eight question marks, fifty-four dashes, and six sets of parentheses. Given the disparate length of the monologues, the use of exclamation points and dashes is consistent. In *Andrea del Sarto*, an exclamation point appears on average every 5.9 lines and in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, it appears an average of every 5.73 lines, a negligible difference. The dash appears on average every 4.9 lines in *Andrea del Sarto* in contrast to a slightly increased average of every 5.3 lines in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. There is, however, a more noticeable difference in the use of question marks and parentheses. In *Andrea del Sarto*, a question mark appears on average every 44.5 lines whereas in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, it appears more frequently, every 33.3 lines on average. Similarly, if we take into account the fact that both poems use roughly the same number of parentheses with only one more being used in *Fra Lippo Lippi* despite its longer length, we see parentheses in *Andrea del Sarto* being used roughly every seven lines whereas they are used roughly every 9.4 lines in *Fra Lippo Lippi*. Browning was a master of convention and grammar as well as meter, and one may surmise that the fewer question marks in *Andrea del Sarto* imply more of a peace and the greater number of parentheses

imply more of an intellectual wonderment than is shown by Fra Lippo the speaker. Although many readings of *Andrea del Sarto* echo the assertion of Vasari that Andrea was a timid man of little spirit, Browning's reading of him and his presentation of the painter in the eponymous poem show the speaker Andrea as a deeply spiritual man.

Faith by definition is belief in something that cannot be proven. A sense of being incomplete implies there is a possibility of completion, and a sense of imperfection implies the presence, perhaps in a platonic parallel, of perfection. Andrea is a man of suspense, an intellectual, an artist striving to show the ever-elusive spiritual truth inherent in art. Chesterton tells us Browning was an optimist: "His theory, that man's sense of his own imperfection implies a design of perfection, is a very good argument for optimism."⁸⁹ Spiritual striving implies a deep-seated spirituality.

It is notable that subtitle of *Andrea del Sarto* is "(Called the Faultless Painter)" whereas the subtitle of *Fra Lippo Lippi* is simply "(Florentine painter, 1412-69)." This distinction is not minor; Andrea is not the lesser painter. If anything, he is the more fulfilled one because he is not content. Aware of his inability to achieve what he perceives, he cannot, despite his technical perfection, reach a state of heavenly serenity. Of other artists, Andrea exclaims,

There burns a truer light of God in them,
In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
Heart, or whatever else, than goes on to prompt
This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me.

These lines do not necessarily mean the other artists are more fulfilled. Consider, for example, the use of the indefinite article *a*. Andrea's rivals do not reach heaven; they reach *a* heaven.

⁸⁹ Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, 83.

Andrea does not say “There burns truer light”—he says “There burns *a* truer light.” The works do not reach heaven but the artists themselves do, perhaps a heaven of their own making, as in the case of Fra Lippo Lippi; in other words, spontaneous and spirited people may not ponder as much as the speaker Andrea does. Lippi is content; Andrea continues to strive. He is not “perfect” in that his work will not be and can never be completed. Hermeneutics of imperfection allow us to transcend that same imperfection. As Kennedy and Hair write, “The imperfect is literally the incomplete, and imperfect art paradoxically succeeds because it pushes the mind of the viewer to finish it, while perfect (literally complete) art paradoxically fails because it offers everything in itself and shuts off further development.”⁹⁰ Chesterton notes that “hope may always be based on deficiency itself” and that a “sense of incompleteness may easily be a great advance upon a sense of completeness, that the part may easily and obviously be greater than the whole.”⁹¹ As long as we are alive, or so the Romantic writer Goethe put it, we will err, and if we are truly alive, we will strive, and to Browning, to strive is to be alive.

Perhaps the most famous lines in *Andrea del Sarto* are “Ah, but a man’s reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what’s a heaven for?” Art and perfection, in Andrea’s eyes, do not go together. Of Raphael, Andrea says “he did it all, / Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see, / Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him, / Above and through his art—for it gives way; / That arm is wrongly put—and there again—“. The art gives way and yields to Raphael’s soul; Raphael’s art is not perfect, according to Andrea, although it is stunning. Art, Andrea knows, can never be perfect and complete because a person cannot embody or envision perfection or completion; for that, we can only reach but never grasp. Passion and perfection must meet for

⁹⁰ Richard S. Kennedy and Donald S. Hair, *The Dramatic Imagination of Robert Browning: A Literary Life* (Columbia: UMP, 2007), 266.

⁹¹ Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, 82.

perfect art, and passion and perfection can never meet; the meaning, as Derrida would say, is endlessly deferred, and must be endlessly deferred. To grasp is to kill; hence, the reach must exceed the grasp.

It can be argued that the speaker Andrea's wife, Lucrezia, is a personification of art and Andrea's relationship with art. He is married to her, but she is indifferent to him, and is not seemingly even passionate about her "cousin." Andrea serves her willingly, saying he will work for Lucrezia's "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." If, he says, the two would "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." Again, we have a problematic word in "as." "As" implies comparison, so the speaker may be asking to be LIKE married people, or he may be indicating the couple can be of one mind as a married couple. Given the faithlessness of Lucrezia as described by both Vasari and Browning, it seems the former may be the more likely. Lucrezia is frequently described, too, in a rather objectifying fashion, such as when Andrea calls her "My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!" and her ears are so perfect that her husband is surprised she would prick them "Even to put the pearl there!" Lucrezia remains forever out of Andrea's grasp, reach for her as he may. If she does symbolize art itself, the marriage between art and Andrea is never fully consummated; had it been so, "We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!" Twice, Andrea notes that Michelangelo and Raphael did not have wives. He works to put money in Lucrezia's "small hand," and incurs more debts: "Those loans? / More gaming debts to pay? You smiled for that? / 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?" Yet, although this

monologue is often read as one of a defeated man under his wife's control, and although it is true that for the first part of their marriage to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, at least, she was thought to be by far the better poet and Robert Browning was known as "Mrs. Browning's husband," it is unlikely that Browning is portraying Andrea as defeated or as unable to escape the domination of his wife. Andrea, instead, chooses his situation and strives for spiritual serenity within its confines. Moreover, the speaker in the poem is clearly in love with his wife and seems to understand her and accept her, showing incredible serenity, peace, and strength.

Andrea chooses his own life. As he says to Lucrezia, "Love, we are in God's hand. / How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead; / So free we seem, so fettered fast we are! / I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!" He does not work for glory or for praise, and he seems above both praise and blame: "I, painting from myself and to myself, / Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame / Or their praise either." He knows his own works are nearer heaven; he knows with them he could ply men's hearts as he did in France, "painting proudly" with the king's "breath on me." He returned to Italy because "You called me, and I came home to your heart." Andrea says "Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold, / You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!" Lucrezia, despite her seeming indifference to Andrea, is quite literally a model for him in the platonically ideal sense. It is not coincidental that the last line of the poem is separated from the rest of the piece by a double space, nor is the last word coincidental: "Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love." Andrea uses the imperative voice to give his wife, his love, his art, perhaps, freedom, believing without rancor "At the end, / God, I conclude, compensates, punishes." Andrea is walled within the house he built "to be so gay in," but he is not dejected, angry, or defeated.

Although Andrea does not mention or describe any specific painting in *Andrea del Sarto*, it is clear his wife is his model: “you must serve / For each of the five pictures we require.” Whereas Lippi’s use of dynamic tension in his figures is evident, Andrea del Sarto provides a different sort of tension, one more psychological than physical. His paintings are quieter, more meditative, than the busy paintings of his predecessor. Contemporary to Raphael, Leonardo, and Michelangelo, Andrea del Sarto is described by Vasari as faultless, and his paintings “free from errors.”⁹² A tailor’s son, Andrea was apprenticed to a goldsmith at the age of seven, but had, according to Vasari, a natural inclination for painting and drawing. After leaving his first apprenticeship, Andrea was placed with Gian Barile and then Piero di Cosimo; on feast days, when he was in the company of other young men, he would spend time drawing in the Sala del Papa where he could see the cartoons of Michelangelo and Leonardo. Vasari describes the painting *Noli Me Tangere* (Figure 3) as having “a certain quality of softness and harmony” and as “sweetness itself.” As Cody points out in his “Andrea del Sarto’s *Noli me tangere*: Sight, Touch, and an Echo of St. Augustine,” the Augustinians actively negotiated for Andrea and persuaded others to engage him for commissions.⁹³ Antonio Natali also emphasizes the Augustinian theology in *Noli Me Tangere* when he writes, “For Augustine, that ‘noli me tangere’ signifies Christ’s firm refusal to allow himself to be known through sensory appearance, and conversely his insistence that he be comprehended for what he truly was. In sum, one cannot ‘touch’ the divine; one can know it only through faith.”⁹⁴ Clearly, Andrea was well respected by the Augustinian monks, by other prominent artists, and by the wealthy Florentines. Andrea, like

⁹² Giorgio Vasari, quoted in *Art in Tuscany*, www.travelingintuscany.com/art/andreadelsarto.htm (accessed May 24, 2020).

⁹³ Steven Cody, “Andrea del Sarto’s *Noli me tangere*: Sight, Touch, and an Echo of St. Augustine,” *Arion*, no. 2 (2018): 41.

⁹⁴ Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 35.

Lippi, had indeed achieved the purpose of art as a medium through which the viewer is moved, but in sharp contrast to Lippi, the divine is not to be found in humanity; it is something instead to be reached for, if never grasped. Natali writes that “Andrea was the sort of painter inclined to debate and investigate the theoretical problems of art, and in depth. Yet convinced as we are, thanks to ancient and authoritative tradition, of his prioritization of technical matters, we end up ignoring the possibility of his interest in theoretical ones which [. . .] may indeed have been among his principal concerns.”⁹⁵ Theoretically, and theologically, one cannot paint a true representation of the divine. Here, we see the sliding of the signified under the signifier. The signifier, no matter the technical skill in which it is rendered, is forever inadequate in encompassing the signified. The numinous remains outside human grasp. Thus, in his religious art, Andrea elicits a sense of psychological tension and a yearning for the divine.

Andrea’s art is, in the true sense of the term, artful: it is artificial and is carefully and deliberately wrought for a given purpose. Andrea’s technique would have met with the approbation of Alberti. Alberti himself, Baxandall tells us, was born out of wedlock, raised in poverty, and, as he grew older, was someone who seemed to “direct unusual energy toward controlling chagrin and maintaining poise.”⁹⁶ Alberti writes that richness in a picture should be “diversified by means of variety and [be] tempered by a sense of dignity and restraint. I condemn painters who, because they want to make an impression of richness or want to leave no inch empty, have no mind to composition.”⁹⁷ Alberti also says a successful painter will cultivate a sense of sparseness so as to lend dignity to a rich painting.⁹⁸ The dignity and balance in Andrea’s

⁹⁵ Antonio Natali, *Andrea del Sarto* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999), 37.

⁹⁶ Baxandall, *Words for Pictures*, 32.

⁹⁷ In Baxandall, *Words for Pictures*, 31.

⁹⁸ In Baxandall, *Words for Pictures*, 30.

work lead the viewers to contemplation and perhaps meditation in contrast to Lippi's work which celebrates the numinous in "life's flash."

Andrea del Sarto was highly praised indeed by Francesco Bocchi who wrote a never-published essay about Andrea del Sarto in 1567. According to Robert Williams, this essay, *Discorso sopra l'eccellenza dell'opere d'Andrea del Sarto, pittore fiorentino*, is the "earliest known attempt to apply Aristotle's *Poetics* systematically to the theory of art."⁹⁹ In it, Bocchi focuses on five elements of art that correspond with Aristotle's parts of tragedy. One of these elements is *disegno* that is aligned with Aristotle's plot. According to Aristotle, the plot is the most important element of tragedy and leads the reader into a sense of recognition. What is being recognized, briefly, is the imitation of an action, and it is important to note here that imitation does not mean repetition. Nature must be not only imitated but surpassed. *Disegno* is understood by Bocchi as a sort of an outline or layout of a composition, just as plot is an outline to tragedy. Both are necessary, but neither should be obvious or conspicuous. Williams explains, "Because lines are not perceptible in nature, the painter must avoid making them too conspicuous in his work."¹⁰⁰ Moreover, "The successful blending of light and shade requires far more subtlety than the articulation of surfaces in *disegno*"¹⁰¹ Andrea del Sarto was not simply a technically proficient painter but an innovator, particularly when it came to his portrayal of faith in his religious paintings, including the *Noli me tangere* and the *Madonna of the Harpies* (Figure 8). Andrea's careful use of symmetry, the balance of his figures, and his use of hues of color caught

⁹⁹ Robert Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 52 (1989), 112.

¹⁰⁰ Williams, "A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi," 112.

¹⁰¹ Williams, 112.

the viewer's attention. The sheer beauty of Andrea's paintings was a sort of meditative guide to the mysterious and divine.

Of course, to produce these works cost money, and so to some degree Andrea's prowess and work was tied to the ideology and privilege of the classes of people who could afford to pay for art. Art must please the patron before it can please other viewers. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, it must reinforce and reproduce the privileged world views of the patrons. But could religious art, when rendered in a dazzling way, distract from the viewer and negate its purpose in eliciting a sense of devotion and mystery? According to Cody, "The first decades of the sixteenth century in Italy were marked by persistent and unregulated attempts to reform religious art."¹⁰² Art was innovative but it was also respectful of older traditions. Cody asserts that Andrea's "dazzling pictorial virtuosity, his formal sophistication, and his self-conscious creativity become part of the Christian intellectual tradition."¹⁰³ In essence, Andrea was far from a bland craftsman applying empty but technical skill to paintings as Vasari would have us believe. Like Lippi, Andrea conveyed a specific religious and theological message through his work, but he did so in a completely different manner using intellect and mysticism rather than dynamism and human interaction.

Andrea uses many type of contrasts in his work. If we consider, for instance, the altarpiece in oils, *Madonna of the Harpies*, we see use of pyramidal composition, chiaroscuro, *colore*, and careful attention to iconography. The Madonna is flanked by St. Francis and St. John the Evangelist as she holds a smiling Christ child and *putti* hold to her robes. The pedestal on which she stands is devoid of color and lifeless, and represented on it are harpies which signify

¹⁰² Cody, "Disputation," 3.

¹⁰³ Cody, "Disputation," 4.

evil. The Madonna's right arm cradles and supports her child while her left arm is extended toward the pedestal and her left hand holds a holy text which supports the foot of her child. John the Evangelist on the right also has his left hand extended toward the pedestal and he is also holding a text in his left hand. The text is supported by John's right knee and his right foot rests also on the edge of the pedestal. Only on the right side of the painting are hands visible, namely the hands of the Madonna, of one of the *putti*, and of John the Evangelist. Only their left hands are visible, and each shows a gesture of blessing or peace with the forefinger and middle fingers parted and extended. The vibrant red of the robe of St. John contrasts sharply with the muted tones of St. Francis, and while the left side of the altarpiece is nearly monochromatic, the red of John's robe is also contrasted with very dark shadow to his immediate right. The painting itself seems to indicate a *paragone* as the Christ child is in an unmistakable *contrapposto* pose, and the stances of Mary as well as the two saints also reference this allusion to sculpture, as does the very pedestal on which the Madonna stands. Another, and perhaps more subtle, type of *paragone* is also at play here, namely the *paragone* of the image and word. On the one hand, we have the Christ child incarnate, and on the other, we have the word of God in the text St. John holds. Indeed, the word is made flesh.

The characters in this *sacra conversazione* are by no means accidental. The piece, commissioned in 1515 for the Poor Clares, was finished in 1517. The theme of the Madonna trampling on evil as represented by the harpies is clear, although it must be noted that harpies are often associated with female sins of sexual incontinence and greed. The integration of St. John the Evangelist is interesting as Andrea also uses, as Cody notes, specifically the Gospel of John in the *Noli me tangere*. John, whose symbol is an eagle, often represents light, and of course, the light that comes with the Word. The famous first lines of John's Gospel read,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome[a] it.¹⁰⁴

The ways of the flesh as signified by the harpies give way to the light made flesh as told by John.

Opposite John is St. Francis who is known for giving up a life of material ease in favor of a life of poverty and faith signifying victory of salvation over mammon, of light over darkness. The use of chiaroscuro in the piece also point to the intersection, literally, of light and darkness. The Christ child and the *putti* all seem to have a mischievous and childish affect, but all three are quite muscular, perhaps showing the strength of childlike faith. In discussing a lost altarpiece by Andrea, *The Madonna of S. Ambrogio*, Shearman argues that the piece was a precursor to the *Madonna of the Harpies*. As with the latter, in the former, “the two saints belong as much to a system of diagonals or a surface diamond, as to a tectonic [sic] vertical rhythm, and the centre of gravity is unusually high.”¹⁰⁵ The rhetoric of the *Madonna of the Harpies* is clear and is another manifestation of Andrea’s careful intellect. It is clear the religious painting integrates mysticism, but there are many ways to read it. Natali, for instance, analyzes the painting from an eschatological lens.

It is interesting that, as Natali points out, the finished painting has departed from the contract in two ways: first, St. Bonaventure is replaced by St. Francis, and second, the angels in the work do not crown the Virgin but clasp on to her robes.¹⁰⁶ As well, we cannot ignore what Vasari called a “film of transparent clouds,” nor can we ignore the fact that what Vasari refers

¹⁰⁴ John 1:1-5, NIV.

¹⁰⁵ John Shearman, “A Lost Altar-Piece by Andrea Del Sarto ‘The Madonna of S. Ambrogio,’” *The Burlington Magazine*, n. 699 (1961), 229.

¹⁰⁶ Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 83.

to as harpies, the creatures on the pedestal are not, in fact, harpies but are multi-form monsters.¹⁰⁷

Natali argues that the painting references the End Times, that the harpies are those creatures described in Revelation 9:

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.¹⁰⁸

The Madonna, then, Natali argues, is actually standing on the lid of the bottomless pit and the angels are holding her down to increase her weight.¹⁰⁹ If we accept this reading, and it is a feasible one, we can see why John the Evangelist's foot is also firmly planted on the platform and Francis is the angel of the sixth seal in Revelation, the angel who will bring salvation. The harpies, too, are not such as they do not have the bodies of birds. Natali claims the figures actually match those described in Revelation 9:7-11:

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer).¹¹⁰

If we look at the detail of the creatures in Figure 8, they certainly do have human faces, armored breasts, women's hair, large wings, and legs completely out of proportion to their bodies enough to suggest a grasshopper or locust. The Virgin holds down the opening of the abyss, but the

¹⁰⁷ Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 84.

¹⁰⁸ Revelation 9: 1-5, NIV.

¹⁰⁹ Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 84.

¹¹⁰ Revelation 9: 7-11, NIV.

abyss will eventually open as foretold, and at that point, St. Francis, the new Elijah or new John the Baptist, stands near to offer salvation to those marked by the sign of the Living God.¹¹¹ Natali's argument is made stronger by the fact that in 1517, the same year the painting was completed, Pope Leo characterized St. Francis as "the Angel who rose in the East, carrying the mark of the living God, the Blessed Frances, who together with men of great sanctity laid the first foundations of this vineyard."¹¹² Among all the master painters in Florence at the time the *Madonna of the Harpies* was made, surely it is not coincidental that an artist was chosen who had strong theological acumen and was viewed by patrons as being able to execute "this theologically ambitious and innovative commission," and was also perhaps sympathetic to the patron's theological biases.¹¹³ Andrea was an ambitious, though humble, artist, proud of his art and his intellect. Through both, he could help viewers approach mystical and mysterious religious figures. As with the *Noli me Tangere*, one cannot grasp the divine, but one may reach for it by approaching it with awe.

A late painting of Andrea's, *Virgin and Child, St. Elizabeth and the Infant St. John the Baptist* (1529), also known as the *Medici Holy Family* (Figure 10), gives further credence to Andrea's intellect and spirituality as well as his quiet generosity. According to Vasari, this painting was commissioned by Ottoviano de' Medici. Andrea was glad to oblige, for, according to Vasari, Andrea was indebted to Ottoviano "because he had always shown favour to men of lofty intellect, and particularly to painters."¹¹⁴ Clearly, Andrea was considered not only a

¹¹¹ See Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 85-86.

¹¹² In Natali, *Andrea del Sarto*, 87.

¹¹³ Natali, 88.

¹¹⁴ Giorgio Vasare, quoted in *Art in Tuscany*, www.travelingtuscany.com/art/andreadelsarto.htm (accessed May 24, 2020).

faultless painter, but also a man of lofty intellect. The *Medici Holy Family* is a somber and sacred painting. The figures within it are set in diagonals. The gazes of Elizabeth, Mary, and St. John are on the child, giving us a rather pyramidal structure, but the gaze of the Christ child focused on St. John lends the painting diagonals. A strong Madonna holds the child's hand and waist as he straddles her lap; it is unclear as to whether the child is trying to get nearer to or further away from his cousin. The background is dark and stormy, and the light reflected on the infant St. John as well as on the Madonna seems to emanate from Christ. Light also lands on the small cross on the ground as well as on some scattered stones which foreshadow Christ's passion. The small flowering shrub near Mary's left shoulder also symbolizes the life brought by Christ. The oil on the panel gives the "quality of softness and harmony" mentioned by Vasari in regards to the *Noli me tangere*. The chiaroscuro also plays on the intellectual puzzle of darkness and light in religion. If the colors used by Andrea were too bright and dazzling, ironically, they would not be as noticeable or as striking as the more muted, quiet colors highlighted by the darkness. It is, perhaps, not the devil but the divine that is in the details. Aside from the dazzling sheer skill shown by Andrea, we also have a sense of spirituality and presence through the tension of the Christ child's body and the interplay of light and sight in contrast to the more human and dynamic interaction of the figures in the *Tarquina Madonna*.

Intellect and passion cannot be fully resolved, but neither can they be fully separated. In Browning's monologues, neither Lippi nor Andrea is deified or demonized. They are simply presented as Browning had come to imagine them. As Hughes writes, "Browning pursued the *Ding an Sich*, an exploration of personality for its own sake."¹¹⁵ Personality is explored, not defined, and the very nature of the dramatic monologue genre is that the audience within the

¹¹⁵ Hughes, *Many Faced Glass*, 17.

poem, be it the members of the night guard or Lucrezia, becomes part of the poem as well. The auditors, as Hughes writes, help to “bring to the surface the distinctiveness of the speaker, just as the imposition of infrared light on topography emphasizes features we might otherwise miss.”¹¹⁶ We are heard and seen through others’ perceptions of and reactions to us. Reality is not our own perception as much as it is others’ perception of us, or even more significantly, our perception of others’ perceptions of us. The audience outside of the dramatic monologue also shapes, to some degree at least, the personalities of the speakers within it. Fra Lippo cannot perceive objectively and consciously his darts of thought or his flashes of insight, but the reader can, led by Browning’s use of meter and poetical technique that paint Lippi’s personality so convincingly. Similarly, Andrea seems unaware of his stasis, but as Lucrezia sits unmoving and unmoved in the poem, Andrea’s serene and soulful stance becomes more clear.

The dramatic monologue as wrought by Browning is, as Carleton writes, the *vox humana*: “Figuratively, the very term Vox Humana intimates an orchestration of thought and feeling,” and the “‘voice’ becomes a symbolic or composite one.”¹¹⁷ Dramatic monologues such as *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, are indeed composite compositions as they integrate not only the speaker and the audience within the poem, but also the writer of the poem, the reader, and the interpretive communities to present a shifting sense of artistic perceptions and questions. In so doing, Browning moves toward the type of artistic abstraction promoted by Pater and others in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Pater notes that all great art, particularly that of the Italian Renaissance, “brings with it special phase or quality of beauty, untranslatable into the forms of any other, an order of impressions distinct in kind,” and such also is the beginning of

¹¹⁶ Hughes, *Many Faced Glass*, 18.

¹¹⁷ Frances Bridges Carleton, *The Dramatic Monologue: Vox Humana* (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache Und Literatur, 1977), 9.

any aesthetic criticism.¹¹⁸ Art, according to Pater does not serve a purpose; rather, it gives us a perception of ideal beauty, a perception that is untranslatable. Like music, the message is in the reception of the medium rather than in the individual notes, and it is this ideology that Browning presents in his dramatic monologues *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*.

Conclusion

No art, in whatever medium, nor no theory or interpretation of art exists in a vacuum. Art may reflect the painter, but it is often the theories of art and the analysis of it that defines the artist in ways not necessarily aligned with the actual person. In short, when we analyze art from the lens of our given interpretive community, we paint a picture of the artist so as to affect the perspective of other viewers or readers and so as to reinforce our own preconceived notions. Known as the father of art history, Giorgio Vasari laid the foundations for generations of others to follow. Barolsky asserts that Vasari's *Lives* has altered and influenced "modern art history, fiction, and poetry."¹¹⁹ By merging fact and fiction to reinforce his own views, Barolsky claims, Vasari is a teller of tales, a writer of historical fiction. All artists are storytellers, and so are all critics. To borrow Barolsky's words, "The impulse to invent fables is so great that, despite the desire to move beyond poetry and fiction, or mere impressionism, the scholar continues to tell tall tales, to write, like Vasari, fables of art."¹²⁰ Chesterton warns us that the "over-readiness to seize hints is an inevitable part of that secret hero-worship which is the heart of biography."¹²¹ Clearly, Vasari had a purpose other than to provide facts about various artists of the Italian Renaissance; he was motivated to assert the primacy of Florentine art, and he wished to show a

¹¹⁸ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance*, 78.

¹¹⁹ Barolsky, "The Ultimate Paradox of Vasari's *Lives*," 10.

¹²⁰ Barolsky, "Art History as Fiction," 9.

¹²¹ Chesterton, *Robert Browning*, 4.

clear progress toward the perfection of Florentine art. Although he ends his *Lives* with the story of Titian, the story—and the word is used advisedly—of Florentine art, starts with Cimabue who was “in one sense, the principal cause of the renewal of the art of painting,”¹²² and culminates with Michelangelo, “a man sent by God into the world as an example for men in our profession, so that they might learn from his life how to behave, and from his works how to become true and splendid artisans.”¹²³ Barolsky adds that Vasari’s purpose also included something that may well have been subconscious in the embedding of Vasari’s religious feelings into his descriptions of the artists: “when Vasari describes a devotional work of art in a compelling way, he is not just describing the pious intentions of the artist whose work he describes. He is also giving voice to his own piety.”¹²⁴ In much the same way, all critics of art, from Alberti to Pater, and including us scholars as well, give voice to and embed their own beliefs, hopes, and devotions into the works they describe.

Robert Browning was a deeply spiritual man who presented all sorts of people in his collection *Men and Women* as they were. He explored; he did not judge. Had Browning been a man who had decided that the best art was made of “life’s flash,” he would have let *Fra Lippo Lippi* speak for itself—there would be no need for the companion piece, or counterargument, in *Andrea del Sarto*. Conversely, if Browning believed the purpose of art was to celebrate mystery, to have one’s grasp exceed one’s reach, Andrea’s voice would be the only artist’s voice in the collection. Through the juxtaposition of the two monologues, Browning gives us a sort of *paragone*, but it is a *paragone* that is unanswered. The value of art seems to depend not on the subject matter, not on the genre, and not on the techniques, but on the ineffable way the art

¹²² Vasari, *Lives*, 13.

¹²³ Vasari, *Lives*, 482.

¹²⁴ Barolsky, “The Ultimate Paradox of Vasari’s *Lives*,” 11.

may—or may not—reach a person’s soul. In addition, Browning gives us not only a comparison of two approaches to art, but of two approaches to spirituality, and again, the question is unanswered as to whether one can find the wonder of God in the mystery of life and the celebration of all manner of life, including lust and love, or whether one can only contemplate the never-touchable, never-reachable essence of the mystery of God.

Like Vasari, Browning is a storyteller and a myth maker, and as with Vasari, historical accuracy comes second to the holistic portrait of the subject, and the subjects of Browning’s monologues serve Browning’s greater purpose of examining the development of a soul. As Gray explains, “Browning is, typically, less intent on reaching a single conclusion than on exploring how the varieties of art enrich our understanding of the complexities of human love.”¹²⁵ The meter, rhyme, and poetic techniques used in *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto* respectively mirror the personalities of the artists as set forth in Vasari’s work. According to Bergman, “Lippi is the objective poet who emphasizes the human over the larger landscape and directs his art to the many below,” whereas Andrea del Sarto “aspires to a spirituality Lippi cannot imagine”.¹²⁶ Through his words and techniques, Browning makes paintings of the painters, but these word paintings must have viewers/readers to give them meaning, and there are as many meanings as viewers/readers. Readers become, in a sense, patrons of the poems, and as with patrons of paintings, we insert ourselves into the poems, reading them not as they are or as they could be but as we wish them to be.

¹²⁵ Erik Gray, “‘Men and Women’ and the Arts of Love, *Victorian Poetry*, 50, no. 4 (2012), 522.

¹²⁶ David Bergman, “Browning’s Monologues and the Development of the Soul,” *ELH*, 47, no. 4 (1980), 781.

Historians and critics of all ages and all periods have debated endlessly about what makes a work of art or a piece of literature “good.” Historical accuracy becomes irrelevant to some degree at least because that accuracy or perception of accuracy is largely dependent on whose voices are being heard. Intentionality also, as Bruns points out, is contingent on our experiences and desires: “we can arrive at intentions [. . .] by producing our own versions of them.”¹²⁷ To view a painting is to paint a painting; to read a poem is to write the poem. All viewers and all readers bring to each painting and each poem their own backgrounds, experiences, desires, and needs which is why no interpretation of an aesthetic work of art can ever be complete. Interpretation is discussion, and an interpretation is privileged by the person providing it. The endless debates in academe will not cease. We use our interpretations to further our own understandings and, consciously or subconsciously, those interpretations allow us to make sense of some aspect of the world. Thus, every interpretation is appropriation, at least to some degree.

By writing *Fra Lippo Lippi* and *Andrea del Sarto*, by providing each figure with a voice, a listener, and a sense of psychological tension, Browning points to the ways paintings can be in and of themselves very similar to the dramatic monologue. Every painting has a speaker or speakers in the primary figures and subjects, particularly in *istoriae*, every figure in the painting has an implicit listener or listeners in the other figures, and, most importantly, paintings have viewers, either intentionally as when a work of art is made for a specific patron or group of patrons, or non-intentionally as when a work is viewed by people outside of the realm of the imagination of the artists themselves. A Renaissance artist, for instance, could no more imagine his or her work being viewed in a modern art museum by modern people than Shakespeare could

¹²⁷ Gerald Bruns, “Intention, Authority, and Meaning,” *Critical Inquiry*, 7, no. 2 (1980), 301.

have imagined Hollywood films. When we readers or viewers imagine we “know” Renaissance artists such as Lippi and Andrea, we are remaking them in our image because we can no more truly “know” them than they can “know” us. Baxandall would agree when he explains, “The Renaissance sense of who was responsible for works and their quality is nimble in that observers can slip to and fro between a sense of the patron as author and a sense of the artist as author in a way that is hard to follow.”¹²⁸ One might wonder, indeed, who or what causes the work of art: is it the painter, the patron, the interpreter, or a shifting of all three? Patrons, artists, and viewers all are causes, in a sense, of the work of art itself. Baxandall quotes Rudolph Agricola as saying, in Baxandall’s translation, “Thus form and end can be the same thing, for from is the immediate end of almost all action. But matter and end, matter and form, efficient cause and matter, efficient cause and form can by no means combine in the same thing.”¹²⁹ The artists, be they painters, patrons, or viewers, shift in their roles; a viewer can be a patron of sorts if she pays to view a work of art, a patron can certainly be a viewer of the work he causes to be created, and the painter can be a viewer and can indeed patronize a way of seeing art. Agricola is quoted by Baxandall as asserting further “The one and only end for the man who builds is the house, and when he has attained it, he ceases.”¹³⁰ Painting is different from building houses, of course, but the point remains that when the painters finish their paintings, they stop working on them. It is the viewers and interpreters who continue to shape, modify, and literally re-present the works in question.

In interpreting the painters Fra Filippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto through his monologues, Browning gives us a sense of sympathetic insight. Neither artist is portrayed as

¹²⁸ Michael Baxandall, *Words for Pictures* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2003), 78.

¹²⁹ Baxandall, *Words for Pictures*, 79.

¹³⁰ Baxandall, *Words for Pictures*, 80.

perfect: Lippi seems somewhat trapped in a frenetic cycle of activity and lust, and Andrea seems as though he will forever yearn to manifest what he feels deeply. The very genre Browning uses is one of sympathy and insight, something Gerard Manley Hopkins would later call “inscape.” Browning uses poetic techniques to allow us to approach his subjects as a viewer might approach a painting. Our ear and our eye is guided as we come to an understanding of Lippi and Andrea. This understanding, of course, is not complete and could never be complete; to understand perfectly is to destroy consume and destroy. In other words, if we read only for facts that can be understood and comprehended, we are engaging in efferent reading. There is no connection. There is no allure. There is no mystery because the dynamic tension that gave the piece life no longer exists. If, on the other hand, we engage in aesthetic reading, regardless of whether we are “reading” art or poetry, we engage in the dynamic tension. In Browning’s monologues, we approach the painters and they approach us. After reading the poems, we may read the paintings of Lippi and Andrea differently as well, appreciating in them the dance of desire, the desire for the divine.

Illustrations



Figure 1: Franz Pfors. Sulamit et Maria. 1811. Diptych.

https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000921922.



Figure 2: Sir John Everett Millais. *Christ in the House of His Parents*. 1850.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/ARTSTOR_103_41822000847457.



Figure 3: Andrea del Sarto. 1509-1510. Noli me tangere. painting. Place: Museo del Cenacolo di San Salvi, Florence, Italy, Inv. 1890 no. 516.

https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039614811.



Figure 4: Filippo Lippi. 1452-1466. Scenes from the Life of Saint John the Baptist: Herod's Feast. fresco. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039930755.



Figure 5: Filippo Lippi. 1437. Madonna and Child Enthroned (Tarquinia Madonna). painting. Place: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, Italy (D-54; on deposit from the Museo Nazionale, Tarquinia). https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039929448.



Figure 6: Filippo Lippi. Coronation of the Virgin. 1447. Panel (78 3/4" x 118").. Place: Florence: Gall. Uffizi.. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31694767.

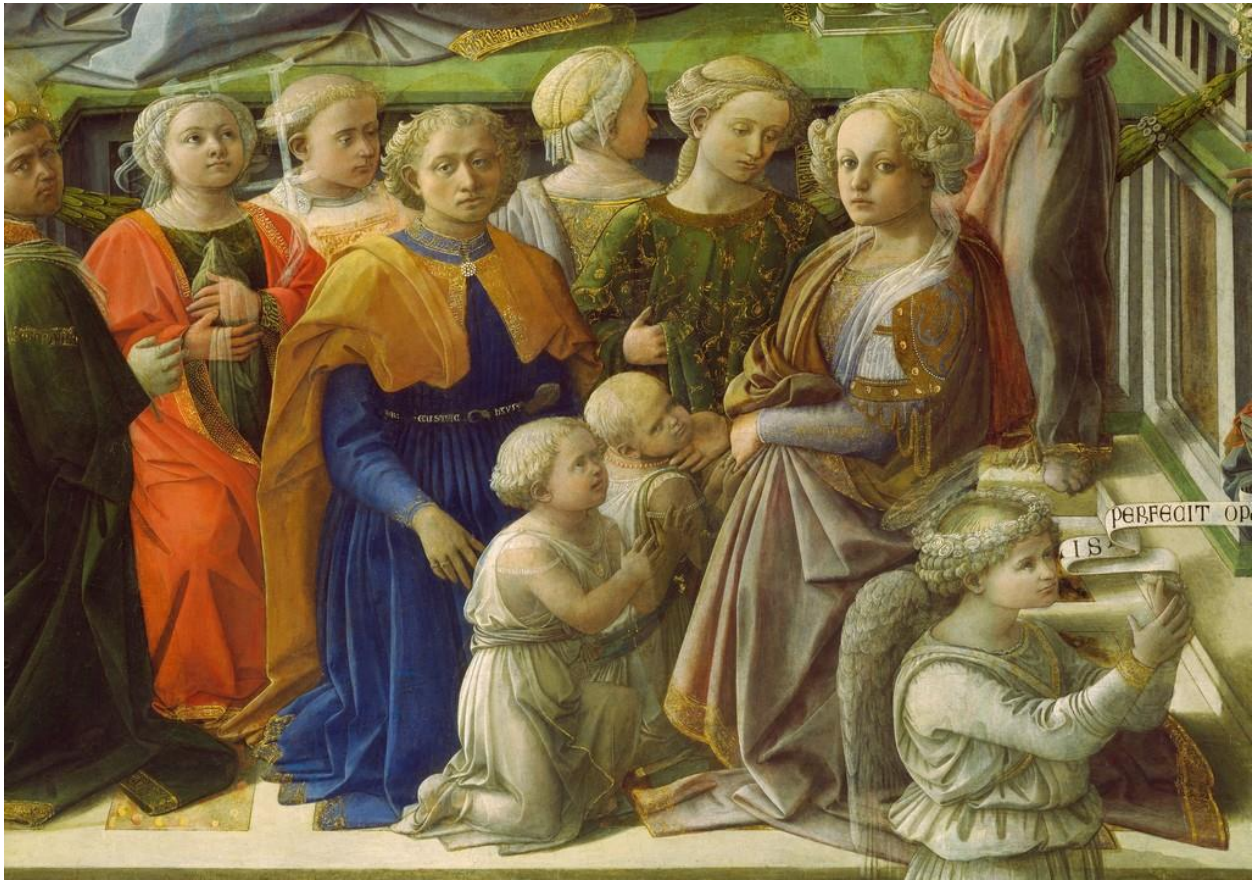


Figure 7: Filippo Lippi. Coronation of the Virgin (Detail view). 1447. Panel (78 3/4" x 118").

Place: Florence: Gall. Uffizi.. https://library.artstor.org/asset/AWSS35953_35953_31694767.



Figure 8: Andrea del Sarto. 1517. Madonna of the Harpies, Madonna di San Francesco. painting. Place: Galleria degli Uffizi. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039488714.



Figure 9: Andrea del Sarto. 1517. Madonna of the Harpies, (Detail view), Madonna di San Francesco. painting. Place: Galleria degli Uffizi.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039488714.



Figure 10: Andrea del Sarto. c. 1529. Medici Holy Family. painting. Place: Galleria Palatina.
https://library.artstor.org/asset/SCALA_ARCHIVES_1039488811.

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Appendix A: Robert Browning, *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 1855.

Fra Lippo Lippi

BY ROBERT BROWNING

[Florentine painter, 1412-69]

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

You know them and they take you? like enough!
 I saw the proper twinkle in your eye—
 'Tell you, I liked your looks at very first.
 Let's sit and set things straight now, hip to haunch.
 Here's spring come, and the nights one makes up bands
 To roam the town and sing out carnival,
 And I've been three weeks shut within my mew,
 A-painting for the great man, saints and saints
 And saints again. I could not paint all night—
 Ouf! I leaned out of window for fresh air.
 There came a hurry of feet and little feet,
 A sweep of lute strings, laughs, and whiffs of song, —
 Flower o' the broom,
 Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!
 Flower o' the quince,
 I let Lisa go, and what good in life since?
 Flower o' the thyme—and so on. Round they went.
 Scarce had they turned the corner when a titter
 Like the skipping of rabbits by moonlight,—three slim shapes,
 And a face that looked up . . . zooks, sir, flesh and blood,
 That's all I'm made of! Into shreds it went,
 Curtain and counterpane and coverlet,
 All the bed-furniture—a dozen knots,
 There was a ladder! Down I let myself,
 Hands and feet, scrambling somehow, and so dropped,
 And after them. I came up with the fun
 Hard by Saint Laurence, hail fellow, well met,—
 Flower o' the rose,
 If I've been merry, what matter who knows?
 And so as I was stealing back again
 To get to bed and have a bit of sleep
 Ere I rise up to-morrow and go work
 On Jerome knocking at his poor old breast
 With his great round stone to subdue the flesh,
 You snap me of the sudden. Ah, I see!
 Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your head—
 Mine's shaved—a monk, you say—the sting 's in that!
 If Master Cosimo announced himself,
 Mum's the word naturally; but a monk!
 Come, what am I a beast for? tell us, now!
 I was a baby when my mother died
 And father died and left me in the street.
 I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
 On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
 Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
 My stomach being empty as your hat,

The wind doubled me up and down I went.
 Old Aunt Lapaccia trussed me with one hand,
 (Its fellow was a stinger as I knew)
 And so along the wall, over the bridge,
 By the straight cut to the convent. Six words there,
 While I stood munching my first bread that month:
 "So, boy, you're minded," quoth the good fat father
 Wiping his own mouth, 'twas refection-time,—
 "To quit this very miserable world?
 Will you renounce" . . . "the mouthful of bread?" thought I;
 By no means! Brief, they made a monk of me;
 I did renounce the world, its pride and greed,
 Palace, farm, villa, shop, and banking-house,
 Trash, such as these poor devils of Medici
 Have given their hearts to—all at eight years old.
 Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
 'Twas not for nothing—the good bellyful,
 The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
 And day-long blessed idleness beside!
 "Let's see what the urchin's fit for"—that came next.
 Not overmuch their way, I must confess.
 Such a to-do! They tried me with their books:
 Lord, they'd have taught me Latin in pure waste!
 Flower o' the clove.
 All the Latin I construe is, "amo" I love!
 But, mind you, when a boy starves in the streets
 Eight years together, as my fortune was,
 Watching folk's faces to know who will fling
 The bit of half-stripped grape-bunch he desires,
 And who will curse or kick him for his pains,—
 Which gentleman processional and fine,
 Holding a candle to the Sacrament,
 Will wink and let him lift a plate and catch
 The droppings of the wax to sell again,
 Or holla for the Eight and have him whipped,—
 How say I?—nay, which dog bites, which lets drop
 His bone from the heap of offal in the street,—
 Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
 He learns the look of things, and none the less
 For admonition from the hunger-pinch.
 I had a store of such remarks, be sure,
 Which, after I found leisure, turned to use.
 I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
 Scrawled them within the antiphony's marge,
 Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
 Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,

And made a string of pictures of the world
 Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
 On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
 "Nay," quoth the Prior, "turn him out, d'ye say?
 In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
 What if at last we get our man of parts,
 We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
 And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
 And put the front on it that ought to be!"
 And hereupon he bade me daub away.
 Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
 Never was such prompt disemburdening.
 First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
 I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church,
 From good old gossips waiting to confess
 Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle-ends,—
 To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
 Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
 With the little children round him in a row
 Of admiration, half for his beard and half
 For that white anger of his victim's son
 Shaking a fist at him with one fierce arm,
 Signing himself with the other because of Christ
 (Whose sad face on the cross sees only this
 After the passion of a thousand years)
 Till some poor girl, her apron o'er her head,
 (Which the intense eyes looked through) came at eve
 On tiptoe, said a word, dropped in a loaf,
 Her pair of earrings and a bunch of flowers
 (The brute took growling), prayed, and so was gone.
 I painted all, then cried "'Tis ask and have;
 Choose, for more's ready!"—laid the ladder flat,
 And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
 The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
 Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
 Being simple bodies,—"That's the very man!
 Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
 That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
 To care about his asthma: it's the life!"
 But there my triumph's straw-fire flared and funk'd;
 Their betters took their turn to see and say:
 The Prior and the learned pulled a face
 And stopped all that in no time. "How? what's here?
 Quite from the mark of painting, bless us all!
 Faces, arms, legs, and bodies like the true
 As much as pea and pea! it's devil's-game!

Your business is not to catch men with show,
 With homage to the perishable clay,
 But lift them over it, ignore it all,
 Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
 Your business is to paint the souls of men—
 Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke . . . no, it's not . . .
 It's vapour done up like a new-born babe—
 (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
 It's . . . well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
 Give us no more of body than shows soul!
 Here's Giotto, with his Saint a-praising God,
 That sets us praising—why not stop with him?
 Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
 With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
 Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
 Rub all out, try at it a second time.
 Oh, that white smallish female with the breasts,
 She's just my niece . . . Herodias, I would say,—
 Who went and danced and got men's heads cut off!
 Have it all out!" Now, is this sense, I ask?
 A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
 So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
 And can't fare worse! Thus, yellow does for white
 When what you put for yellow's simply black,
 And any sort of meaning looks intense
 When all beside itself means and looks nought.
 Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
 Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
 Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
 Both in their order? Take the prettiest face,
 The Prior's niece . . . patron-saint—is it so pretty
 You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
 Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
 Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
 Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
 And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?
 Or say there's beauty with no soul at all—
 (I never saw it—put the case the same—)
 If you get simple beauty and nought else,
 You get about the best thing God invents:
 That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
 Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
 "Rub all out!" Well, well, there's my life, in short,
 And so the thing has gone on ever since.
 I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
 You should not take a fellow eight years old

And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
 I'm my own master, paint now as I please—
 Having a friend, you see, in the Corner-house!
 Lord, it's fast holding by the rings in front—
 Those great rings serve more purposes than just
 To plant a flag in, or tie up a horse!
 And yet the old schooling sticks, the old grave eyes
 Are peeping o'er my shoulder as I work,
 The heads shake still—"It's art's decline, my son!
 You're not of the true painters, great and old;
 Brother Angelico's the man, you'll find;
 Brother Lorenzo stands his single peer:
 Fag on at flesh, you'll never make the third!"
 Flower o' the pine,
 You keep your mistr ... manners, and I'll stick to mine!
 I'm not the third, then: bless us, they must know!
 Don't you think they're the likeliest to know,
 They with their Latin? So, I swallow my rage,
 Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
 To please them—sometimes do and sometimes don't;
 For, doing most, there's pretty sure to come
 A turn, some warm eve finds me at my saints—
 A laugh, a cry, the business of the world—
 (Flower o' the peach
 Death for us all, and his own life for each!)
 And my whole soul revolves, the cup runs over,
 The world and life's too big to pass for a dream,
 And I do these wild things in sheer despite,
 And play the fooleries you catch me at,
 In pure rage! The old mill-horse, out at grass
 After hard years, throws up his stiff heels so,
 Although the miller does not preach to him
 The only good of grass is to make chaff.
 What would men have? Do they like grass or no—
 May they or mayn't they? all I want's the thing
 Settled for ever one way. As it is,
 You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
 You don't like what you only like too much,
 You do like what, if given you at your word,
 You find abundantly detestable.
 For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
 I always see the garden and God there
 A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
 The value and significance of flesh,
 I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.

You understand me: I'm a beast, I know.
 But see, now—why, I see as certainly
 As that the morning-star's about to shine,
 What will hap some day. We've a youngster here
 Comes to our convent, studies what I do,
 Slouches and stares and lets no atom drop:
 His name is Guidi—he'll not mind the monks—
 They call him Hulking Tom, he lets them talk—
 He picks my practice up—he'll paint apace.
 I hope so—though I never live so long,
 I know what's sure to follow. You be judge!
 You speak no Latin more than I, belike;
 However, you're my man, you've seen the world
 —The beauty and the wonder and the power,
 The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
 Changes, surprises,—and God made it all!
 —For what? Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
 For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
 The mountain round it and the sky above,
 Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
 These are the frame to? What's it all about?
 To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
 Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
 But why not do as well as say,—paint these
 Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
 God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
 To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
 Are here already; nature is complete:
 Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
 There's no advantage! you must beat her, then."
 For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
 First when we see them painted, things we have passed
 Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
 And so they are better, painted—better to us,
 Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
 God uses us to help each other so,
 Lending our minds out. Have you noticed, now,
 Your cullion's hanging face? A bit of chalk,
 And trust me but you should, though! How much more,
 If I drew higher things with the same truth!
 That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
 Interpret God to all of you! Oh, oh,
 It makes me mad to see what men shall do
 And we in our graves! This world's no blot for us,
 Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good:
 To find its meaning is my meat and drink.

"Ay, but you don't so instigate to prayer!"
 Strikes in the Prior: "when your meaning's plain
 It does not say to folk—remember matins,
 Or, mind you fast next Friday!" Why, for this
 What need of art at all? A skull and bones,
 Two bits of stick nailed crosswise, or, what's best,
 A bell to chime the hour with, does as well.
 I painted a Saint Laurence six months since
 At Prato, splashed the fresco in fine style:
 "How looks my painting, now the scaffold's down?"
 I ask a brother: "Hugely," he returns—
 "Already not one phiz of your three slaves
 Who turn the Deacon off his toasted side,
 But's scratched and prodded to our heart's content,
 The pious people have so eased their own
 With coming to say prayers there in a rage:
 We get on fast to see the bricks beneath.
 Expect another job this time next year,
 For pity and religion grow i' the crowd—
 Your painting serves its purpose!" Hang the fools!

—That is—you'll not mistake an idle word
 Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot,
 Tasting the air this spicy night which turns
 The unaccustomed head like Chianti wine!
 Oh, the church knows! don't misreport me, now!
 It's natural a poor monk out of bounds
 Should have his apt word to excuse himself:
 And hearken how I plot to make amends.
 I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
 ... There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
 Something in Sant' Ambrogio's! Bless the nuns!
 They want a cast o' my office. I shall paint
 God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
 Ringed by a bowery, flowery angel-brood,
 Lilies and vestments and white faces, sweet
 As puff on puff of grated orris-root
 When ladies crowd to Church at midsummer.
 And then i' the front, of course a saint or two—
 Saint John' because he saves the Florentines,
 Saint Ambrose, who puts down in black and white
 The convent's friends and gives them a long day,
 And Job, I must have him there past mistake,
 The man of Uz (and Us without the z,
 Painters who need his patience). Well, all these
 Secured at their devotion, up shall come

Out of a corner when you least expect,
 As one by a dark stair into a great light,
 Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!—
 Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck—I'm the man!
 Back I shrink—what is this I see and hear?
 I, caught up with my monk's-things by mistake,
 My old serge gown and rope that goes all round,
 I, in this presence, this pure company!
 Where's a hole, where's a corner for escape?
 Then steps a sweet angelic slip of a thing
 Forward, puts out a soft palm—"Not so fast!"
 —Addresses the celestial presence, "nay—
 He made you and devised you, after all,
 Though he's none of you! Could Saint John there draw—
 His camel-hair make up a painting brush?
 We come to brother Lippo for all that,
 Iste perfectit opus! So, all smile—
 I shuffle sideways with my blushing face
 Under the cover of a hundred wings
 Thrown like a spread of kirtles when you're gay
 And play hot cockles, all the doors being shut,
 Till, wholly unexpected, in there pops
 The hothead husband! Thus I scuttle off
 To some safe bench behind, not letting go
 The palm of her, the little lily thing
 That spoke the good word for me in the nick,
 Like the Prior's niece . . . Saint Lucy, I would say.
 And so all's saved for me, and for the church
 A pretty picture gained. Go, six months hence!
 Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
 Don't fear me! There's the grey beginning. Zooks!

Appendix B: Robert Browning, *Andrea del Sarto*, 1855.

Andrea del Sarto

Called the Faultless Painter

But do not let us quarrel any more,
 No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
 Sit down and all shall happen as you wish.
 You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
 I'll work then for your friend's friend, never fear,
 Treat his own subject after his own way,
 Fix his own time, accept too his own price,
 And shut the money into this small hand
 When next it takes mine. Will it? tenderly?
 Oh, I'll content him,—but to-morrow, Love!
 I often am much wearier than you think,
 This evening more than usual, and it seems
 As if—forgive now—should you let me sit
 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 to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. Let us try.
 To-morrow, how you shall be glad for this!
 Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
 And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
 Don't count the time lost, neither; 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—
 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.
 You smile? why, there's my picture ready made,
 There's what we painters call our harmony!
 A common greyness silvers everything,—
 All in a twilight, you and I alike
 —You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know),—but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
 There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;

That length of convent-wall across the way
 Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
 The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
 And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
 Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
 As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was born to be and do,
 A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand.
 How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
 So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
 I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
 This chamber for example—turn your head—
 All that's behind us! You don't understand
 Nor care to understand about my art,
 But you can hear at least when people speak:
 And that cartoon, the second from the door
 —It is the thing, Love! so such things should be—
 Behold Madonna!—I am bold to say.
 I can do with my pencil what I know,
 What I see, what at bottom of my heart
 I wish for, if I ever wish so deep—
 Do easily, too—when I say, perfectly,
 I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge,
 Who listened to the Legate's talk last week,
 And just as much they used to say in France.
 At any rate '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—you don't know how the others strive
 To paint a little thing like that you smeared
 Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,—
 Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
 (I know his name, no matter)—so much less!
 Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
 There burns a truer light of God in them,
 In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
 Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
 This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
 Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know,
 Reach many a time a heaven that's shut to me,
 Enter and take their place there sure enough,
 Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
 My works are nearer heaven, but I sit here.

The sudden blood of these men! at a word—
 Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.
 I, painting from myself and to myself,
 Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
 Or their praise either. 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?
 Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
 Or what's a heaven for? All is silver-grey,
 Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
 I know both what I want and what might gain,
 And yet how profitless to know, to sigh
 "Had I been two, another and myself,
 "Our head would have o'erlooked the world!" No doubt.
 Yonder's a work now, of that famous youth
 The Urbinate who died five years ago.
 ('Tis copied, George Vasari sent it me.)
 Well, I can fancy how he did it all,
 Pouring his soul, with kings and popes to see,
 Reaching, that heaven might so replenish him,
 Above and through his art—for it gives way;
 That arm is wrongly put—and there again—
 A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines,
 Its body, so to speak: its soul is right,
 He means right—that, a child may understand.
 Still, what an arm! and I could alter it:
 But all the play, the insight and the stretch—
 (Out of me, out of me! And wherefore out?
 Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,
 We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!
 Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think—
 More than I merit, yes, by many times.
 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. Had the mouth there urged
 "God and the glory! never care for gain.
 "The present by the future, what is that?
 "Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
 "Rafael is waiting: up to God, all three!"
 I might have done it for you. So it seems:
 Perhaps not. All is as God over-rules.

Beside, incentives come from the soul's self;
 The rest avail not. Why do I need you?
 What wife had Rafael, or has Agnolo?
 In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
 And who would do it, cannot, I perceive:
 Yet the will's somewhat—somewhat, too, the power—
 And thus we half-men struggle. At the end,
 God, I conclude, compensates, punishes.
 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
 That I am something underrated here,
 Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
 I dared not, do you know, leave home all day,
 For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
 The best is when they pass and look aside;
 But they speak sometimes; I must bear it all.
 Well may they speak! That Francis, that first time,
 And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
 I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
 Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
 In that humane great monarch's golden look,—
 One finger in his beard or twisted curl
 Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
 One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
 The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
 I painting proudly with his breath on me,
 All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
 Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
 Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,—
 And, best of all, this, this, this face beyond,
 This in the background, waiting on my work,
 To crown the issue with a last reward!
 A good time, was it not, my kingly days?
 And had you not grown restless... but I know—
 'Tis done and past: 'twas right, my instinct said:
 Too live the life grew, golden and not grey,
 And I'm the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
 Out of the grange whose four walls make his world.
 How could it end in any other way?
 You called me, and I came home to your heart.
 The triumph was—to reach and stay there; since
 I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
 Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold,
 You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!
 "Rafael did this, Andrea painted that;
 "The Roman's is the better when you pray,
 "But still the other's Virgin was his wife—"

Men will excuse me. I am glad to judge
 Both pictures in your presence; clearer grows
 My better fortune, I resolve to think.
 For, do you know, Lucrezia, as God lives,
 Said one day Agnolo, his very self,
 To Rafael . . . I have known it all these years . . .
 (When the young man was flaming out his thoughts
 Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
 Too lifted up in heart because of it)
 "Friend, there's a certain sorry little scrub
 "Goes up and down our Florence, none cares how,
 "Who, were he set to plan and execute
 "As you are, pricked on by your popes and kings,
 "Would bring the sweat into that brow of yours!"
 To Rafael's!—And indeed the arm is wrong.
 I hardly dare . . . yet, only you to see,
 Give the chalk here—quick, thus, the line should go!
 Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
 Still, all I care for, if he spoke the truth,
 (What he? why, who but Michel Agnolo?
 Do you forget already words like those?)
 If really there was such a chance, so lost,—
 Is, whether you're—not grateful—but more pleased.
 Well, let me think so. And you smile indeed!
 This hour has been an hour! Another smile?
 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.
 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.
 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. 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?
 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. 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.
 Will you? To-morrow, satisfy your friend.
 I take the subjects for his corridor,
 Finish the portrait out of hand—there, there,
 And throw him in another thing or two
 If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
 To pay for this same Cousin's freak. Beside,
 What's better and what's all I care about,
 Get you the thirteen scudi for the ruff!
 Love, does that please you? Ah, but what does he,
 The Cousin! what does he to please you more?

I am grown peaceful as old age to-night.
 I regret little, I would change still less.
 Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
 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? you see
 How one gets rich! Let each one bear his lot.
 They were born poor, lived poor, and poor they died:
 And I have laboured somewhat in my time
 And not been paid profusely. Some good son
 Paint my two hundred pictures—let him try!
 No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
 You loved me quite enough. it seems to-night.
 This must suffice me here. What would one have?
 In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance—
 Four great walls in the New Jerusalem,
 Meted on each side by the angel's reed,
 For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
 To cover—the three first without a wife,
 While I have mine! So—still they overcome
 Because there's still Lucrezia,—as I choose.

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love.

