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Robert Browning's Dramatic Monologue as a Medium of Intransigence

Probing the dramatic monologue mould of Robert Browning (1812-1899) has maintained a long tradition of portraying this poet as an experimenter and pursuer of the Victorian representation de-norming process. Browning's narrative verse employs ambiguation through syntactic rendition of his dramatic personae who voice their minds beyond the restraints of dialogic turn-taking and divulge their impulses through verbal dominance. Browning's bicentenary seems a most auspicious moment to creatively explore the tenacity of his discordant narrative vein in literary translation.

Browning's fixation on engendering a poetic form that would fully sustain the self-projecting techniques of his protagonists resulted in the employment of narrative verse whose dialogic nature is undermined and embedded in his creations' monologues. The poet utilizes innuendoes which originate not only from the pool of poetic references but also from the syntactic realizations disclosing a disparity between the speakers' intentions and their verbal acts. Their interlocutors are being gradually drawn into a puzzling locutionary display.

What kind of subversiveness may be detected in Robert Browning's dramatic monologue, with his eloquent monomaniacal personae uncovering the barren psychological landscape of the Victorian individual disinclined to relate to others? The notions of mutuality are being persistently flouted and the reader reminded of the type of discourse impeding the flow of ideas and causing spiritual stagnation. The social identity of Browning's protagonists made them dependent on the symbolic order over the imaginary (Lacan: 50), and turned them into bearers of the monodic culture which precludes individuals from being fully engaged and representative of their human content. The subversiveness of Browning's dramatic monologue relates to his delineation of inter-subjective relationships forever hindered by the protagonists' obstructive self-centredness.

eISSN 1847-7755; doi: 10.15291/sic/1.3.lc.6

Browning's astute form of narrative verse asserts diegesis, or telling, as a way of mesmerizing the listener by the allure of words alone. Such a poetic procedure evokes Scheherazade's mode of setting things right by story-telling: the exemplary mode is indeed ironically distorted because the motivation for story-telling in Browning's poetic case-histories does not bespeak a sublime and life-enriching disinterestedness. Browning's poetic strategy resorts to a discursive narrative verse to validate his creations' glottal greed and aggression. His intemperate locutionists' volubility is effected by means of metonymies that signify cause-and-consequence logical relationships, while staple tropes as metaphors seldom make up the diction of his self-appointed opinion-makers, paragons of truth and arbiters of taste.

Browning's characters speak their minds through catachreses, or dead metaphors, and take advantage of emptied figurative language. Their idiom is pursuant to the syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic level of structuring poetic meaning. Linguistic and cultural paraphernalia have been determined by the subject-matter of this poet's dramatic monologues, the form of narrative verse propulsive for the irony-laden display of his characters' rhetoric. Dramatic monologues are conceived as ultimate performative acts which absorb the listener.

This paper exploits the semantic potentialities of Browning's dramatic monologue in Croatian translations of Porphyria's Lover, Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister (Bells and Pomegranates, 1842), and My Last Duchess (Dramatic Lyrics, 1842). Translating the given texts, we can search for Browning's constituents of poetic ambiguity in the discursive ploy of his dramatic monologue. Discursiveness could be deemed as instrumental to his poetic apparatus, and vital to his metalepsis generated by means of 'everyday diction'. My translations of Browning's dramatic monologues lean upon criticism and translation studies insights into the ethical concepts of Browning's poetry reflected in his poetic discourse. Collating Harold Bloom and Barbara Herrnstein Smith's approaches to Browning's poetry, Herbert F. Tucker concludes that 'Browning's moral doctrine of incompleteness finds a clear aesthetic analogue in his poetics (...) Browning's is an art of disclosure, an art that resists its own finalities' (Tucker 5).

In eliciting a poetically valid translation of Browning's dramatic monologues, I was led by Pound's notion of 'the translation's intrinsic and inevitable imperfection that allows the translator to focus on recreating the original's spirit and style' (Preminger, Brogan 1304). The reception of Browning's

works in Croatia, outside the humanities academic curricula, was initiated by the poet and translator Luko Paljetak who referred to Browning's Toccata Galuppi in his 1997 book of essays Engleske teme (Paljetak 218-223).

Browning's dramatic monologue evolves into a vibrant and mutable poetic medium whose formal properties are exploited to gradually disclose the protagonists' attitude underscoring the central theme. Their unexpected lapsing into a personalized speech mode provides relevant verbal and nonverbal material for these creations' poetic psychograms. The intractable mysteries of one's self are seeping through the welter of commonalities. With common parlance downtoning a personal horror vacui, Browning also reflects the ways in which the rigours of the collective may shackle individuality; therefore, he frames his dramatic monologues as vehicles of formal as well as notional variation, or the vehicles of expressing non-conformity. The agents of his dramatic narrative compositions wield an outstandingly apodictic, categorical style of argumentation that does not allow for opposition.

The dramatic monologues selected here have been translated by means of the unrhymed narrative verse that captures best the covert spontaneity and undercurrent ambiguity of Browning's dramatic verse. The assumed lightheartedness and nonchalance pervades the respective poems protagonists' dictions. They are cumbered with either conventional (sentimental, romance) motifs turning morbidly askew in Porphyria's Lover, with cloys of sophisticated and quotidian speech modes in a solipsistic macaronic rant of the Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, and with rhetorical distractions veiling the narrator's intentions in My Last Duchess.

The authentic rhyme of the three poems is used as a constituent of poetic meaning in that it creates the illusion of coherence and balance amongst the participants of the narrative stories, up to the point when the assumptions of romance, brotherhood and loyalty prove to have misled the reader/listener. It is such disruptive rhetoric that signifies Browning's dramatis personae.

The dramatic nodes of Browning's lyrics permeate those personal histories carefully delineated and heightened as outbursts of verbal self-fashioning. Locutionary pretension in which the narrative agents tirelessly expand their rosters of merit, which stand out as misnomers for major misdeeds, indicate the penchant of these narrators for excess and transgression. The linguistic rendition would contain a score of unguarded remarks adding new facets to their assertive self-

portrayal, and making Browning's colourful personages loom large through the network of linguistic decoys meant for their passive interlocutors.

The said speech acts lack spiritual or contemplative substance, which only intensifies the dissembling content of the respective protagonists' flow of thought. The reflexive moment may be either deliberately neglected (My Last Duchess), or blinded by a gratification of momentous sensation (as in Porphyria's Lover). The overt abuse of spirituality presented in Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister takes on the form of strong language wedged into the friar's vehement speech-aside.

The self-absorption of Browning's agile narrators is displayed in a tone of cynicism on the part of the author. Their obtrusively persuasive speeches, with strings of digressions retarding the reception of psychologically overwhelming material, anticipate what would be expressed as '...The fury and the mire of human veins...' (Yeats 248). The speakers' cumulation of hackneyed rhetoric and impulsive embracing of verbal patterns that strike the right chord with community is poetically substantiated, and the provision of clichés of misleading impact upon recipients in these three poetic case histories is recognized as Browning's demonstrative authorial act; along these lines, the speakers' occasional slips in the use of mannerisms gain additional poetic significance.

Browning problematizes the rift between conventional parlance indicating the societal symbolic order, and the individual urge for the disclaiming of the collective code. By recollecting the disparity between the spiritual and mundane planes of the Victorian cultural practice, Browning registers the turbulences of the Victorian setting that had established a parallel system of social and aesthetic values. Language as one of the major representational forms of the Victorian social agenda becomes a device for marking the thin line between order and autarchy, proposition and realization; but, the generators of Browning's poetic meaning to complement the protagonists' portfolio are often found outside the lexical constituents of his narrative verse. Thus, the voices of his protagonists reach their authentic suppleness when strained through abrupt syntactic closures of verse sections, parentheses, and repetitions.

Those referentially saturated utterances that make up the lingo of Browning's exuberant verbal manipulators would repeatedly recall the fickleness of the human condition. The diction of the impassioned narrator-perpetrator in Porphyria's Lover, the Duke of Ferrara's peremptory idiom of

the reputed Renaissance patron of art in My Last Duchess, and the invidious Franciscan monk's rampage against brother Lawrence bring home Browning's cognition of the plausibility of personal rhetoric.

These speakers are running amok or losing their verbal control to an extent. They seem to be losing the power of abstracting notions, through a process whereby they are lapsing into irrationality. The distinctive feature of their insurgent behaviour lies with the choice of their verbal instrument (Lacan 49). Browning realizes the power of reason being at stake in these upsurges of destructive emotion, and yet he admits the convergence of the mind and heart in a human. The poet would also dissociate from the generic Victorian poetic persona, offering it a new and demanding frame, with a number of interpretive strategies left to the reader. It would involve the construction of a kind of borderline speech of the psychiatric patients initiated into divulging of their personality.

In his dramatic-lyrical explorations Browning is not resorting to the stylistic apparatus of the two poetic genres in order to accommodate the aesthetic parameters of his times. The mediocre backdrop that his renegade and singular narrators are set against may be regarded as an additional impetus to their deliverance. They present themselves as the type of actants (Hawkes 89) who exert their aplomb to usurp the actantial roles: they find opponents in their own projections instigated by suspicion, jealousy, and envy. Those three dramatic monologues composed as verbose petitionary recollections of the protagonists' malignant undertakings are aimed at reaching agreement on the part of their addressees.

Porphyria's Lover

The renowned dramatic monologue originates from Browning's 1842 collection of verse entitled Bells and Pomegranates. The poem was written in 1836, and got its definitive title in 1863. It is moulded in 60 iambic octosyllables, with a cross-rhyme pattern abab. The text used below has been retrieved from the 1919 Bibliographic record of editor Arthur Quiller-Couch, in The Oxford Book of English Verse: 1250-1900. The narrator's reconstruction of the amorous encounter with beautiful Porphyria, which has gone amiss due to his poisonous thoughts about her ways with the world of men, is mediated in a macabre strain of the eighteenth-century gothic ballad:

1The rain set early in to-night,

The sullen wind was soon awake,

It tore the elm-tops down for spite,

And did its worst to vex the lake:

I listened with heart fit to break.

When glided in Porphyria; straight

She shut the cold out and the storm,

8 And kneeled and made the cheerless grate

Blaze up, and all the cottage warm,

Which done, she rose, and from her form

Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,

And laid her soiled gloves by, untied

Her hat and let the damp hair fall,

And, last, she sat down by my side

And called me. When no voice replied,

16She put my arm about her waist,

And made her smooth white shoulder bare,

And all her yellow hair displaced,

And, stooping, made my cheek, lie there,

And spread, o'er all, her yellow hair,

Murmuring how she loved me – she

Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour,

To set its struggling passion free

24 From pride, and vainer ties dissever,

And give herself to me for ever.

But passion sometimes would prevail,

Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain

A sudden thought of one so pale

For love of her, and all in vain:

So, she was through wind and rain.

Be sure I looked up at her eyes

32Happy and proud; at last I knew

Porphyria worshipped me; surprise

Made my heart swell, and still it grew

While I debated what to do.

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,

Perfectly pure and good: I found

A thing to do, and all her hair

In one long yellow string I wound

40 Three times her little throat around,

And strangled her. No pain felt she;

I am quite sure she felt no pain.

As a shut bud that holds a bee,

I warily oped her lids: again

Laughed the blue eyes without a stain.

And I untightened next the tress

About her neck; her cheek once more

48 Blushed bright beneath my burning kiss:

I propped her head up as before,

Only this time my shoulder bore

Her head, which droops upon it still:

The smiling rosy little head,

So glad it has its utmost will,

That all it scorned at once is fled,

And I, its love, am gained instead!

56Porphyria's love: she guessed not how

Her darling one wish would be heard.

And thus we sit together now,

And all night long we have not stirred,

And yet God has said a word!

The narrator's flow of thought is sustained by deictic words. We may attend the sections ending with a period that convey the most palpable determination of the speaker and a juggernaut of murder being underway. The aggravating energy of the protagonist's cankerous thoughts lies in store for Porphyria, and periods would terminate the stages of his premeditated plan. The poet uses instances of demonstrative punctuation (Lacan: 32) in which commas and semi-colons indicate the moments of procrastination, or retardation of the unavoidable. The exclamation mark of the climatic line 55 and the irrevocable conclusion of the line 57 once again corroborate the execution of the speaker's will. The piece is outlined as a subterfuge, and a remonstrance against Porphyria's behaviour. The mnemonic and metonymical effect of the name Porphyria may be taken for another semantic exploit of Browning's: not only does this name denote the ailment of morbid paleness but it also suggests a person afflicted by the ailment and destined to die. The poetic syntax is dependent upon descriptive nominal elements, merely substantives and attributes

forestalling the action, while dynamic reporting verbs and predicative adjectives (lines 31, 32, 38, 41) account for the steps the narrator intended to have taken in order to put a stamp upon his relationship with Porphyria. The overt indicators of the narrator's vacillation could be located in the asyndeton strings of the catenative and in the lines 12-20, and the explicit avowal of agitation in the line 35 '...While I debated what to do...'. Her violent death is brought about as a tribulation to the pre-given Victorian tenet of female chastity, which disregards the sensual aspect of femininity. This is why Porphyria needs to be sanctioned and objectified, and her golden tresses, the very symbol of female sensuality, must be chosen as the means of her punishment. In the minute display of his atrocity, the narrator re-experiences the sensation over imposing his will on the credulous other. The Victorian patriarchal attitude with its reversal of values is once again highlighted with the narrator's relishing Porphyria's beauty in the ambiance of utmost disquietude.

The mould of my Croatian translation of this poetic narrative episode is intended to substantiate the narrative rhythm of poetic diction ever heightening Browning's speaker's irascibility. The strain of negative emotion and the incantatory call of the speaker's account, originally set off by the cross–rhyme pattern, have been upheld by the forthright rhythm of the unrhymed trochaic pentameter. Through the chosen verse form, the speaker's deposition is unrolling as a sequence of verbal evidence. The strings of parallel verse-sentences set the tone of his report playing on the properties of free indirect style. The style also known as free indirect discourse, which combines the first-person direct speech with the third-person narration, is prominent in the lines 16, 25, and 33. The rhyme of the lines 54-55 has been retained in order to reinforce the horrific outcome of the protagonist's delivery.

Porfirijin ljubavnik

Dramski monolog I.

1Zarana kiša krenu te noći,

Nemio vjetar učas se diže,

Zlurado raskide vrhe brijesta,

I ražesti silno jezero:

Osluškiv'o sam u srcu sav napet,

Kad uroni Porfirija; te

Ostavi za sobom studen i oluju,

8Eto je saže se i potaknu ugasli

Plam, pa koliba utonu u milje,

Tad ustane, sa sebe svuče

Mokri taj plašt i šal,

Odloži zamrljane rukavice, odriješi

Šešir i otpusti mokre vlasi,

Najzad uza me ona sjedne

I dozva imenom. Ne odvrnuh,

16 Pak me obujmi oko struka,

Otkrivši glatkobijelo rame,

A svu si plavu kosu rastrese,

Saginjuć' se, položi mi na nju obraz.

Rasuvši, svud po njem, svoje plave prame,

Zboreć' da voli me silno – preslaba

Da je, uza sve htijenje,

Odriješit svoju burovitu strast

24Zbog ponosa, i pokidat sveze tanke,

Da meni zavijeke se preda.

No strast će kadikad pretegnut,

Pa ni noćašnja slast ne može sputat'

Misao na jednoga poniklog od

Ljubavi za nju, sve to uzaludne:

I tako, prošla je ona vjetre i oluje.

Vjeruj mi da gledo sam je u oči

32Vedre i uznosite; barem sam znao

Da obožava me Porfirija; iznenađenje

Ispuni mi srce, i srce je nabujalo

Dok dovijah što učiniti.

U tom je času bila moja, moja, krasna,

Posve čista i smjerna; uto mi sinu

Nešto, i svu joj kosu

U dugu, plavu omču spletem

40Oko grlašca triput obavijem,

I zadavim. Boli nije osjetila;

Siguran sam da nije osjetila bol.

Kao pupoljak zastrt što pčelu krije,

Oprezno otvorih joj kapke: ponovno

Nasmiješe se jasnoplave oči.

Nato popustih pletenicu

Oko vrata; obraz još jednom

48Briznu svjetlom na moj vreli cjelov;

Podigoh joj glavu u položaj prvi

Samo što ovaj put na moje rame

Njena glava beživotno pada:

Glavica rumena što se smiješi,

Sretna jer ispuni zadnju želju,

Kad sve što preziraše nesta istog trena,

Pa ja ostah mjesto svega ljubav njena!

56Porfirijina ljubav: ni slutila nije kako

Stalo je dragom utažit' vlastitu želju.

Nas dvoje sad skupa sjedimo,

Ni pomakli se cijele noći nismo,

Nakon što Bog je svoju rekao riječ.

The transference of the tenebrous setting of Porphyria's Lover thrives on the lexical register of Croatian oral poetry, particularly on the whole gamut of its archaic past tense frame verb phrases and set epithets (glatkobijele, jasnoplave). The rhythmical unity of the lines has been variedly affected through figures of sound (assonance and alliteration), inversions, elisions (lines 5, 19, 21, 27, 57), and epiphoric closures (lines 41-42).

Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

The dramatic monologue of Browning's inceptive collection of verse Bells and Pomegranates (1839), conceived as a syntactically variegated and rhythmically jagged dispatch of the Franciscan monk begrudging against his brother inmate Lawrence, set in trochaic tetrameters, with the rhyme scheme ababcdcd. The narrator's macaronic, malediction-filled report is delivered in its entirety as a gushing speech-aside. We are dealing with the narrator's subsidiary lingo that keeps going off at a tangent in devotional matters; moreover, it slips into a series of baleful abuses of diverse concepts of spirituality. The poetic syntax revolves round rhetorical questions, enjambments,

ellipses, parentheses, and frequent uses of exclamatory and onomatopoeic expressions that would substantiate the scope of the protagonist's personal resentment.

I

Gr-rr-there go, my heart's abhorrence!

Water your damned flower-pots, do!

If hate killed men, Brother Lawrence,

God's blood, would not mine kill you!

What? Your myrtle-bush wants trimming?

Oh, that rose has prior claims –

Needs its leaden vase filled brimming?

Hell dry you up with its flames!

II

At the meal we sit together:

Salve tibi! I must hear

Wise talk of the kind of weather,

Sort of season, time of year:

Not a palnteous cork-crop: scarcely

Dare we hope oak-galls, I doubt:

What's the Latin name for parsley?

What's the Greek name for Swine's Snout?

III

Whew! We'll have our platter burnished,

Laid with care on our own shelf!

With a fire-new spoon we're furnished,

And a goblet for ourself

Rinsed like something sacrificial

Ere ‘tis fit to touch ourchaps –

Marked with L for our initial!

(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores

Squats outside the Convent bank

With Sancicha, telling stories,

Steeping tresses in the tank,

Blue-back, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,

– Can’t I see his dead eye glow,

Bright as ‘twere a Barbary corsair’s?

(That is, if he’d let it show!)

V

When he finishes refection,

Knife and fork he never lays

Cross-wise, to my recollection,

As I do, in Jesu’s praise.

I the Trinity illustrate,

Drinking watered orange-pulp –

In three sips the Arian[1] frustrate;

While he drains his at one gulp.

VI

Oh, those melons? If he's able

We're to have a feast! So nice!

One goes to the Abbot's table,

All of us get each a slice.

How go on your flowers? None double?

Not one fruit-sort can you spy?

Strange! – And I, too, at such trouble,

Keep them close-nipped on the sly!

VII

There's a great text in Galatians,

Once you trip on it, entails

Twenty-nine distinct damnations, one sure, if another fails:

If I trip him just a-dying, sure of heaven as sure can be,

Spin him round and send him flying

Off to hell, a Manichee?

VIII

Oh my scrofulous French novel

On grey paper with blunt type!

Simply glance at it, you grovel

Hand and foot in Belial's gripe.

If I double down the pages

At the woeful sixteenth print,

When he gathers his greengages,

Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

IX

Or, there's Satan! – once might venture

Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave

Such a flaw in the indenture

As he'd miss till, past retrieve,

Blasted lay that rose-acacia

We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine...

'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia

Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r – you swine!

Solilokvij iz klaustra španjolskoga samostana

Dramski monolog 2.

I.

Grrr, eno ga, moga srca jad!

Napoji vražje svoje biljke, daj!

Da mržnja ljude ubija, brate Lovro,

Krvi mi Božje, moja bi te satr'la!

Što? Da mirte grm treba skresat'?

No, ružu ćeš prvo obaći –

Mora li se olovna žara prepunit'?

Nek' te pak'o sažeže ognjem svojim.

II.

Za objedom mi sjedimo skupa:

Salve tibi! Moram ga slušat'

Mudroslovit o vremenu,

Dobu i dijelu godine:

Nikad o plodovima hrasta: rjeđe

Još o hrastovu šišarcu, čini se:

Koja je latinska riječ za peršun?

A grčki naziv za maslačak?

III.

Fuj! Uglačat ćemo tanjure,

Položene pomno na vlastitu policu!

Opremljeni posve novim žlicama,

I kupicom svaki za se,

Ispranom s takvim posvećenjem

Da bi dostojna bila tih usta –

Na njoj početno je L naših imena!

(Ha, ha! Tu je njeg'va zijevalica!)

IV.

Svetac, doista! Dok časna Dolores

Čuči na obali kraj samostana

Sa Sancichom, i razgovara se,

Raspleće pletenice nad perilom,

Plavocrne, sjajne, čvrste k'o griva,

– Vidim li to usahlo oko da zasjaji,

Sjajem kakav je u oku gusara.

(Pa da ga još otkrije posvema!)

V.

Kada dovrši on objed,

Vilicu i nož nikad taj ne složi

U križ, koliko znadem,

Kao što ja činim, sve u slavu Isusovu.

Ja tako častim Trojstvo,

Pijuć s vodom narančin sok –

U tri guca što ih arijanac otklanja;

Dok će on nadušak iskapit' svoj.

VI.

A gle ove dinje? Ako je za što

Pogostit' ćemo se! Krasno!

Jedna ide za Opatov stol,

Svaki će od nas dobit' po krišku.

Kako vaše cvijeće? Nema dupla cvata?

Zar baš svaku voćku znate?

Čudno! – Jer ja vam u prigodi,

Podrežem koju kriomice!

VII.

Ima onaj sjajan tekst u Galaćanima

Kad ga primiš, nadođe

Redom dvadesetdevet prokletstava,

Propustiš li jedan, drugi pretiče:

Ak' ga dočekam umirati,

Sigurna da naravski u nebo će uzaći,

Zavitlat ću š njime i poslati

Pravo do pakla, toga manihejca!

VIII.

Onaj moj razbludni roman

Na sivu papiru otisnut crnim pismenim!

Baci pogled na nj, dok puziš

Spodobo sva u vlasti Beliala:

Ako evo označim ga

Na opakoj stranici šesnaestoj,

Kad skupiš svoje renklode

Da otvoriš sito i ubaciš si štivo?

IX.

Eno ga, Sotona! – mog'o bi tkogod pokušat'

Prodat ' mu dušu, i učinit' takav

Jedan golem propust

A on bi svoje posle nastavio

Dok mu snijet ne potre bagrem

Kojim se tol'ko dičimo! Haj, Zaj, hajn

Šš̌š, evo nam ide večernja! Plena gratia

Ave, Virgo! Grrr – tebi, svinjo!

Procuring the stanzaic arrangement to his Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, Browning exploits this semantically significant formal tool to characterize the protagonist who is apparently adhering to the convent's disciplinary regimen of prayer and labour.

The speaker's multi-register idiolect (ranging from Latinate digressions on divinity to the specifics of brother Lawrence's favourite distraction of botany) has been transposed in its informal, secular, off-hand design and with the help of Croatian substandard and dialectal lexemes (vražji; skresat; razgovara se; guca; naravski; spodoba;) and phrases (krvi mi Božje, š njime;).

To a Croatian reader, the multilingual frame and ambiance of Browning's poem would evoke the works of Croatian Renaissance comediographer Marin Držić who employed the macaronic idiom to delineate his characters' falsities.

My Last Duchess

This prominent poetic narrative piece of 28 heroic couplets belongs to Robert Browning's book of verse Dramatic Lyrics (1842). Its characters and historic references are evocative of the reputedly troublesome relationship of Alphonso II D'Este, the fifth Duke of Ferrara and his young wife Lucrezia di Cosimo Medici, said to have been poisoned at the age of 17.

Browning's Duke pursues a narrative strategy which monopolizes the roles of the mediator and focalizer of the event. His speech act is outlined as an attempt at appropriating the interlocutor's (Count's envoy) right to reflect and judge from what has been related to him. The Duke's gripping decorous discourse is supported by non-verbal devices such as pauses and stammerings, instances of accelerated, staccato rhythm which are erupting in a torrent of non-assertive and imperative phrases signifying the husband's discontent with his pliable spouse's deportment. The executive power of the word is made manifest in the lines 46-47. The descriptive angle of the

introductory passage (up to line 24) is dramatically reversed with the Duke's jealousy being fuelled on the spur of the moment.

My Last Duchess

Ferrara

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,

Looking as if she were alive, I call

That piece a wonder, now: Fra Pandolf's hands

Worked busily a day, and there she stands.

Will't please you sit and look at her? I said

'Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read

Strangers like you that pictured countenance,

The depth and passion of its earnest glance,

But to myself they turned (since none puts by

10The curtain I have drawn for you, but I)

And seemed as they would ask me, if they durst,

How such a glance came there; so, not the first

Are you to turn and ask thus. Sir, 'twas not

Her husband's presence only, called that spot

Of joy into the Duchess cheek: perhaps

Fra Pandolf chanced to say, 'Her mantle laps

Over my lady's wrist too much,' or'Paint

Must never hope to reproduce the faint

Half-flush that dies along her throat:' such stuff

Was courtesy, she thought, and cause enough

For calling up that spot of joy. She had

A heart – how shall I say? – too soon made glad,

Too easily impressed; she liked what'er

She looked on, and her looks went everywhere.

Sir, 'twas all one! My favout at her breast,

The dropping of the daylight in the West,

The bough of cherries some officious fool

Broke in the orchard for her, the white mule

She rode with round the terrace – all and each

Would draw from her alike the approving speech,

Or blush, at least. She thanked men – good! But thanked

Somehow – I know not how – as if she ranked

My gift of a nine-hundred-years-old name

With anybody's gift. Who's stoop to blame

This sort of trifling? Even had you skill

In speech – (which I have not) – to make your will

Quite clear to such an one, and say, 'Just this

Or that in you disgusts me; here you miss,

Or there exceed the mark' – and if she let

Herself be lessoned so, nor plainly set

Her wits to yours, forsooth, and make excuse,

– e'en then would be some stooping; and I choose

Never to stoop. Oh sir, she smiled, no doubt,

Whene'er I passed her; but who passed without

Much the same smile? This grew; I gave commands;

Then all smiles stopped together. There she stands

As if alive. Will't please you rise? We'll meet

The company below, then. I repeat,

The Count your master's known munificence

50Is ample warrant that no just pretence

Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;

Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed

At starting, is my object. Nay, we'll go

Together down, sir. Notice Neptune, though,

Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,

Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!

Moja posljednja vojvotkinja

Dramski monolog 3.

Ferrara

Tu visi portret pokojne vojvotkinje moje,

Izgleda kao da je živa. Za mene

Je slika pravo čudo, doista. Fra Pandolfo

Slikaše vrijedno, evo je ako vas zanima.

Hoćete li molim sjest' i baciť pogled? Rekoh

Djelo je Fra Pandolfa, a nikad dosad

Strancu poput vas ne bje predočen taj lik,

Dubina i strast ozbiljna joj izraza,

Nego se meni obraćala (jer jedino ja

Znam što skriva zavjesa koju povukoh za vas)

I svi bi me pitali, da usude se samo

Otkud joj taj pogled; niste, dakle, prvi

Koji me slično pita. Gospodine, nije

To zbog supruga svoga rumen radosti

Prevukao Vojvotkinjin obraz: moguće

Je fra Pandolfo lanuo 'Gospođin plašt

Prekrio je posve zglavak,' ili 'Boja

Nikad neće prenijet' nježnog

Crvenila brizgaj niza grlo: riječi li

Ljubeznih, pomisli ona, dovoljno da

Učas probudi joj dragost. Bila je

Srca – kako da vam velim? – lakopobudljivoga,

Umah polaskana; zavoljela bi istom što god

Oko joj opazi, i svud je okom zvjerala.

Gospodine, sve bi odjednom! Oko mi svrnu na prsa,

Dan zamicaše tamo na zapadu,

Grana trešnje koju neka preuzetna luda

Otkinu u voćnjaku za nju, bijela mazga

Na kojoj je jašila terasom – sve i svatko

Od nje bi dočekao hvale,

Ili barem obraza rumen. Zahvaljivat' gospodi – neka! no hvalom

Nekako – što ja znam – kao da je ništila

Moje baštinsko slavno devetstostoljetno ime

Svačijim imenom. Tko će uopće podnijet'

Takva uniženja? Pa kad bi i vještim

Govorom – (kojem nisam vičan) – iskaz'o volju

Posve jasno riječima: 'To

I to u tebe ne podnosim; ovo ti je propust,

A ondje pretjera' – pa da hoće primit'

Takvu pouku, a prigušit

Svoju ćud spram vas, doista, te se ispričat',

– Uniženja opet nestalo ne bi; odlučih stoga

Da unizivat' se više dati neću. Gospodine, smiješila se

Kad god bi prošla kraj mene; no je li i druge

Darivala istim smiješkom? Nadošlo je svega, pa naredbu izdah;

I dokinu se posve njeni smiješci. Eno je

Čini se živa. Hoćete li ustat', molim? Pridružimo

Se dolje društvu, nadalje, ponavljam

Bogatstvo vašega gospodara grofa

Dostatno jamči da razumni moj zahtjev za

Mirazom neće se otklonit';

Premda do grofove lijepe kćeri, kao što rekoh

Na početku, vrlo mi je stalo. Ne, sići

Ćemo skupa, gospodine. Pogledajte Neptuna

Koji kroti morskoga konjica, kakva rijetkost,

Klaus Innsbruški salio ga je u bronci za me.

The design of the microstructures of Browning's verse brings forth the interdependence of verbal and nonverbal constituents of meaning. I endeavoured to bring this across and recreate a sweeping narrative onset most notably supported by run-on lines. The flexible Croatian syntax proved resourceful in capturing the nature of Browning's verse sentence.

On no occasion is verbal communication of the characters in My Last Duchess affected as a discursive exchange between two equal interlocutors. The solipsistic and exclusive position of the protagonist suffuses narration. Browning's presentation of the speaker growing oblivious of other agents while communicating his thoughts infuses the lines with semantic contingencies.

The ideational or symbolic layer of Browning's dramatic monologues is always closely related to the world of art. And yet, the references to Fra Pandolf's mastery at the service of the Duke, the connoisseur of art and sensitive aesthete, are being counterpointed with his sheer pragmatism. Susceptibility to beauty is another declarative hoax of the feigning Duke.

Implementing structuralist terms, Browning preposterous heroes, or verbal distractors, relish their solitary and self-appointed status of the masters of ceremony: they are empowered to initiate a change of the semantic field (Lotman 320-321), and capable of switching from contemplation to action. They do infringe upon the semantic field of their interlocutors who are assigned the roles of protagonists' subjects.

Browning's dramatic monologue structure validates the poet's endeavour to warn against a depreciation of meaning in linguistic performance. He is continuously dispelling the hackneyed language that his proponents are using as a personal safeguard.

The phatic linguistic function (Jakobson 293) is accentuated by the narrator's effort to perpetuate the askew, one-dimensional rhetorical rendition, or to check out the existent contact. All the factors of communication have been recognized, but never fully activated. The counterpointing of the referential, emotive, conative and phatic functions of Browning's dramatic pieces articulates the poetic, iconic function of his diction. The dialogic setting is giving way to the speakers' objectification of their anatagonists, real or intended (the breath-taking Porphyria, industrious and inquisitive brother Lawrence; the light-hearted and docile Duchess).

Opting for the unrhymed pentameter mode in translating the three monologues into Croatian, I tried to locate those discursive devices of Browning's narrative vein that most amply foster its semantic ambiguity. These literary translations have been aimed at situating Browning's dramatic monologue as a poetically contingent cross-genre, a transitory medium between poetry and prose. Browningesque discourse has been viewed in the light of its prescient formal and lexical uncouthness, creatively interpreted in congruent poetic explorations of T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and W.H. Auden.

The design of Browning's dramatic narrative outcomes recalls the musical form of a rondo developing a principal theme (refrain), and setting it off by several contrasting themes called episodes, or digressions. The insatiable verbal manouvres of the said narrators take on the pattern of a rondo, except that they leave less room for variation.

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[1] An Arian, a follower of Arius (AD 250-336), a priest in Alexandria, who denied the divinity of Christ. The narrator affirms Christ's divinity by taking three sips that symbolize the Trinity.



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