

DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE IN ROBERT BROWNING'S POEM "ANDREA DEL SARTO"

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ABSTRACT

Robert Browning and the form of poetry known as "dramatic monologue" inevitably go together. It is already made known that dramatic monologue is essentially a narrative spoken by a single character. We are to imagine that it is being listened to but never answered; it is a dialogue of which we are to hear only one side. It gains added effect and dimensions through the character's comments on his own story and the circumstances in which he speaks. It is through the single character's speech that Browning presents the plot, characters and scenes. It is through the words of Andrea that the reader can feel the presence of the plot, characters and scenes. This article tries to describe how Robert Browning handles his three objects in writing dramatic monologue through his poem entitled Andrea Del Sarto.

Keyword

Dramatic monologue, poem, objective poetry.

INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning and the form of poetry called "dramatic monologue" inevitably go together. The dramatic monologue is essentially a narrative spoken by a single character. It gains added effects and dimensions through the character's comments on his own story and circumstances in which he speaks (Sen: 2000). M.H Abrams (2002) remarks that the dramatic monologue has the following characteristics: first, a single person, who is not the poet himself, utters the entire poem in a specific situation at a critical moment. Second, this person addresses and interacts with one or more other people; but we know of the auditors' presence and what they say and do only

from clues in the discourse of a single speaker. Third, the monologue is so organized that its focus is on the temperament and the character that the dramatic speaker unintentionally reveals in the course of what he says.

In the dramatic monologue the reader can infer or judge the intelligence and honesty of the narrator and assess the value of views expressed. The form also gives the poet the opportunity to be technically impersonal like a dramatist. However, the salient features of the dramatic monologue can be understood better if we compare the dramatic monologue with soliloquy. Since the dramatic monologue is a narrative spoken by a single person; the form seems to have affinity with the soliloquy, man talking to himself or private debate. However, we should not forget that the root meaning of the term “monologue” is a single man’s conversation. Of course, that may sound slightly paradoxical because conversation by its very nature means a talk between two persons. The paradox is resolved when we realized that in the dramatic monologue, though the active speech is ascribed to a single person, the presence and the reactions of other person are conveyed naturally in the course of the single man’s talk. The listener does not actively interrupt the current of speech. Thus, the dramatic monologue, unlike the soliloquy, implies the presence of some other character or characters, listening and reacting. In a soliloquy, the speaker delivers his own thoughts, uninterrupted by the objections or the propositions of other persons. In a dramatic monologue; however, the reactions of the listener, or other persons, are woven into a speaker’s word.

Andrea del Sarto is one of the greatest dramatic monologues of Browning. The poem presents a slice from the life of a great painter named Andrea del Sarto. The painter is shown in a reflective mood, and as he muses over his failure in art, his very soul is laid bare before the readers. His

thoughts range over the past and the present, and in this way the complete tragedy of a soul is revealed.

1. The Poet's Biography

Browning was born in Camberwell, a suburb of London, England, the first son Robert and Sarah Anna Browning. His father was a man of both fine intellect and character who worked as a well-paid clerk for the bank of England. Browning's paternal grandfather was a wealthy slave owner in St Kitts, west Indies, but Browning's father was an abolitionist. Browning's father had been sent to the west Indies to work on a sugar plantation. Revolted by the slavery there, he soon returned to England. Browning's mother was a musician. He had one sister, Sarianna. It is rumored that Browning's grandmother, Margaret Tittle, was a Jamaican-born mulatto who had inherited a plantation in St Kitts.

Browning was a fast learner, and by the age of fourteen he was fluent in French, Italian and Latin as well as his native English. He became a great admirer of the romantic poets, especially Shelley. Following the precedent of Shelley, Browning became an atheist and vegetarian, both of which he gave up later. At the age of sixteen, he attended University College London but left after his first year. His mother's staunch evangelical faith prevented his studying at either Oxford University or Cambridge University; both then open only to members of the Church of England. He had substantial musical ability and composed arrangements of various songs. In 1845, Browning met Elizabeth Barrett, who lived as a semi-invalid and virtual prisoner in her father's house in Wimpole Street. Gradually a significant romance developed between them, leading to their secret marriage and flight on September 12, 1846. (The marriage was initially secret because Elizabeth's father disapproved of

marriage for any of his children). From the time of their marriage, they lived in Italy, first in Pisa, and then, within a year, finding an apartment in Florence at Casa Guidi (now a museum to their memory). Their only child, Wiedeman Barret Browning, nick name “Penini” or “Pen”, was born in 1849. In these years Browning was fascinated by and learned hugely from the art and atmosphere of Italy. He would, in later life, say that ‘Italy was my university’. Browning was also bought a home in Asolo, in the Veneto outside Venice, and in a cruel irony he died on the day that the Town Council approved the purchase.

His wife died in 1861 and he died in 12 December 1889 at his son’s home Ca’ Rezzonico in Venice, the same day as *Asolando* was published, and was buried in Poets’ corner in Westminster Abbey. His grave now lies immediately adjacent to that of Alfred Tennyson.

2. Summary of the Poem

This poem represents yet another of Brownings’ dramatic monologue spoken in the voice of historical Renaissance painter. Andrea Del Sarto, like Fra Lippo Lippi, lived and worked in Florence, albeit a little later than Lippo, and was later appointed court painter by Francis, the King of France.

Under the nagging influence of his wife Lucrezia, to whom he speaks in this poem, he left the French court for Italy but promises to return; he took with him some money that Francis has given him to purchase Italian artwork for the court, and also the money advance to him for his own commissioned paintings. However, he spent all of his money on a house of himself and his wife in Italy and never returned to France. This poem finds Andrea in the house he has bought with the stolen money, as he thinks back on his career and laments that his worldly concerns have kept him from fulfilling his

promoise as an artist. As he and Lucrezia sit at their window, he talks to her at his relative successes and failures: although Michelangelo (here, Michel agnolo) and raphael (Rafael) enjoyed higher inspiration and better petronage- and lacked nagging wives-he is the better craftsman, and he points outto her the problems with the Great Masters' work. But while Andrea succeeds technically where they do not (thus his title "the faulltless painter"), their work ultimately triumphs for its emotional and spiritual power.

Andrea now finds himself in the twilight of his career and his marriage: Lucrezia's Cousin- probably her lover-keeps whistling for her to come; she apparently either owes the man gambling debts or has promised to cover his own. The fond weary Andrea gives her some money, promises to sell paintings to pay off her debts, and sends her away to her "cousin' while he remains to sit quietly and dream of painting in heaven.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ROBERT BROWNING'S POETRY

1. Representing his character in moments of tense drama

Browning is passionately interested in all form of human nature. He is eager to know exactly how men and woman think and feel, therefore his chief work is in spiritual portraiture. Browning represents them usually in moments of tense drama, and does not forget their physical presence. He had the zest of the novelist for every kind of detail, and to his strong, wholesome good sense nothing comes amiss in the way of vice or madness or abnormality. Whatever is or has been human is his province, and he has the gusto of an antiquary in digging into the dust of the past.

2. dealing with the imaginary ones and historical persons

He manage to allow many of his imagined person to be pretty much themselves. In writing andrea Del sarto, the poet was more than usually faithful to his sources, and the result is a triumphant portrait of the painter. Andrea says what the reader is convince he would say. But, unfortunately he says more. He accepts the doctrine of compensation: if things do not go well in this world, thing will be proportionately better in the next.

3. Not possessing the objectivity of a dramatist

Browning cannot throw large and varied groups of people together. In all the words which his characters utter we seem to hear the ring of Browning's own voice. He is less a dramatic than an exhibitor, an interpreter of single dramatic situations. In presenting these single situations, Browning's power is absolute; here he works with the most graphic vividness, and with the compression of meaning which crowds into a few lines the implication of life-time.

4. Using pure dramas, dramatic narrative, and dramatic lyric

In three form – pure drama, dramatic narrative, and dramatic lyric – he gave the history of hundreds of souls; or, if not their whole history, at least some crucial moment of it, when its issues trembled in the balance and dipped toward good or evil. In his earlier life, he made many attempts to present these crucial moment in dramas intended for the stage, but but the form was not perfectly suited to his peculiar cast.

5. Clergy, as a rule, not drawn from the loftiest type

The bishop ordering his tomb makes the monk in the Spanish cloister shows the weak points of “enclosed orders”. It is in The Ring and

the book, in the character of caponsacchi, the soldier-priest who tries in vain to save pompilia that he shows the noblest type of christisn service.

6. Presenting a large number of memorable character

It has been suggested that, in his power over character, Browning is second only to shakespeare. Browning has presented something over eighty memorable characters, of which about thirty are women. These numbers include not only principals but figures like Gigadibs and Elvire.

7. The Use of Dramatic Monologue Depicted in the Poem

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8. To Present the Plot

Plot may be defined as a story itself with all the procedures. It deals with the organization of certain events, situations and episodes in a narrative or play. In the poem, Browning skillfully makes use dramatic monologue to present the plot. This poem opens at a section from Andrea’s life in which Andrea reveals his own basic weakness. He begs his wife to sit by him for an evening and bribes her for it.

Sit down and all shall happens as tou wish
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
I’ll work then for your friend’s friend , never fear
Fix his own time, accept too his own price
And shut the money into this small hand,

(Lines: 3-8)

From the lines quoted above, it can be seen that Andrea promises to paint for her “friend” the next day, but her company would inspire him to paint better so that he can earn more, and give her more money to hand it over to her “friend” that he might discharge his debts. Whatever money he gets, he will shut it in her small hand, i.e. he will give the money to her and she may spend it in the way she likes. The lover is under debts.

9. To Present the Character

Character is a person or a figure, man and woman, in whose life events and incidents take place. Without character, action cannot proceed, remain unimportant, be rather meaningless. In *Andrea del Sarto*, Browning makes use the dramatic monologue to show andrea as the speaker. It is through the words of Andrea that the reader can feel the presence of the listener and other character in the poem. The presence of Lucrezia as the listener in the poem can be felt at the opening of the poem.

But do not let us quarrel any more
No, my Lucrezia ; bear with me foe once :
“Sit down and all shall happen as you wish
You turn your face, but does it bring your heart?
(Lines: 1-4)

From the lines quoted above, it can be seen that Andrea, the speaker, addresses his speech to someone named Lucrezia, who become the listener in the poem. From the first line of the poem: “but do not let us quarrel anymore”, the reader can see that Andrea has been quarreling with his wife named Lucrezia, and Andrea asks her to be patient with him and do not

quarrel anymore. He will do as she wishes if she is ready to sit down beside him for a while. From the line: “you turn your face, but does it bring your heart?”, it can also be inferred that Lucrezia responds Andrea’s request by turning her face to him. It means that the monologue is clearly seen in the poem.

10. To Present the Scene

Scene is the structure on which a spectacle or play is exhibited; the part of the theatre in which the acting is done, with its adjunct and decorations; the stage.

From the words of Andrea, the reader can see that the scene is in Andrea’s studio in Fiesole in which Andrea asks his wife named Lucrezia to sit by the window in other that they can enjoy the scenery of Fiesole from their window.

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,
(Lines: 13-17)

From the lines quoted above, it can be seen that Andrea request his wife Lucrezia to sit by the window in his studio in Fiesole, holding with her hand in his. He would like to spend half an hour or so looking out on the town of Fiesole in the company of his wife. Fiesole is the name of a small but famous city of Italy. It is situated on the top of hill, about three miles to the west of Florence.

CONCLUSION

The poet has three objects in writing the dramatic monologue in this poem, i.e. they are to present plot, character and scene in the speech of single character. We are to imagine it is being listened to but never answered; it is a dialogue of which we are to hear only one side. The scene in which the story takes place is mainly in Andrea's studio. It is in an autumn evening in Fiesole, Italy, in King Francis's palace, the scene moves to Fontainebleau, in France.

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