




Poetry
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Lecture 41
Robert Browning

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Robert Browning (1812-1889)

- Historical and Literary Context
- Robert Browning
- *Andrea del Sarto* (1855)
- Andrea, Leonardo and Raphael
- Sources and Influences
- Themes and Techniques
- Art Register
- Voices in *Andrea del Sarto*
- *Andrea del Sarto* as a Dramatic Monologue




Hello, now let us see Robert Browning, the greatest master of Dramatic Monologue. Let us see the historical and literary context first and then some information about the life of Robert Browning. And the poem that we have chosen for this course is, *Andrea del Sarto* published in 1855. We will also see the background to this poem in the case of Andrea, Leonardo and Raphael; these were painters and the sources and influences on Robert Browning for writing this poetry. We will discuss some of the themes and techniques that Browning has used in this poem.


We also, we will see one specific case of art register that is, many words Browning has used from art, so we call them art register. We will look into the voices that is, female or male voices in *Andrea del Sarto*. And finally consider this poem as a dramatic monologue.

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Historical Context



- King George IV (1820-1830), William IV (1830-1837)
- Queen Victoria (1837-1901)
- Reform Bills; Factory Acts; Famines; Rights; Wars
- Victorian double standards
- Continuing influence of Romantic poets
- Emergence of Elizabeth Barrett, Tennyson and Browning
- Serious examination of the Victorian society by novelists and prose writers
- Scrutiny of social and psychological conditions of human beings from multiple angles



The historical context goes like this. There were 3 rulers actually King George the IV, William the IV and Queen Victoria. Of course, the longest reigning monarch of this period is Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901. During this period many reform bills were passed relating to factory acts, famines, rights and also there were many wars fought during this period.



‘Victorian double standards’ is a concept that is, normally related to this period. We have to understand how people were behaving personally in one way and publicly in another way. We notice the continuing influence of Romantic poets on Victorian poets, especially Tennyson and Browning. We find at this time the rise of Elizabeth Barrett that is before her marriage to Robert Browning, Elizabeth Barrett Browning was herself a poet on her own right. And then we have Tennyson and lastly, we have Browning. Of course, there are many other poets of this period.

We will look into the serious examination of the Victorian society by novelists and prose writers. As far as this poem is concerned, the character analysis, the psychological probing of Andrea del Sarto is related to how novelists and prose writers analysed people and society at this time. There was also a scrutiny of social and psychological conditions of human beings from multiple angles. Several points of views are presented in novels and also in poems as we can see in Andrea del Sarto.

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Literary Context

- Poetry was popular with the Victorians.
- But, the novel emerged as a dominant art form.
- Drama did not receive much patronage.
- Browning failed in theater but succeeded in dramatic poetry with a strong narrative element.
- The influence of Wordsworth and Shelley continued in Tennyson and Browning, respectively.
- Browning explored different characters from several points of view suggesting multiplicity of 'truths.'
- Poetry and the novel reflected on the Victorian values and compromises.
- Exploratory art forms starting from the Pre-Raphaelite poets moved toward aestheticism and decadence.



The literary context is this. Poetry was very popular with the Victorians. However, the novel emerged as a dominant art form of this time. Drama did not receive much patronage from the people of Victorian period. In fact, Browning started as a dramatist, he failed in theatre and then later, succeeded in dramatic poetry with a strong narrative element. The influence of Wordsworth and Shelly continued in Tennyson and Browning respectively. Browning explored different characters from various points of view suggesting multiplicity of truths.

So, this idea of explaining truth or understanding truth from multiple angles is very common during this time and that is much more in the twentieth century. Poetry and the novel reflected on the Victorian values and also the compromises that the society made at this time. We have many exploratory art forms starting from the Pre-Raphaelite poets moving to aestheticism and decadence finally at the end of nineteenth century.

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Robert Browning (1812-1889)

- Son of a failed poet and a successful banker
- Educated at home with a library of 6000 volumes
- Experimented with narrative, dramatic, and lyrical forms
- Perfected the dramatic monologue form
- Explored deviant characters psychologically
- Married Barrett in 1846; RB & EB, a poetry couple
- Influenced the Pre-Raphaelite poets and painters
- Shaped the modernist dramatic monologues of Pound, Eliot, Frost, and others
- Faulted for obscurity but recognized as a great poet
- Famous for "The Pied Piper of Hamelin," "My Last Duchess," "Pippa Passes," etc.



It was in this historical and literary context, Robert Browning lived and wrote his poems. He was a son of a failed poet actually and his father was a successful banker. So, Robert Browning had his education at home with a library of 6000 volumes. Browning experimented with narrative, dramatic and lyrical forms and then perfected the art form known as 'dramatic monologue.' He explored deviant abnormal characters psychologically in depth in his poems.

He married Elizabeth Barrett in 1846 and these two poets became a poet couple or a poetry couple. Robert Browning influenced Pre-Raphaelites, that is poets and painters who came after him. He shaped the modernist dramatic monologues of Pound, Eliot, Frost and many other writers who came in the twentieth century.

In his own time, he was faulted for his obscurity but then, recognized as a great poet in his own right. Browning is famous for many of his dramatic monologue. Here we have some poems like, 'The Pied Piper of Hamelin,' 'My Last Duchess,' 'Pippa Passes.' Pippa Passes is the poem in which he has outlined his philosophy, 'god is in heaven, all is right with the world.'

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*Andrea del Sarto,
called the Faultless Painter (1855)*

Based on the life of Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530)
A typical dramatic monologue
267 lines, Blank verse
Three verse paragraphs

Section I: 1-243
➤ Andrea's quarrel with Lucrezia

Section II: 244-266
➤ Andrea's neglect of his family, duty, and his apocalyptic vision

Section III: 267
➤ Andrea's ironical adieu to Lucrezia
"Again the Cousin's whistle! Go, my Love."



Now let us move on to this chosen poem, 'Andrea del Sarto' subtitled called 'The Faultless Painter.' This poem is based on the life of Andrea del Sarto who lived from 1486 to 1530. This poem is a typical dramatic monologue of Robert Browning. It has 267 lines and written in Blank verse. There are 3 verse paragraphs. Section 1 starts from 1 and ends in 243 line. And then Section 2 begins in line number 244 and ends in 266. And the last section has only one line distinguished from the rest of the poem to indicate some speciality about Andrea and also his love Lucrezia.

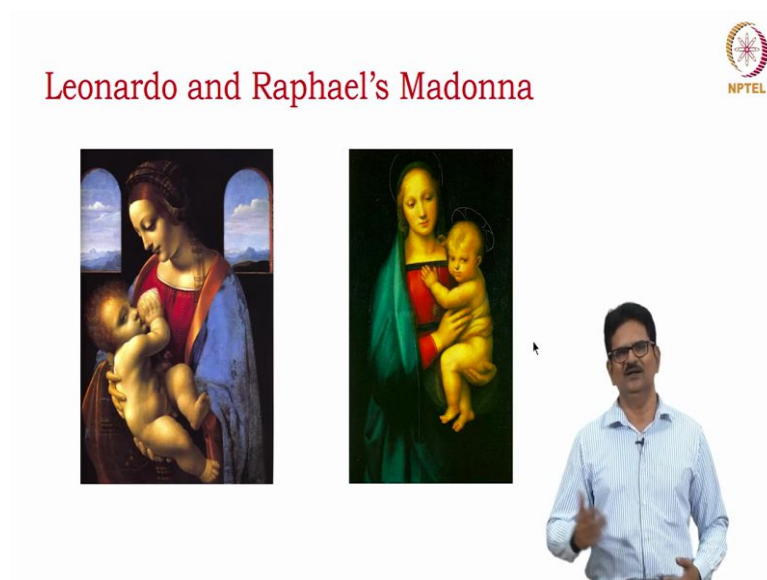
Section 1 deals with Andrea's quarrel with his own wife, Lucrezia. And Section 2 deals with Andrea's neglect of his family duty and his apocalyptic vision. And lastly, we find Andrea giving ironical bidding adieu to Lucrezia.

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Here we have the pictures of Andrea and also Madonna who was modelled on his own wife, Lucrezia. The pictures are beautiful and we will see some more pictures now.

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Here is a Madonna by Leonardo and another Madonna by Raphael. These are well-known, world famous pictures or paintings.

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Andrea del Sarto:
Sources (MacEachen, 1970)

- Two major sources:
 - Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Painters*
 - Filippo Baldinucci's *Notes*
- Alfred de Musset **added Lucrezia's lover** in his play *Andrea del Sarto* (1833)
- **Vasari** – a student of Andrea, a contemporary painter and a biographer of Andrea
- Andrea was a diffident artist, but a great painter.
- Browning **misrepresented** Andrea as a less than great painter and **Lucrezia as an adulteress** to illustrate his poetic credo that "a man should pass his life in a state of divine frustration" (63).





Robert Browning collected his sources from various writings. MacEachen, a critic has identified them here. Giorgio Vasari's 'Lives of the Painters,' first one. Second one, Filippo Baldinucci's 'Notes.' And the third one is, Alfred de Musset's a play called 'Andrea del Sarto' written in 1833. The first one is a major source for Browning, that is Giorgio Vasari's Lives of the Painters. Because Vasari was a student of Andrea, a contemporary painter and also a biographer of Andrea. From these sources we find that Andrea was a diffident artist but he was a great painter.

Browning misrepresented Andrea, as a less than great painter and Lucrezia as an adulteress to illustrate his poetic credo that "a man should pass his life in a state of divine frustration." So, we find some addition of detail in Browning. We also notice such addition of detail in Alfred de Musset, that is a character has been added in the play and that is also reflected in Browning's poem.

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Influence of Shakespeare & Donne

- **Shakespeare's influence:** *Lear, Macbeth, Othello*
- Psychological and spiritual investigation of character/ soul
- (Plot, Character, Thought, Diction, Melody & Spectacle)
- Self-analysis of cause and effect – self-recognition
- **Donne's influence** in conversational tone and dramatic interaction and interrogation too
- Readers are invited into the minds of both speaker and listener and given a chance to enter their own selves.



Further we notice the influence of Shakespeare and Donne in Browning. Shakespeare's influence can be seen from plays like *Lear* that is *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*. And these plays have the impact on the psychological and spiritual investigation of character or soul in Browning's poem. These are the six aspects of drama plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle. These have been inherited by Browning and adapted into his poems.


In Browning's poem, we find self-analysis of cause and effect. That means, there is a clear focus on self-recognition and after self-examination. Further, we find Donne's influence in terms of this conversational tone and dramatic interaction. And also, interrogation; questions are raised by Browning through his characters. Readers are also invited into the minds of both the speaker and the listener and given a chance to enter their own selves, that is where, we have more involvement in a dramatic monologue by Robert Browning.

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Themes



- **The Artist:** God and Man; major artist and minor artist
- **Philosophy and Religion:** One and Many;
Free will and Destiny
- **Man:** Body and Soul
- **Family:** Husband and wife
- **Purpose:** Art and Morality
- **Identity:** Gendered construction of the Self and the Other
Crisis of identity
- **Voice:** Male and Female
- **Myth:** Adam and Eve



What are the many themes that we have in this poem, first is the artist, God is the great artist; man, also is an artist; major artist and minor artist that is how we see God and man. We also have philosophical and religious themes like one and many. Is the whole world one? or is the world made up of many things? That is how this problem of one and many is treated in philosophy and also in religion. Further, we have one more theme, free will and destiny. Does man have this freewill? or is man destined to behave in certain ways or live in certain ways?

We also have the conflict between body and soul which is very much evident in the poem. We also have the theme of family life as represented in the husband and wife, in the case of Andrea and his wife Lucrezia. Further, we notice the theme of art and morality. Does art serve society? or does art serve on its own for itself? We have this major theme of identity. How is identity constructed? or how does identity form in human beings? So, critics have noted this gendered construction of the self and other.

There is also the crisis of identity, which is very much visible in Andrea del Sarto. We have this voice. Whose voice is presented in this poem? is it a male voice? or is it a female voice? We will spend some time on this separately a little later. And also, we can notice the myth of Adam and Eve, as a background for this whole poem. That is how many critics have identified various themes in this poem.

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Techniques



Irony: faultless painter (title); Go, my Love (267)

Paradox: less is more (78); freedom in confinement (51)

Metaphor: serpentine beauty (26), moon (29), twilight (49) bat (169)

Alliteration:
Such frank **F**rench eyes, and such a fire of coals (160)
Too **l**ive the **l**ife **g**rew, **g**olden and not **g**ray (166)
Let my **h**ands frame your **f**ace in your **h**air's gold (175)

Transferred epithet:
Inside the melancholy little house (212)



What are the techniques that we have in this poem? we can call them poetic devices. We have not read this poem because we are going to have many extracts from this poem for various reasons. Here we have some examples from the poem. For irony, we have this title. In the title itself and Andrea is called a faultless painter. And then at the end of the poem though Andrea does not want his wife to go he says, ‘Go, my love,’ that is a case of irony.

We have many examples of paradox. Here we have two, ‘less is more;’ ‘freedom in confinement.’ And how is this less- more in the case of painting? how is this freedom in confinement superb or useful or valuable for Andrea? this is what, we have to think about. Andrea, we have to remember, he is confined to his home now because, he came out of France and stayed at home to help his wife. We have the case of metaphor in ‘serpentine beauty.’ He refers to his own wife's beauty, ‘my serpentine beauty,’ that is why we have this. That means, he is invoking the serpent from paradise lost or from the Bible. Moon, twilight, bat all these metaphors are used in this poem. We have one example for alliteration here.

“Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of coals. (160)


Too live the life grew, golden and are not gray. (166)

Let my hands frame your face in your hair's gold.” (175)

These are three lines from this poem. And we also have an example for transferred epithet, inside the melancholy little house. The house itself is not melancholy but we have the idea of melancholy being attributed to the house.

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Techniques



Repetition: (Anaphora, Irony of Possession)

My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds! (26)

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon (29)


My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down (39)

And best of all, this, this, this face beyond,

This in the background, ... (162-163)

Repetition and juxtaposition/ antithesis:

Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too (89)



We continue with techniques. Here we look at repetition, particularly anaphora. We can also refer to this technique as irony of possession because, Andrea wants to possess his wife, we can see how my is used several times:

“My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds! (26)

He continues,

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon. (29)

My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down (39)


And best of all, this, this face beyond,

This in the background...” (162-163)


So, from my, this he differentiates; so, my beauty, my face, my moon that is Lucrezia is not his moon or his face, his hope because she has a lover waiting for her and so she has to go. We also have this repetition and juxtaposition; we can call this antithesis as well. This looks more like a neoclassical poem: ‘Praise them, it boils, or blame them, it boils too.’ That is how this whole idea of the rhythm we can see from Pope or from Dryden here in this particular line.

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Techniques



- **Rhetorical question**
How could it end in any other way? (171)
- **Conversational tone:**
Will it? Tenderly? (9); Let us try (19);
Well, let me think so (204)
Love, does that please you? (242)
- **Atmosphere:(1-5)**
But do not let us quarrel anymore,
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,



We continue with the techniques. Here we have one rhetorical question: “How could it end in any other way?” No other way. We have lots of conversational tone throughout the poem. Here are some examples: Will it? Tenderly? Let us try; Well, let me think so; Love, does it please you? This is the kind of conversational tone that we find in Donne and later in Eliot also and many other poets who have followed Browning and Eliot in the twentieth century. We can see how Browning creates the atmosphere in these lines:

“But do not let us quarrel anymore.

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,

These are the opening lines of this poem Andre del Sarto.

Now, we can see how this poem opens and see how the quarrelsome atmosphere in the family, in the life of Andrea is created here. A triangular relationship is brought into the poem. We have Andrea, we have Lucrezia and also, we have a friend's friend, in whom Lucretia has much interest. For whom Andrea is actually painting and this painting will be sold and the money from that painting will be used by Lucrezia to pay the debts of the friend's friend. That is how, the whole poem is built up.

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Ambiguity



Lexis: (52)

“let it lie”

1. let it be there
2. let it tell or be a lie

Syntax: (172)

“You called me, and I came home to your heart.”

1. I came home to your heart.
I am the home for your heart.
2. I came home to your heart.
I came to my house to reach/ catch your heart.



We have some ambiguity here. In the case of Lexis, that is word we have one example in line 52, “let it lie.” What does this lie mean? does it mean just lie there? keep it there somewhere? And then, the second one, let it tell a lie or let it be a lie. So, just lying there on the table or being there is one thing and telling lie is another thing. Falsehood is another thing. So, this kind of ambiguity we find, lexical ambiguity we find in this poem. Similarly, at the level of syntax we have one line “You called me and I came home to your heart.” This can be understood in two ways. I came, home to your heart, as home to your heart as object for this came. So, in this case it can mean, I am the home for your heart. And in the second one, I came home, to your heart. So, there is a difference. Home is associated with the came here. And then next, we have this adjunct to your heart. That means, I came to my house to reach or catch your heart. Actually, it was Lucrezia who asked Andrea to come back from France to live with him in Italy. That kind of motive is found throughout the poem.

Actually, Andrea was working for the King of France, painting or doing whatever the King wanted him to do. But then, without the knowledge of the King, without telling the King that he was going home he left and came here. And so, he is staying in in Italy and so the King's men have come to Italy to find out where Andrea is, to collect back the money that he had brought from the King and probably to punish him as well. But then, now he is confined at home. He cannot go out because the men from France have come here in search of him.

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Art Register

Alter	Model	Leonardo
Art	Outline	Madonna
Body	Paint	Michael Angelou
Cartoon	Pencil	Raphael
Chalk	Piece	Urbinata (Raphael)
Copy	Serve	Virgin
Craftsman	Shade	King Francis as
Drawing	Shape	patron
Frame	Silver	
Gold	Sketch	
Grey	Smear	
Harmony	Soul	
Hue	Trace	
Light	Twilight	
Line	Work	

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Here we have this art register. This is a poem about a painter, so many words used in this poem are all drawn from the field of painting. All these words from alter, art, body, cartoon, if these words are used in a different context, they may have some other meaning. Cartoon, chalk, copy, craftsman, drawing, frame, gold, grey, harmony, hue, light, line, model, outline, paint, pencil, piece, serve, shade, shape, silver, sketch, smear, soul, trace, twilight, work. These are the words which are associated with painting.

And also, we have the names of the painters and their paintings like, Leonardo and Madonna. Another painter Michael Angelo, one more Raphael. And then, we also have another name for Raphael in Urbinata. Then we have one Virgin, that is Mary Virgin and then patron of art, King Francis.



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Whose Voice?

Primarily the voice of Andrea but Lucrezia's voice also creeps into the poem.

Margaret A Loose (2015) identifies the voice of Lucrezia in lines 218–221, especially the highlighted words

“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?”



One major question in this poem is whose voice is presented in this poem? Of course, the poem is called Andrea del Sarto, so primarily the voice of Andrea is found in this poem. But then a feminist critic like Margaret A Loose has identified the voice of Lucrezia also in this poem. Here the words are highlighted which represent the voice of Lucrezia. So, this occurs in line number 218, from 218 to 221.

“Let us but love each other. **Must you go?**

That cousin here again? He waits outside?

Must see you- you, are not with me? Those loans!

More gaming debts to pay? You smiled for that?”

Margaret A loose says, the first half of the line that is “Let us but love each other” that alone belongs to Andrea. Similarly, the last half of the line “you smiled for that?” that also belongs to Andrea. But in between, “Must you go? That cousin here again? he waits outside? Must see you- see you not with me? Those loans! More gaming debts to pay?” The voice of Lucrezia comes out in these lines she says.

Because in the Victorian society, the voice of women was not given that much importance. So, we have this notion of the voice of women coming out in male discourse. This poem is a very interesting case for feminists to study as Margaret A Loose has shown in her article. In fact, she argues that throughout the poem Andrea is made into a female, whereas Lucrezia is made into a male. So, there is a kind of interchange of identity: Male identity or female

identity. That is seen primarily in terms of domination, who dominates who. Andrea is a passive character and Lucrezia becomes a very active character in this poem.

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Terse sayings

- A common grayness silvers everything (35)
- So free we seem, so fettered fast we are! (31)
- **Less is more** (78)
- Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what's heaven for? (97-98)
- **All is as God overrules.** (133)
- 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. (136-140)
- **God is just.** (213) (Browning's philosophy/ attitude)
- No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. (257)



We have many terse sayings in this poem. So, a number of quotations we have from this poem:

“A common grayness silvers everything.” (35)

“So free we seem, so fettered fast we are! “ (31)

“**Less is more**” (78)

“Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp”

“Or what is heaven for?” (97-98)

“**All is as God overrules.**” (133)

“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” (136-140)

And thus, we half-men struggle. Half-men, that is Andrea and mostly all the Victorian people maybe all men of that time. And thus, half-men struggle. For Margaret Loosé, this particular line is very important. Because men are not full-men, they are only half-men and the other

half is, that is, women. 'God is just.' that is a philosophy of Browning or his attitude to life. And lastly, we have, 'No doubt there is something strikes a balance.' We have highlighted differently to indicate that this is a kind of echo that we find in Robert Frost poem, 'Mending Wall.' There is something that does not love your wall. Such kind of echo or influence is very interestingly noticed when we read poems by many poets.

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"Andrea" as a Dramatic Monologue

Application of Ina Bet Sessions's categories of DM to *Andrea del Sarto*:


1. **Speaker:** Andrea del Sarto
2. **Listener:** Lucrezia
3. **Occasion:** Evening
4. **Interaction:** sitting, holding hands, smiling
5. **Revelation of character/ soul:** passive (feminine) Andrea and active (masculine) Lucrezia
6. **Dramatic action:** less action and more atmosphere
7. **Action in the present:** Lucrezia waiting for her lover and Andrea pleading with her to stay back



Now, we come to the last point that is Andrea as a dramatic monologue. We have indicated this Ina Bet Sessions' categories earlier. Now, we list them and also see the various aspects of dramatic monologue in this poem. The speaker is Andrea del Sarto, the listener is Lucrezia. The occasion is evening time, twilight. There is an interaction between the speaker and the listener that is Andrea and Lucrezia. They are sitting, holding hands, smiling, listening to each other, moving physically probably.


In all this, the most important aspect of this poem is revelation of character or the innermost soul of Andrea and also probably of Lucrezia. In this context, we see the passive feminine aspect of Andrea more and the active or masculine aspect of Lucrezia much more. We also have this dramatic action. In this case, we find less action but more atmosphere. The action is dramatic because of this conflict between Andrea and Lucrezia. Should Lucrezia stay with Andrea for his painting or should Lucrezia go to her friend's friend to spend her time. We have action in the present that is Lucrezia is waiting for her lover and Andrea is pleading with her to stay back, so that she can spend time with him. And that means, Andrea can draw more and earn more for her.

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But

- ❖ Browning's use of "but" in *Andrea Del Sarto*
- To signal the beginning of action in the middle
- To contrast the character of Andrea with Lucrezia
- To juxtapose the faultless painter and the faulty husband
- To compare the unwedded painters with the married painter
- To differentiate Victorian Poetry from Romantic Poetry




Here is one “but” this is how the whole poem begins, “but.” Browning’s use “but” in *Andrea del Sarto* is remarkable. It has many functions. To signal the beginning of action in the middle of the whole story. To contrast the character of Andrea with Lucrezia. To juxtapose the faultless painter and the faulty husband. Also, we have the comparison between the unwedded painters with the married painter, that is Andrea. Leonardo, Raphael; they are not married, whereas this Andrea is married. Further we have one more to differentiate Victorian poetry from Romantic poetry. This kind of intense conflict between human beings we may not find in Romantic poetry. There we have more of a cosmic, transcendental experience. But in the case of Victorian poetry, we have down to earth, family domestic context.

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Summary

- Historical and Literary Context
- Robert Browning
- *Andrea del Sarto* (1855)
- Andrea, Leonardo and Raphael
- Sources and Influences
- Themes and Techniques
- Art Register
- Voices in *Andrea del Sarto*
- *Andrea del Sarto* as a Dramatic Monologue



In sum, we have seen the historical and literary context of Robert Browning and his poem, Andrea del Sarto, his sources and his influences we saw. We also noticed how Browning was interested in many painters like Andrea, Leonardo and Raphael. And from these Italian sources and literary influences, Browning has written his poem, Andrea del Sarto. We examined the themes and techniques and also paid attention to the vocabulary, special vocabulary relating to art as art register.

We examined the voices, the female and the male voices in Andrea del Sarto. And finally, considered the poem Andrea del Sarto as a dramatic monologue. We have not read some passages from this poem primarily because we have quoted many of the lines from this poem in almost every page or every slide. So, we hope that you will be able to read the poem yourself and understand this poem much better.

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References

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We have the references for you. Thank you.