

Robert Browning: “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister”

- I. Both “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” and “The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed’s Church” depict religious figures
 - A. “The Bishop Orders His Tomb” emphasizes the worldliness of the dying bishop and jealousy of his rival
 - B. “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” also presents a highly hypocritical figure
- II. The character of the speaker
 - A. The speaker is a monk who is jealous of another monk named Brother Lawrence
 - B. The jealousy is exaggerated, which is typical of Browning’s monologues, here to comic effect
 - C. The poem memorably begins, “Gr-r-r—there go, my heart’s abhorrence!”
 - D. The speaker is plotting ways to have his rival condemned to Hell, but projects his own sins on Brother Lawrence
 1. He imagines Brother Lawrence gazing lustfully at nuns washing their hair in the river, but it is he who dwells on the details
 2. The speaker ironically emphasizes his own pious rituals (laying out his knife and fork in the shape of a cross, for example)
 3. At the same time, he is snipping off the blossoms from Lawrence’s plants so they don’t bear fruit
 4. He cites a text in Galatians that consists of a catalog of sins, hoping to trip up his rival with one of them
 5. He imagines Brother Lawrence being condemned to Hell for glancing at the “scrofulous French novel” that he himself possesses
 6. He finally imagines pledging his own soul to Satan to have Lawrence condemned, but being so clever in the bargain that he would escape his own damnation at the last moment
 - E. The poem ends with a growl, as it began