 Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister

Gr-r-r-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 10

Wise talk of the kind of weather,

Sort of season, time of year:

Not a plenteous 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, 20

Rinsed like something sacrificial

Ere 'tis fit to touch our chaps —

Marked with L. for our initial!

(He-he! There his lily snaps!)

IV

Saint, forsooth! While brown Dolores

Squats outside the Convent bank

With Sanchicha, telling stories,

Steeping tresses in the tank,

Blue-black, lustrous, thick like horsehairs,

— Can't I see his dead eye glow, 30

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 frustrate

While he drains his at one gulp. 40

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 eager to get 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 50

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

Or, my scrofulous French novel,

On grey paper with blunt type!

Simply glance at it, you grovel

Hand and foot in Belial's gripe: 60

If I double down its pages

At the woeful sixteenth print,

When he gathers his greengages,

Ope a sieve and slip it in't?

IX

Or, there's Satan! — one might venture

Pledge one's soul to him, yet leave

Such a flaw in the indenture

As he'd miss it till, past retrieve,

Blasted lay that rose-acacia

We're so proud of! Hy, Zy, Hine... 70

'St, there's Vespers! Plena gratia

Ave, Virgo! Gr-r-r — you swine!

Student Activities

1. Annotate the poem.
2. How does Browning convey the speakers increasing difficulty in containing his feelings?
3. The speaker lists his irritations regarding Brother Lawrence’s conduct. What are they? What does this tell audiences about the speaker?
4. What incongruous statements are made throughout the poem? How does this contribute to Browning’s efficacy in delivering his message to the reader?
5. What form does the poem take? What is the effect of the form of the poem on the reader? In what ways does it differ to “My Last Duchess” and “Porphyria's Lover”?
6. In what ways is the speaker in this poem seeming even more evil than the personas in the previous two poems?