# MIMESIS AND MASK: A STUDY OF METAPHOR AND IRONY IN THE POETIC OF ROBERT BROWNING

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ABSTRACT

Major Browning criticism from 1880 to the present focuses on the dramatic monologue either as a method of character revelation or as an oblique means of presenting the poet's religious or philosophic beliefs. Neither approach accounts for the consistent interweaving of metaphor and irony within the poems; neither establishes a poetic which characterizes the dramatic monologue form. This thesis explores the major features which distinguish Robert Browning's dramatic monologues and which embody metaphors that reveal the function of the artist and the nature of the creative act. Unlike most Browning criticism, the thesis examines the correspondence between metaphor and irony in an effort to delineate the dramatic significance of the play between speaker and context, man and "other," creation and conception, life and art.

All of Browning's dramatic monologues share ironic correlations between subject and object, but the selections discussed in this thesis are concerned with the nature of the creative act and thus provice a delineation of Browning's abiding concern for the relation between perception and ex-

pression. Over the last hundred years these poems have received much critical attention; but rarely have critics subjected the poems to close textual study in an effort to determine the ironic relation or balance between what the speaker says and the dramatic implications of his utterance. This thesis considers the context of each speech in order to relate this ironic balance to the metaphoric characteristics of the speaker's language and to the poem's larger metaphoric implications.

This study of the ironic features of the dramatic monologues reveals that the dramatic play is with the relationship between opposites and that the implications initiated by the speaker's speculations and statements are completed and redefined by the context of the speaker's situation. The gap between the potential meaning and the revealed one and between the actual experience and the ideal model is sustained. However, the relationship is inverted as God becomes man and the metaphors become actualized. The speech in a dramatic monologue is one-half of the poem's structure; the poem is completed by the ironic frame of the dramatic context. The critical methodology used throughout this thesis stresses the poetic, which defines the activity of the poem, rather than the character revelation inherent in each dramatic utterance. The speaker's mask is discovered to be a form of imitation which represents the ironic relationship between expression and experience.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# CHAPTER I

## The Imagination of Imitation: "Caliban Upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island"

It was imagination that wrought these forms, a more cunning artist than imitation. Imitation will make what it has seen, but imagination will make what it has not seen.

Philostratus

There is no way of conceiving or naming anything objective except after the similitude of the subjective or of ourselves.

Max Muller. The Science of Thought

The following discussion offers, in part, an analysis of Caliban's style--the characteristic, consistent and repetitious use he makes of the language. It also attempts to delineate from the structure of the poem, from Caliban's description of his world, what his usage indicates about his perceptions and conceptions. Because Caliban's discourse, as poem, is a dramatic monologue[1] carrying its own setting or location, his description includes its context and together they provide a particular vision of reality, an artistic rendering and ordering that is the poem's subject matter as well as the poem's "message." The paper includes two approaches: first, a textual consideration of what Caliban says (the verbal texture examined); and second, a commentary on the content of the "dramatic utterance," the implication of location.[2] I make no attempt to separate these approaches in my analysis in order to avoid moving into either character study or strictly philosophical considerations of Browning's religious or aesthetic interests and appeals.[3] Instead, I fuse the two.

A central interest in the paper is how, if at all,

Caliban's understanding differs from his description of the cosmology.[4] What is the nature of his mask or persona? (It should be made clear that in no way do I attempt to establish that Browning shares Caliban's views or that Caliban is a voice for Browning. Such an attempt would, again, lead to character study or to autobiography; neither lies within the range of my interest.[5] The effort of Browning students to match the poet's views with those of a character has led readers away from the poem as Poem, as representation,[6] as image[7]). The mask[8] has a two-fold function in that it is veil-like and refers to something behind;[9] that is, it is dualistic or dialectic in nature, as well as providing for the "shock of recognition." It is this aspect of experience, the difference between description and depiction, the veil and the revealed, that Browning dramatizes. His poem is a measure of the gulf between perception and articulation where Caliban's understanding and his description are separated by his experience with the world. His interest is explication, his achievement a play, a verbal dance of simultaneous reverence and mockery, an applauding of conditions and an attempt to overcome them. The poem becomes a dramatization of the creative process, how a texture is achieved, and in its process offers postulations and details concerning the why.

The direction of this study is towards a consideration of metaphor as an aspect of style. Metaphor is relationship and "Caliban Upon Setebos" is structured by and concerned with the

quality and nature of relationships. Here the dramatized relationship between character and posture is a figuration of the relationship between creator and created. Metaphor operates as an articulation of the unknown in terms of the known, the unseen in terms of the seen, where the inner eye both informs and is informed by the outer. This is metaphor representing the circularity of experience, the acting/acted-upon motif, where the sign and that signified are not merely analogically linked--rather, the one creates the other.

The explicit/implicit quality of the poem is part of the actual/ideal dichotomy throughout the Browning canon. What is considered and what is revealed,[10] what is revealed and what is potential, are all part of the poem's ground. The relationship between actual and ideal is parallel to the difference between what is proposed and what is attained. The vehicle or explicit of the metaphor (the relationship) is the dramatic monologue form itself. Caliban's speech is NOT the poem.

The dramatic monologue is a structure in which subject/object[11] and vehicle/tenor[12] are circumscribed in a technique that describes a vision of the world by ironically reflecting it from a prescriptive, a self-justificatory explanation of phenomena offered by its speaker. This character is made aware at some point in the process (if not at the onset) that he is deceiving himself, or that he has been deceived by the restriction of his prescribed speculation. I am suggesting that each

of Browning's dramatic monologues is constructed not as one of many possible windows on the universe[13] but as a depiction of the OUROBOROS-like nature of perception that is encoded in the structure of our language and that controls human expression.

The whole poem, its context, character, action, its metaphor, is an attempt at transcendence.[14] The poem is greater than the restrictions of language and perception it reveals because it includes an awareness not only of otherness but of the shifting range of our kaleidoscopic experience. "This is how things are"[15] comes from the character-voice and is part of the dramatic mask. "Truth," fixed reality, or indisputable fact remains illusive--not to be delineated or secured by statement or proposition. The narrator of Book XII of The Ring and the Book says that

> our human speech is naught,
> Our human testimony false, our fame
> And human estimation words and wind.

He argues that the effort and achievement of the entire presentation of voices and perspectives have been to expose the frailty of human speech and testimony to secure the "truth" of any situation. It is only Art, he continues, that

> remains the one way possible
> Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine, at least.

He does not insist that the truth of Art is the revelation of facts but that Art initiates the activity of thought in a

manner non-literary language cannot achieve.

> Art may tell a truth.
> Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought
> Nor wrong the thought missing the mediate word.

The act of the poet, what Eliot called his "intolerable wrestle/ With words and meaning,"[16] is to move "beyond the facts," to

> Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.[17]

Language cannot divide or sort out "reality" because of the persistent mercurial nature of that reality.[18] Articulation offers a shadow

> Between the idea
> And the reality
> Between the motion
> And the Act.[19]

It is Art that can move beyond the facts and beyond the explicitness of statement to create from language. "This is how things are" means nothing experientially. Art makes language representational and approaches experience otherwise. It is this metaphorical reaching "to tell the truth/Obliquely" to "breed the thought," which governs Browning's method. The dramatic monologue is Browning's effort to dramatize the fact that for every speaker and for every speaker's world, there is an audience and the world of the audience--every attempt to fix fact is an effort of fancy. Every attempt to fix fact imposes a frame on the perceived and becomes a comment on the perceiver.

"Caliban Upon Setebos" is a description of Caliban's world and of the way in which he perceives that world. The poem is also a representation of the relationship between experience and articulation. It is also Browning's metaphor to describe the artist's function as an attempt to apprehend form while simultaneously holding the awareness that such form is constantly fluctuating with the pulse and rhythm of the perceiver's location and perspective. Browning's "truth" is that there is no truth other than a fragmentary and instant perception of accord between the subject and the object.

Any "non-discursive" speech is representational and any writing, being orthographic, is specifically representational. A discussion of dualities, either implied or stated, properly begins with the recognition that recorded language implies a representation of experience and that the nature of a poem is to provide an intelligible translation (perceptual relation) of experience.[20] A dramatic utterance is especially representational and not merely the recorded speech of the speaker. The dramatic utterance <u>implies</u> an audience as well as a special motivation on the part of the speaker, either to convince or to justify or to explain. Always the speech is more than an explanation or justification or enquiry on the part of the speaker, because it is dramatically working with or even against its context. It is the discourse taken in terms of its context that shapes the poem.

The title Browning uses to introduce Caliban's monologue--"Caliban Upon Setebos; or, Natural Theology in the Island"--is part of the shaping instrument of the poem. Caliban is offering a discourse upon the subject of Setebos. Caliban imposes himself on Setebos in the sense that he applies his view of the world to Setebos's design. Caliban is superimposed on Setebos in that we only view Setebos through Caliban and Caliban is upon Setebos in the sense of combat or struggle. The apposition "or, Natural Theology in the Island" announces the poem's concern with relationships. Caliban's relationship to Setebos is an example of nineteenth-century Natural Theology.[21] Caliban's reasoning is "natural"; his interests theological in part. These deductions are confined to and by the Island. In the course of the poem Caliban is to theology what Setebos is to the Island: each uses the other as a form of self-extension.

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself" is another preview of Caliban's discourse and provides the context for any consideration of the discourse.[22] It functions as epigraph, epitaph and allusion. As an epigraph it focuses upon Caliban's view of Setebos and allows for interpretation of Caliban's approach as one in error: it offers an epitaph to the life and validity of Caliban's speculations, ironically asserting itself as what could be called Setebos's "rebuttal." Simultaneously, this quotation from Psalm 50:21 alludes to its full source and implies that Caliban's narcis-

sistic or anthropomorphic delineation of Setebos as creator will have its consequences and will therefore ironically justify Caliban's working premise that Setebos is altogether such an one as himself. Caliban narrates a series of events which indicates that his assumptions about Setebos's motivations were not conceived in error. His "prattling" is "fool's play" because he ridicules Setebos: he is "Fool to gibe at Him." Caliban is in error only in the sense that he does not order his tongue aright: he does not praise.[23] He misjudges the range of Setebos's perceptions, not the quality of his Being. This is precisely the connection between this articulate Caliban and the dilemma of Shakespeare's beast:

> You taught me language, and my profit on't
> Is I know how to curse.[24]

Neither Caliban is equipped with language that serves. Browning's Caliban, by "Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech,"[25] deals only with shadows and constructs of the proposition "this is how things are." He cannot penetrate the limitations of a language that is so representational as to be analogical and once removed from the powers of creative innovation. Caliban is a renovator, limited not in intelligence but in experience. He describes by seizing on pairs which justify their selection through the balance effected. This balance finds its stability in the tension of the contrasts implied in the pairing. Although Caliban's analogical reasoning is reflected in the lexical

choices he makes to describe his own situation, the tension is effected in what Caliban is unaware of in these choices and what he makes of them.[26] Caliban builds a structure of concentric analogies but the poem becomes a play on these while simultaneously implying further "upons." The linear chain of being is broken; halves are imposed on other halves; the implied and the real are shadow images of the Real and the Ideal.[27]

Thematically, "Caliban Upon Setebos" is concerned with the creative process, with the relationship between creator and created.[28] The questions which arise out of Caliban's discourse revolve around the issue of how the outer eye is informed by the inner. Does either Caliban's explanation of his experience or the deductions he makes from his experiments offer a description of anything outside the inner eye?

A study of the language of the poem reveals the character of the poem.[29] That is, the choices Caliban makes to describe his universe show his manner of seeing, but what is the relationship between the perceived and the process of perception? Caliban may be his own subject matter; certainly the language is used to indicate his roughness and grotesqueness.[30] But more significantly, Caliban uses language to speculate about his universe. It is this creative aspect of his usage that informs the direction of the poem. Caliban's energy, his intent, is ostensibly not to justify his vision of self, but to make sense of his environs.[31]

> He looks out o'er yon sea which sunbeams cross
> And recross till they weave a spider-web
> (Meshes of fire, some great fish breaks at times)
> And talks to his own self, howe'er he please,
> Touching that other, whom his dam called God.
>
> (ll. 12-16)

Caliban perceives the universe to be composed of sun-made spider webs, meshes of fire. He also <u>believes</u> that some great fish, sometimes, can break that net. This willingness to believe is part of his pattern of ordering. His descriptions more than define his character, they locate him in a world that demands he catalogue its aspects if he is to survive. The order Caliban imposes, his filing system, is necessarily a comment on his character, but what is the shaping force of that character? Who gave Caliban his language?

Significantly, Caliban is "Flat on his belly in the pit's much mire" (l. 2) before he begins his discourse. He is comfortable "in the cool slush" and well provided for--"now a fruit to snap at, catch and crunch" (l. 11). His perspective is limited and confined to the sphere he can see from his cave. His world is limited not merely because he is rough and grotesque, but because he must seek his cave to escape his masters, Prosper, Miranda, and Setebos. The pompion-plant that Caliban sees to be "coating the cave-top as a brow its eye" (l. 8) functions as an imitation of the Setebos who shapes the arc of the outer cave (an instance of Caliban's projection) and as an imitation

of the circumscribing of the eye by the brow (an instance of his observation). These functions are important because both the eye and the two caves are limited and protected by the coating arcing over them. This cave imagery places the discourse Caliban is to offer in mythological regions of concern with shadows and reality. Such Platonic epistemology is echoed when Caliban supposes that Setebos created

> this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
> And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same,
>
> (ll. 29-30)

as a "bauble-world to ape yon real" (l. 147).

Caliban understands his world--what can be seen from his cave--as representational, as an imitation of a substantive OTHER, which, like Setebos, "that other whom his dam called God," depends for its existence on the imagination, on Caliban's need for a creative survival. The theories of imitation that Caliban offers as explanation for the fact of the world go beyond methods of character revelation in that Caliban is presented as poet, one who, in Plato's terms, is limited:

> The imitator or maker of the image knows nothing of true existence; he knows appearances only.[32]

He, too, is thrice removed from truth, living in a bauble world and attempting to understand the construction of it. Caliban functions as the poet whose eye is restricted not only by the "I" of character but by the fact that his field is limited, a

shadow of the Ideal.[33] Caliban might also be read as a parody of the critic or of Shelley's Alastor poet, but his speculative, imitative methods more aptly describe the dilemma of poetic creation.

My reading is based on a sympathy for Caliban's effort. Satirical intentions[34] would work against the dramatic and metaphoric consideration of the nature of creation that is the poem's consistent direction. Caliban's function as character is to reveal the limitations of language and reason,[35] to deal with how and why. Caliban, as character, is a dramatization of the necessity for metaphor as a means to depict perceptual realities.

> Le style n'est jamais que metaphore.[36]

As creator, Caliban is limited by the range of his own personal resources and the raw materials of his world. These restrictions define both his "reality" and his creations. But although his location, in a cave on an island, is a qualification of the "reality" he can appeal to, the tone of his discourse is set by the method he proposes for "touching that other." Caliban says that the "time to vex is now" (l. 18) and that "to talk about Him, vexes" (l. 17). To vex is both to discuss a question at great length and to irritate. "Vexation" is both the act of vexing and the state of being vexed. This usage is ironic in that Caliban is certainly not

aware of the implication that as vexed and vexer he is both created and creator.

When Caliban is in the state of being vexed (l. 152), or irritated by his limitations, he imitates Prosper:

> Plays thus at being Prosper in a way
> Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He.
>
> (ll. 168-169)

If Caliban's vexation is relieved by this creativity, then it follows that Setebos is prodded into make-believes in a similar manner. But Setebos is agent "who made them weak, meant weakness He might vex" (l. 172). Setebos is clearly vexed and vexer, so by Caliban's own analogical structure, he also is victim/victimizer. However, it is Caliban and not Setebos who vexes and who offers the long discourse. Setebos depends on Caliban for his existence in that Caliban calls Him into apposition.[37]

Although the terms creator/created are interchangeable here, it is significant that Caliban deduces Setebos's irritation by projecting his own state of discomfort as impetus for the creative act. He reads Setebos as capable of vexing, of inflicting large-scale irritation. This is a useful index to the hierarchy Caliban perceives: it describes the nature of "imitation" Caliban indulges in. He imitates a bauble world making an imitation of an imitation. He is thrice removed from origins and the Real. As poet he offers a compensation for his

removal from the substantial by attempting to articulate his experience of the gulf. His attempt is certainly to "suffice the eye and save the soul beside."[38]

Caliban takes "time to vex" as a means to balance his limitations. His discourse proceeds from this need and is shaped by the balancing mechanisms he appeals to. Caliban notes items by pairing them either directly or by implying that there is a pattern where one unit can be matched to another. This is the central method of Caliban's dialectic.[39] It may be called dialectic because it both describes the "logical" nature and the prescriptive and solipsistic bases of his enquiry.

When Caliban debates the nature of "that other" while "the pair," Prosper and Miranda, sleep he shows the dialectical basis of his proceeding in that his "gibe" becomes self-derisive--he "talks to his own self" (l. 15). "Letting the rank tongue blossom into speech" is not so much metamorphosis as it is self-expression. Although Caliban is aware that his audience is himself, his discourse as an act of self-expression is an attempt at transcendence. "The pair" whom he "cheat[s]" is matched by the temporary verbal and imaginative liaison between himself and "that other."

In this persistent quest for self-awareness, Caliban is Browning's subjective poet. He struggles toward "what God sees--the Ideas of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on

the Divine Hand. . . . He digs where he stands,--preferring to seek them in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak."[40]

Caliban's effort may be larger than his achievement but this is the result of the limitations of his god. The vastness of his interest is dictated, in part, by the vastness of the spectrum visible from his cave. His inquiry takes on the shape of his own soul as inch-by-inch he perceives its outline against that vast spectrum of the outside world.

The first line of Caliban's actual speculation is almost an incantation: "Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!" (l. 24). His invocation of a three-personed God suggests allegorical[41] connections to some ground outside his particular speculation. The change in rhythm marks the ambitiousness of the speculation and the emphatic "!" at the end of the line is ritualistically appropriate to an invocation.[42]

Caliban must match inner and outer just as he dualistically balances all items he conceives:

> 'Thinketh, He dwelleth in the cold o' the moon.
> 'Thinketh, He made it, with the sun to match.
>
> (ll. 25-26)

Given the cold of the moon, Caliban must match it with the warmth of the sun.[43] Caliban needs a sense of harmony in his cosmology, a sense of formal balance. This need is part of

his creative impulse and a movement away from his rough and grotesque character. The entire construction which he offers as his description of the world is an articulate attempt to transcend the limitations of that world. Appropriately, his discourse takes the shape of legend and myth.

> The problem of existence is the theme of mythology. Myth is troubled by existence, and it states this problem in the crucial concept of the "World." . . . It is a mythical concept--or better, it is not a concept at all; it is a metaphorical process, it is the existential process as such.[44]

> As all nature sounds; so to Man, creature of sense, nothing could seem more natural than that it lives, and speaks, and acts. A certain savage sees a tree, with its majestic crown; the crown rustles! That is stirring godhead! The savage falls prostrate and worships! Behold the history of sensuous Man, that dark web, in its becoming, out of verbis nomina--and the easiest transition to abstract thought! For the savages of North America, for instance, everything is still animate, everything has its genius, its spirit. That it was likewise among Greeks and Orientals, may be seen from their oldest dictionary and grammar--they are, as was all nature to their inventor, a pantheon! A realm of living, acting creatures. . . . The driving storm, the gentle zephyr, the clear fountain and the mighty ocean--their whole mythology lies in those treasure troves, in verbis and nominibus of the ancient languages; and the earliest dictionary was thus a sounding pantheon.[45]

Like a vestigial remnant of such a lost, pre-conceptual vision, Caliban attempts to build a personal mythos, appealing to the living creatures and their activity for his material. Caliban draws his evidence from the natural phenomena to reinforce his sense of how the world works. He deduces patterns

and uses these patterns to interpret the unobservable. His concepts are assembled not only on models of the observable particulars but on his need for self-survival.

Because Caliban is largely overcome by the bauble world in which he lives, he attempts to balance this limitation by making it more discernible. Obviously, analogy is the only method available to him to make sense of the disparate items of his daily world.[46] Just as he is "forced" to speculate on how the world came into being, so, logically, the Creator of that world was in some way "forced" into the activity which generated Caliban's world.

> 'Thinketh, it came of being ill at ease. (1. 31)

That Caliban's suppositions and constructions do not explain the fullness of the scheme does not detract from the fact that he does account for the features of his universe. He is capable of relating to the natural phenomena that define the bauble world. He is both shaped and shaper. His soul, his shaping spirit, survives. He takes

> the forms of things unknown, . . .
> Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.[47]

Like Theseus's poet, Caliban's rolling eye moves from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. In that motion he creates.

Caliban's constructions of origins both define and

limit the nature of creation. The definitions give him a perspective against which to test the validity of his observations, while the limitations made in the process free him from the necessity of further speculation, for example, as to the nature of the Quiet. His articulation, then, both describes and circumscribes. Setebos, he says,

> made clouds, winds, meteors, such as that:
> Also this isle, what lives and grows thereon,
> And snaky sea which rounds and ends the same.
>
> (ll. 28-30)

This movement from individual items to corporations in Caliban's description precisely mirrors the pattern of creation or the way in which Caliban determines how Setebos works--Setebos made clouds, then the isle, then the sea, each assuming progressively larger surface and influence. Caliban is principally concerned with the frame, the Setebos who, like the sea, "rounds and ends" the isle.

Caliban's deductions of the motives of the icy fish "That longed to 'scape the rock-stream where she lived" (l. 34) parallel his assumptions about the creation of "the sun, this isle, /Trees and the fowls here, beast and creeping thing" (ll. 44-45). He moves from microcosmic observations to macrocosmic speculations. At each instance he is able to move further from the concreteness of the initial observation. The icy fish wants to move from her stream to the

lukewarm brine
O' the lazy sea her stream thrusts far amid,
A crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave.

(ll. 35-37)

This is the same kind of movement as that from the cold of the moon, and, like the impetus to Setebos's creation, is based on a bliss/despair dichotomy of response--"Hating and loving warmth alike: so He" (l. 43).

Through his speculations Caliban counts as fact each analogy previously constructed. Each instance of "so He" marks a description that will be the basis of the next supposition:

Hating and loving warmth alike: so He.
'Thinketh, He made thereat the sun. . . .

(ll. 43-44)

and Making and marring clay at will? So He.
'Thinketh, such shows nor right nor wrong in Him.

(ll. 97-98)

and As it likes me each time, I do: so He
Well then, supposeth He is good i' the main.

(ll. 108-109)

Each "Thereat," "such," or "well then" functions as a justification for the connection to be made in the following speculation. In this sense, Caliban effectively creates Setebos and can reasonably suppose that his discourse has activated Him.

The storm is interpreted as evidence of Setebos's rancour: Caliban has been overheard. "There scuds His raven that has told Him all!" (l. 286). Significantly, at the point when Caliban is concluding his speculation with the extinction of Setebos,

> some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
> And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
> Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die,
>
> (ll. 281-283)

the storm intervenes.

Just as Setebos depends for his existence on the imaginative needs of Caliban, Caliban depends on the concept of Setebos for an explanation of how his world works. If Setebos were to "doze, doze, as good as die," Caliban could no longer justify the nature of his existence. In this way, Caliban's creative energy, his attempt to understand his existence, is as procreative as Setebos's original spawning of the chain from the sun to each beast and creeping thing. Caliban's hierarchical "reasoned" argument proceeds according to the same chain of being he observes to be of Setebos's design.

Caliban's creativity, either when he uses his rank tongue or when he "Falls to make something" (l. 192), is possible only when "the heat of the day is best" (l. 1), when Prosper and Miranda sleep, and when he "wants little, hungers, aches not much" (l. 190). Caliban must have his physical needs

assuaged before he begins his imitation:

> 'piled yon pile of turfs
> And squared and stuck there squares of soft white chalk.
>
> (11. 192-193)

His powers are limited to copying, to imitating by piling piles and squaring squares. Still, he perceives the form of the pile, the square or the "wattle" (1. 205) and he can deduce the items of Prosper's world sufficiently to reproduce their semblance on his own:

> now pens the drudge
> In a hole o' the rock and calls him Caliban.
>
> (11. 165-166)

The use of "pens" here is analogous to the use of "vex" in 1. 18. Literally, Caliban places his self-imitation in a hole and keeps him penned. Figuratively, Caliban pens his Caliban by giving him a verbal form. This is Browning's play only since Caliban is not aware of the implications of his creativity; he does not see Setebos as self-extension. He does, however, fix the nature of his creativity in the realm of imitation: "plays thus at being Prosper in a way" (1. 168).

Caliban's need to speculate is based on a general discontent with the quality and ease of his existence. He "never speaks his mind save housed as now" (1. 268). He supposes he must deceive Setebos:

> the best way to escape His ire
> Is, not to seem too happy.
>
> (ll. 256-257)

He feels obliged to speak his mind in the shelter of the cave in order to dispel some of his discontent, but simultaneously feels this act puts him in jeopardy, susceptible to the wrath of Setebos. The force that drives his inquiry is the force that disciplines his perceptions. That force causes Caliban to separate the outside from the inside, without taking into account his own agency in effecting the separation. That force I call the imagination, Caliban's rude "consciousness," the shaping principle he applies to the world. This is not Primary Imagination[48] and it is not of the world of Eternity[49] -- but it is entirely active.

Caliban's imagination is "romantic"[50] as it attempts the transformation of his world; his imagination moves toward new forms where the effort and struggle are against limitation and in spite of limitation. He is romantic in his willingness to move beyond the strictly observable and in his belief in an unseen "reality." However, Caliban is clearly unaware of the magnificent creations available to the fully Romantic imagination because his is largely the imagination of imitation. His structures supplement his sense of the real by alluding to the Ideal. He is primarily concerned with the effects of the

Ideal on the real.

The theory of imitation, that Setebos made "the bauble world to ape yon real," does not explain the nature of the imaginative act to Caliban's full satisfaction. The act may be solace (l. 149), sport (l. 149), consolation (l. 114) or make-believe (l. 169) and the imagery of "a crystal spike 'twixt two warm walls of wave" (l. 37) suggests the procreative aspects of creation. But always, the act is a gesture of will, a means of extension. Setebos

> did in envy, listlessness or sport,
> Make what Himself would fain, in a manner, be.
>
> (ll. 61-62)

Even though his creatures are "mere playthings," they are generated by a desire to stretch or amend. Even though they are arbitrarily conceived and constructed as "might take or else / Not take [his] fancy" (ll. 90-91), they represent an act of will (l. 81) where the creator amuses Himself, "Loving not, hating not, just choosing so" (l. 103); "making and marring clay at will" (l. 97).

This concept of construction precisely balances the order of Caliban's speculations. Unable to change his state, he offers an explanation for it. He shapes his world metaphorically by attributing to Setebos his own motives:

perceives he cannot soar
To what is quiet and hath happy life;
Next looks down here, and out of very spite
Makes this a bauble world to ape yon real.

(ll. 144-147)

Caliban's metaphors are controlled by the limitations of his perception. Setebos, he says, "made all we see, and us." Caliban's world includes all he sees, himself, and his creator. He can find no descriptive language for the Quiet: "Something quiet o'er His head" that "all it hath a mind to, doth" (l. 137). Such a postulation is outside his range. Caliban says he "careth but for Setebos/the many handed as a cuttle-fish" (ll. 141-142) and this is largely because Setebos makes "Himself feared through what he does" (l. 143). Setebos is "knowable" to Caliban's mind in that Caliban can attribute activity to Him. This is reasonably part of Caliban's epistemology as he has learned to survive by predicting certain patterns from observable phenomena. These patterns are always described in terms of the known where crabs serve as examples of creatures subject to the pleasures of Caliban, because he is "strong [himself] compared to yonder crabs" (l. 100). It is entirely appropriate that Caliban's speculations about Setebos proceed in the same way, that Setebos can be "known" or described in terms of natural forces stronger than Caliban: "Saith He is terrible: watch His feats in proof!" (l. 200).

Caliban can find no explanation for this activity; that is, he cannot perceive a pattern which justifies the treatment he receives. He knows appearances only and is restricted to analogies which explain his own nature and which help him to come to some terms with his own actions. He becomes more specific about his own situation as he becomes more and more unable to direct his speculation towards answers.

> Put case, unable to be what I wish,
> I yet could make a live bird out of clay.
> Would not I take clay, pinch my Caliban
> Able to fly?
>
> (ll. 75-78)

Even though Caliban's creative impulse depends on his being "wanton, wishing he were born a bird" (l. 74), he reasons that inadequacy can be compensated for by the construction of a clay-made imitation. Accordingly, the imitation as analogy serves as both "a second self" and as self-justification. Together, the analogy and the self-justification propose the validity of another order which functions in the same manner: "So He."

Caliban can partially explain Setebos's creativity as an act of sublimation:

> He could not, Himself, make a second self
> To be His mate; as well have made Himself.
>
> (ll. 57-58)

Setebos is seen constantly in reaction to the ultimate limitations He suffers. He is to the unrestricted Quiet "that feels nor joy nor grief" (l. 133) what Caliban is to Him. He is rough, cold, ill at ease, caught between the ultimate and the mundane. Nonetheless, he is a greater magician than Prosper, "lord now of the isle" (l. 151); "He is the One now: only He doth all" (l. 178). He is "strong and Lord" (l. 99).

Caliban's experience informs his perceptions. He is obliged to believe that the business of life is to discover a method of pleasing Setebos. The creatures of the island must discern how to gain His favour and escape annihilation. They must "discover how or die" (l. 218). Setebos is "rougher than His handiwork" (l. 111) in that He cannot Himself directly assume the specific shape of any of his creatures.

Caliban's case of the "pipe of pithless elder-joint" (l. 118) which he supposes can "prattle and boast forsooth" (l. 122), is another analogy of the functional relationship between creature and creator.

> I catch the birds, I am the crafty thing,
> I make the cry my maker cannot make
> With his great round mouth; he must blow through mine!
>
> (ll. 123-125)

The pipe is intended to serve, to extend the creator's power. Caliban feels the audacity of this creature assuming autonomy and would in such a case, "smash it with [his] foot" (l. 126).

He is later to discover that he too must be the mouthpiece for explaining Setebos, as Setebos makes Himself known through what he does, but is otherwise dumb. His discourse must serve just as much as the prattling pipe. Caliban realizes he has overstepped his rank on the chain of being: "it was fool's play this prattling" (l. 287). He, like the hypothetical pipe, has too much to say; his language and speculation, he supposes, have come too close to Setebos's nature. Caliban is forced to assume that Setebos has sent the wind, invading fires, and thunder as a direct response to his prattle and boast. The blossoming of his rank tongue must be ordered aright or he will be torn to pieces.

In both parables--the live bird of clay and the pipe which "gives exact the scream o' the jay" (l. 118)--Caliban is aware of the verbal constructions he has made and that these are attempts through language to offer analogies which can explain larger patterns. The linking of the pipe analogy ("such pipe could prattle and boast") with Caliban's entire discourse ("it was fool's play this prattling") suggests that Caliban's metaphors and analogies have been realized in the sense that his suppositions about the "natural theology" have been confirmed. The ideal Platonic "real" (l. 147) which is aped by the "bauble world," is left to the stars, "the outposts." Again, Caliban is thrice removed.

This representation marks the relationship of poet

to poem, creator to created, and God to man. Caliban is the creator. He is both subject and object. Because of his situation (as creature) in the poem, he defines both the perspective and the statement. He describes and is described. By extension Setebos, as God, is created in Caliban's image. He is honored by this creation and finally activated by the course of the discourse. Caliban is to the poem as God is to the poet. The Poem holds Caliban as the Poem is articulate conception. The Poet creates God as abstraction Incarnate.[51]

Caliban is device as God is device; both work from either end of the metaphoric action of transformation. This relationship between Caliban and Setebos, man and his God, is used to explain the world. The subject is the metaphor, the transformation itself. Setebos exists because Caliban exists. Setebos is called into existence to complete the abstraction of the bauble world, to complete the transformation from bauble to real, the actual and the Now.[52]

Caliban's concern is with identity, both fixing the objects of his environment and determining his relationship to them. He is often seemingly unconscious of the figurative use of his language.[53] When Caliban describes his getting drunk, "till maggots scamper through [his] brain" (l. 72), he is not deliberately attempting to be metaphorical--this is his understanding of the process. His discourse depends on two metaphorical processes: in the one, Caliban explains one

experience in terms of a known, more easily described system;[54] and in the other he appeals to the "world of imagery which lies behind language."[55]

This first metaphorical process is allegorical, a symbolic method.[56] Any Browning dramatic monologue is in part allegorical, because it offers a discourse in a specific setting that is not its main interest. The speaker offers an approach to his particular problem and in the process a story is told. That story is usually about the speaker, his dilemma or his fantasies, but it is not the plot line or information of the discourse itself. In its dramatic perspective the discourse approaches a larger issue than that to which the speaker specifically directs his attention. The speaker is a character in his own fiction and is dramatized by his relationship to the larger subject matter.[57] This is the poem's representation.

Caliban functions as the man who seeks to know God, but who can discover Him only by making in his own image an explanation of God's ways to man. As allegory, "Caliban Upon Setebos" exposes both the ludicrous "creation" featured by this process and the absence of another more reliable or purposive approach. As allegory, the poem is a comment on the selfishness of the quest and a comment on the quality of failure. Browning's most obvious "quest" poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" offers a similar but less oblique comment:

> There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
> To view the last of me, a living frame
> For one more picture! in a sheet of flame
> I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
> Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
> And blew. "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."
>
> (ll. 199-204; p. 168)

Caliban's success, and his quest, are both directed by and exceeded by the analogies he uses. His style, or the perceptive judgment he renders on the world,[58] is dependent on the dialectical movement of contrasts but his achievement is limited because of the dualistic rendering those contrasts require. His first explanation for the creation of his world is offered in the icy fish analogy (Setebos is later described as "The many-handed as a cuttle-fish," l. 142). Each of these pairs--icy/thaw, a crystal spike/two warm walls of wave, other kind/not her life, bliss/despair, hating/loving--indicate the dualism of Caliban's perceptions. The metaphor emerging from this analogy extends itself so as to become a comment on Caliban's method. The conceptual similarity between Caliban's method and the comment implied about his method is the "likeness" at the foundation of the discourse and the discourse as poem. Caliban is used by his metaphors.[59] He is the victim of his own dialectical thought. He confuses his own peculiar sorting of natural phenomena with the nature of natural phenomena.

Caliban carefully splits his experience not merely

into hating/loving, but into being/not being, into either/or.[60] These separations allow him to interpret his victimization.

> He hath a spite against me, that I know,
> Just as He favors Prosper.
>
> (ll. 202-203)

He is able to account for the drudgery of his existence if there is an "other." This personification is part of the parallelism and juxtaposition that contributes to the allegorical level of metaphor-making. It proposes the levels of understanding available to the speculative mind as well as the range of Caliban's concerns. He restricts Setebos's compositions to those which directly influence his world; "but not the stars, the stars came otherwise" (l. 27). Caliban cannot account for Setebos's limitations ("wherefore rough, why cold and ill at ease?" l. 127) without positing a creature one step up from Him--"the something over Setebos/That made Him" (ll. 129-130).

This necessity to explain one relationship in terms of another eventually argues for the validity of the resulting structure, where the existence of one is confirmed by the speculation of its relationship to an unknown. The Quiet must exist to explain what cannot otherwise be determined about the nature of Setebos. Caliban's refusal to fully consider this Quiet--"never spends much thought nor care that way" (l. 139)--permits this other to stand as fact. It is this method of splitting this/that, other/otherwise, which encourages him

to make conclusions about the meaning of his speculative structure.

> So it is, all the same, as well I find.
>
> (l. 204)

Although Caliban suggests that he is aware of the speculative and even tentative nature of "that other" where "Thinketh/Thinketh/Thinketh" (ll. 25, 26, 31) is a repetition of and reinforcement of "Setebos, Setebos, and Setebos!" (l. 24) he moves inevitably to "Conceiveth" (l. 241) and "Believeth" (l. 250). He assumes a dogmatic position--"with the life, the pain shall stop" (l. 250)--which is not based on his experience, precisely because his dialectical patterning of the inner/outer has restricted possibilities:

> here are we
> And there is He, and nowhere help at all.
>
> (ll. 248-249)

The figurative aspects of Caliban's language that are not essentially structural are the descriptions he uses within his analogies, parallelisms, and matchings and are themselves metaphorical repetitions of his thought processes. His usage in each of the following similes--"lithe as a leech" (l. 46), "like an orc's armor" (l. 177), "as a snake does" (l. 209), "as grubs grow butterflies" (l. 248)[61]--is speculative in

that he takes one aspect from his experience and applies it to another. This method is particularly active when Caliban describes the storm, the "curtain o'er the world at once":

> The wind
> Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
> And fast invading fires begin! White blaze--
> A tree's head snaps. . . .
>
> (ll. 287-290)

The imagery is apocalyptic but entirely appropriate to storm activity. The wind is personified as agent which supports the dust it has shaped into pillars. "Death's house o' the move" is another perceptual reshaping of the dust. Caliban's language both recreates the storm and imposes a shape on it. He takes the action and linguistically interprets it so that the storm is given a motive. The apocalypse warned of by "His thunder" must be the result of Caliban's prattling and the "curtain o'er the world" is a judgment upon him. Caliban's way of perceiving is controlled by the ways he can talk about his experience. He cannot describe the storm in terms outside his experience and his language is limited to the terms relevant to his experience. Just as the snaky sea rounds and ends the isle, Caliban's language circumscribes his experience. He cannot break through the perceptual limitations imposed by his cave and he cannot "blossom into speech" without vexing. Language serves his speculative interests as the bauble world does the Real. Each is the medium whereby we are made aware

of the existence of the other. Each is shadow.

That the range of Caliban's speculations is limited by the language available to him is demonstrated when he says, "Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos" (l. 292). One sense of "lo!" is repeated in both "lieth" and "flat": each word effectually pushes Caliban down. The use of "flat" directs the reader back to Caliban's first description, before the speculation began: "Will sprawl. . ./Flat on his belly." Obviously, Caliban is already prostrated when the storm comes to "reprove" him. "Sprawl", "flat" and "Lo", are the only words Caliban can appeal to in description of his situation. The similarity between these words is made especially clear by the fact that they are used in the introduction and conclusion, both of which are distinct from the main discourse in that they deal explicitly with setting and not with speculation. The parallelism implicit in the usage offers an index to Caliban's analogical reasoning.

The use of "and, while" (l. 4), "and while" (l. 7), "and now" (l. 10), "and now" (l. 11), repeats this interest and suggests the use he is to make of parallel constructions. These particular pairs mark the connection he makes between his setting and his speculation, to the methodology the discourse will follow. Caliban's speculations reflect his situation. His discourse is an image of his relationship to the speculated Setebos. This Setebos acts upon the Real of the Quiet by making the bauble world. He is Caliban's explanation for imperfection. Caliban's discourse is a balance to Setebos in the same way that Setebos

extends Caliban's world as a balance for the "Ideal," or as the sun is a balance for the cold of the moon. And they match as "hips do grapes" (l. 148).

That Caliban's construction is dependent on the language available to him is also evident in the titles he uses. Setebos is "Lord" (l. 99) and Prosper is "lord" (l. 151). The use of Lord and lord indicates the parallel relationship between Setebos and Prosper (both are magicians and powerful; Caliban is subservient to both of them), but at the same time indicates that the two are connected primarily as Lords of their particular positions on the hierarchy. Prosper is not God, but he is favored by Setebos. By calling Prosper "lord" Caliban gives him recognition and neatly places him on the scale. Prosper is "explained," he fits into the natural theology of the island.

A similar paradox is implicit in the peculiar use of the third-person pronouns throughout the discourse.[62] By referring to Setebos as "He" and himself as "he," Caliban makes his constructions work. However, because Caliban has only these terms to work with--he has no sense of Setebos as first person, rather as storm or agent--this use of He/he permits the deductions he makes and discourages other possibilities. The usage makes Setebos the personified other, Caliban's outer.

Caliban creates a design by repetition. One object functions like another so that Caliban's imitations, as repetitions of other items, make a pattern out of the first set of

objects. "Broad leaves" (l. 152) make a book, "eyed skin of a supple oncelot" (l. 156) makes "an enchanter's robe," "a four-legged serpent" (l. 158) serves as Miranda. By balancing each item of Prosper's world with one of his own, Caliban makes another "bauble-world," but also confirms and justifies the existence of the real world. The repeated items achieve their validity by revealing the design of those imitated. Similarly, Caliban can explain the nature of Setebos by offering a description of the pattern of his own behaviour: "Taketh his mirth with make-believes: so He" (l. 169).

Caliban does not purport to fully comprehend the design. "As it likes me each time, I do: so He" and "Just choosing so" imply that choice, the preference that precedes action, is not entirely arbitrary, that there is a design or pattern behind his perception with which Setebos is in tune and of which Caliban knows only the appearance. "This might take or else/Not take my fancy" (ll. 90-91). His fancy is an exercise of will, but that act of will is, in Caliban's structures, subservient to Setebos's approval. Life is "the sport" (l. 218), a constant attempt to determine the pattern: "why, they please Him most/When. . . when. . . well, never try the same way twice" (ll. 221-222). The pattern is too large to be discerned by Caliban at his distance from Setebos.

When Caliban forgets that "You must not know His ways, and play Him off,/Sure of the issue" (ll. 224-225), he is

taught "what 'must' means" (l. 239). Setebos descends to expose his wrath so that Caliban assures himself of the accuracy of his understanding of Setebos's nature. Caliban's attempt to "have Him misconceive" is his mask:

> Wherefore he mainly dances on dark nights,
> Moans in the sun, gets under holes to laugh,
> And never speaks his mind save housed as now,
> Outside, 'groans, curses. . . .
>
> (ll. 266-269)

His mask is more than disguise--it is perspective. If "the best way to escape His ire/Is, not to seem too happy" (ll. 256-257), and if this is Caliban's approach to daily functioning, it also becomes a way of seeing and interpreting the disparate activity on the island. Caliban's mask, then, disguises his interest while at the same time it imposes a frame on events. It is self-deceiving. His mocking song becomes self-mockery, a denial of his own integrity.

Caliban keeps his mask even after the curtain falls. His soul "breaks through and exceeds the condition of the poem,"[63] but he persists in his dualistic reasoning. His perspective does not lose the form, he does not "dissolve his own particularity and the particularity of what he sees in the general stream of being."[64] He plays the game, keeping his soul and body separate. His body serves, his "soul" retaliates. His description of the storm is parallel to his initial invocation of Setebos and attributes to His design a formidable resource-

fulness, but not respect. This description is part of the process of ordering his tongue aright. It is flattery and it is token.

"Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip" (l. 293) is but a shadow of the response he promised.

> If he caught me here,
> O'erheard this speech. . .
> 'Would, to appease Him, cut a finger off,
> . . . . . .
> Or push my tame beast for the orc to taste.
>
> (ll. 269-274)

Caliban promises symbolic self-destruction, but later, when "caught," his ultimate gesture is to forgo his usual "mess of whelks." This irony is further advanced by the artificial gesture of "lieth flat": this is the position he has assumed throughout the discourse.

Caliban has postulated Setebos rather than accept an indifferent, haphazard universe. Existence of a Setebos-deity offers meaning and significance to Caliban's life. Man builds God's image in his own mind as a means to self-perpetuation. Man creates God to confirm the nature of man. The bauble-world implies a REAL, an alternate, to justify its own baubleness. In the process, then, the bauble-world is <u>realized</u>.

> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales. . .
> men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.[65]

Caliban's creativity is an effort directed toward self-realization. He achieves a position in the structure he

has erected. He can return to the world outside his cave while holding a sense of his connection to both that cave and the world. His speculations have equipped him to function more fully in his world.

The poem is a consideration of the relationship between Caliban as character-voice and his "other," the world and its representation. "Caliban Upon Setebos" is an initiating metaphor where the likeness and aptness of the depiction are generated in waves, integrating our experience and reminding us of our participation in the pulse of the universe. We are asked to feel the life within the life. We are asked to recognize the less within the greater. Eventual unity, final union or synthesis, is not part of the dramatic action--neither is it part of the poem's vision.[66] The poem does not ask that the involvement between inner and outer be harmoniously resolved. Nor does it demand that the world be seen from a particular vantage point or perspective. Rather, our experience in the world, the semblance of life, is activated.

Browning wished to consider Shelley's poetry as a "sublime fragmentary essay towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual and of the actual to the ideal."[67] He acknowledges his personal willingness to "remain content with half-knowledge," to be "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."[68] He is

Keats's "camelion Poet."[69] His interest is not with final unity but with correspondency, with relationship, with perspective. He sees the poet's station between the absolute and the concrete and he dramatizes "the connection of each with each."[70] Like Caliban, Browning plays his part "in a world where not only poets and words but all men and all their actions are plaything of

> The eternal spirit's eternal pastime--
> shaping, reshaping. . .[71]

# NOTES

1. "Caliban Upon Setebos" first appeared in Dramatis Personae and might fairly be considered more "Character in Action" than "Action in Character." It is unusual as a dramatic monologue because Caliban has only himself for an audience. See Browning's preface to Stafford for his distinction between Character in Action and Action in Character (in) The Complete Works of Robert Browning (Ohio University Press, 1970), II, 9. Mrs. Orr places the poem under "Argumentative," of the nature of reflections, Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning (1937; Kraus Reprint Co., New York, 1969), p. 178.

2. Robert Langbaum's study of the Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition, The Poetry of Experience (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Ltd., 1957), suggests the necessity for this twofold approach, but his own text offers only superficial commentary on individual poems.
Park Honan's Browning's Characters (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), deals primarily with character, but Chapter V, "The Speaker's Situation," grants at least an initial consideration to the significance of setting.

3. Much Browning criticism is explicit in its form/content split. Honan begins Browning's Characters with "The Two-fold Search: Form and Technique"; William DeVane's A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), depends almost entirely on this separation; even E.D.H. Johnson in The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1963), tends to deal with "subject-matter" vs "experimental methods." One of the most responsible Browning studies, W. David Shaw's The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1968), uses a consideration of rhetoric at the aesthetic, ethical and religious stages to overcome the split between technique and achievement, but nonetheless suffers from its stress on content. See especially the conclusion, pp. 308-17.

4. This is related to Chomsky's distinction between linguistic competence and performance. See Current Issues in Linguistic Theory (The Hague: Mouton, 1969), pp. 9-10.
What factors other than grammar of the langue influence

Caliban's performance? See Roger Fowler's The Languages of Literature (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 71, on the production and interpretation of sentences in a parole. Caliban does not have a langue, the public, conventional aspect of language, available to him due to his isolation. He has only his parole, a usage peculiar to himself. For a discussion of these Saussurian terms see Graham Hough, Style and Stylistics (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). This interest leads obviously to a study of style: what Enkirst describes as a "link between content and linguistic form." See "On Defining Style," (in) Linguistics and Style, ed. John Spender (Oxford, 1964), p. 33.

5. Eg. see Clarence Tracy, "Browning Speaks Out" (in) Browning's Mind and Art (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1968), where Tracy argues that Browning is using his Pope (of The Ring and the Book) as "an ideal personality epitomizing the basic values and feelings that the poet expects us to share with him," p. 16. Or, see Donald Smalley's commentary on "Fra Lippo Lippi","The artistic creed that the painter professes, however, was Browning's to a greater degree than it was Brother Lippo's; and the poem represents an eloquent though oblique exposition and defence of Browning's own artistic principles," p. 495 (in) Poems of Robert Browning (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1956). This type of criticism, so familiar in Browning studies, is not based on close textual study and offers little justification for its statements on Browning's intent. I hold always to Browning's statement that his poetry is "though often Lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine," Footnote to "Cavalier Tunes" (in) Dramatic Lyrics: Bells and Pomegranates, No. III, The Complete Works of Robert Browning (Ohio University Press, 1971), III, 197.

6. For an engaging study of Poem as representation see Susanne K. Langer's Feeling and Form (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), especially Chapter 13: "Poesis" and Chapter 14: "Life and its Image."

7. See C. Day Lewis, The Poetic Image (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), p. 18, for a discussion of Poem as Image: "Every poetic image. . . is to some degree metaphorical. It looks out from a mirror in which life perceives not so much its face as some truth about its face."

8. See Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, pp. 237-57, for a discussion of the mask in The Ring and the Book. See also Robert Garratt's excellent study, "Browning's Dramatic Monologue:

The Strategy of the Double Mask," Victorian Poetry, 11, No. 2 (Summer, 1973), 115-25. "Browning's method, the deliberate strategy of a character playing a character, focuses the reader's attention on the dramatic context of the poem and distinguishes the speaker's personality from that of the poet's," p. 115.

9. This sense of something behind or beyond describes the mask as the separation between the actual and the ideal. This use of the mask connects Browning's interests with those of the Romanticists. See in particular Shelley's "Lift not the painted veil" as an example of this method of separation where the veil functions as mask. For a discussion of romanticism and a poet's need to "mask the subjective origin of his idea," see Robert Langbaum's "Romanticism as a Modern Tradition" (in) The Poetry of Experience.

10. For a consideration of the "overpoem," "created in the reader's mind" as the "artistic object rendered in the combined reading" of Browning's complementary poems, see William E. Harrold's excellent study, The Variance and the Unity (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1973). Although Harrold's work deals strictly with complementary poems, his concept of the overpoem is entirely apt in describing the product rising over and above what the speaker of a dramatic monologue says.

11. Langbaum uses the terms subject and object to correspond to what I call inner/outer. See p. 209 of The Poetry of Experience. Shaw's subjective/objective dialectic separates the subject (character) from the "objective world."

12. Vehicle and tenor are I.A. Richards' terms. See The Philosophy of Rhetoric (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1936). See also Raymond Chapman, Linguistics and Literature (Littlefield, Adams & Co., 1973), pp. 81-83 and G.N. Leech, A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1969), pp. 143-156.

13. For a view of the dramatic monologues as "a series of gradual approximations to truth, each of which, not being total, is inevitably tainted with bias and falsehood," see Shaw, p. 315.

14. Cf. "All Browning's art is based on the paradoxical attempt to give form to the formless, and the central metaphor of The Ring and the Book is an attempt to express this paradox, just as the poem as a whole is an attempt to transcend it," J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 149.

15. Cf. "The general form of propositions is: This is how things are.--That is the kind of proposition that one repeats to oneself countless times. One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which one looks at it," Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), p. 48e, item 114.

16. In "East Coker" Eliot refers to the difficulty of finding a more adequate expression, "That was a way of putting it--not very satisfactory / A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion." Browning's concern from his early through his mature work was always with finding new modes and forms.

17. Robert Browning, The Ring and the Book, ed. R.D. Altick, (London: Penguin), 1971, ll. 834-836, ll. 839-840, ll. 855-857, ll. 862-863, pp. 627-628.

18. Cf. "In spite of the notions of 'common sense' imposed upon us by the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of our unpurified language, reality remains forever whole, seamless, and undivided." Aldous Huxley, Literature and Science (New York, 1963), p. 78.

19. T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men" (in) Collected Poems 1909-1962 (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), pp. 89-92.

20. See Langer's "virtual life" as the "illusion of experience," "actual" as life, "virtual" as its image (in) Feeling and Form, pp. 212-257. See also P.N. Furbank, Reflections on the Word "Image" (London: Secker & Warburg, 1970), pp. 69-70, on image, metaphor, and reality.

21. For papers on the poem as satire, see William C. Devane, Handbook, pp. 299-300; C.R. Tracy, "Caliban Upon Setebos," Studies in Philology, 35 (1938), 487-499; Lawrence Perrine, "Browning's 'Caliban Upon Setebos': A Reply," Victorian Poetry, 2 (1964), 124-127; Michael Timko, "Browning Upon Butler; or Natural Theology in the English Isle," Criticism, 7 (1965), 149.

22. For a consideration of the function of Psalm 50 and the poem as parody of the Psalm, see Arnold Shapiro's "Browning's Psalm of Hate: 'Caliban Upon Setebos,' Psalm 50, and The Tempest," Papers on Language and Literature, 8, No. 1 (Winter, 1972), 53-62.

23. The final section of the Psalm must be taken into context:

> 21 These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.
>
> 22 Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.
>
> 23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

24. The Tempest, I, ii, 367-368.

25. All line references are to the poem as reprinted in Poems of Robert Browning, ed. Donald Smalley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp. 288-295.

26. For a discussion of Caliban's parallel structures as indicative of a rudimentary intelligence, see John Howard's "Caliban's Mind," Victorian Poetry, 1 (1963), 249-257.

27. "Real" will be used in this paper to indicate mundane or actual. This "real" is the "bauble world" of l. 147, while the "real" of that line is represented throughout this discussion by the Ideal. The unnamed, ineffable possibility beyond Caliban's scope is the Real, only the shadow of which is implied. The Ideal is to the Real much as Setebos is to the Quiet.

28. See Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 123, where he proposes that "the unit of relationship is the metaphor." I use Frye's description of the working of metaphor, the "process of identification with."

29. This is Honan's argument in Browning's Characters, e.g. p. 275, "In Caliban, the abruptness of the syntactical movement itself, with its very high frequency of omissions reflects the nature of Caliban's mind." See also pp. 260, 268, 189, 234, 252.

30. Honan insists that Caliban's use of language is intended as character revelation, that the choices he makes to describe his universe describe instead how he sees the universe and that the effect is a revelation of Caliban's rough and grotesque character. This argument is finally tautological.

See also Shapiro: "The world he creates in his mind, his view of existence, is simply his reflection in a mirror," p. 62.

31. Note that the first section, lines 1-23, and the last section, lines 284-95, deal with setting, the non-speculative details of Caliban's discourse. They are appropriately set off from the "speech" by parentheses.

32. Plato, The Republic and Other Works, trans. B. Jowett (Garden City, New York: Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1960), p. 295.

33. For a useful discussion of the attempt of Poet to deal with shadows, to participate in the Ideal, see David Perkins, The Quest for Permanence (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959). Although Perkins concerns himself primarily with "The Symbolism of Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats," he contributes to our understanding of Romanticism, an age of Imagination vs. Reason.

34. Howard's "Caliban's Mind" rejects that "Browning's intent was satirical" (p. 255) because "the poem is part of Browning's way of showing that God reveals to each creature only what he is capable of understanding" (p. 257). Howard's reading depends on his understanding of Browning's religious beliefs. My interests, and the direction of this paper, are certainly other.

35. See Langbaum "Romanticism as a Modern Tradition" for a treatment of the Romantic movement away from 18th century Reason and toward Perception, "When the higher or imaginative rationality brings the ideal to the real by penetrating and possessing the external world as a way of knowing both itself and the external world," p. 24.

36. Roland Barthes, Le Degre Zero de L'Ecriture (Paris, 1953), p. 21 (Style is never anything but metaphor).

37. For instances of this see ll. 43, 97, 111, 126, 169, 199, 240.

38. The Ring and the Book, l. 863.

39. Cf. Shaw's use of "dialectic" throughout The Dialectical Temper as the method of portraying "conflicting ideas and beliefs" or "laying siege to many points of view," p. 2.

40. Browning, "Essay on Shelley" (in) The Poetical Works, ed. G.R. Stange (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), pp. 1008-1014.

41. Although allegory is a method in its own right, I am concerned with allegory as the result of continued metaphor. See Wayne C. Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 24 and 139.

42. For an alternate view on the effect of rhythm see Honan, p. 252: "the rhythm contributes to a grotesque effect at this point precisely because there is no clear emotional cause for it." Again, this restrictive analysis is due to Honan's stated interest in treating the dramatic monologues "strictly as portraits of character," p. 3.

43. Caliban's discourse begins with a supposition which he cannot substantiate empirically because it is not generated from his own experience. This places his supporting suppositions and his "reasoning" in suspicion from the onset. This is not to suggest that Caliban is an object of satire--rather that his theology is founded on something like faith and that his way of knowing begins with the subjective.

44. Martin Foss, Symbol and Metaphor in Human Experience (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1949), p. 70.

45. Herder, "Ueber den Ursprung der Sprache," Werke, ed. Suphan, V, pp. 53 ff., quoted in Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, trans. Susanne K. Langer (Dover Publications Inc., 1946), p. 85.

46. This is close to Johnson's point that Caliban, "instinctively realizing the spiritual limitations of the system of thought to which he is committed, is driven against his will to postulate a Christian deity," (p. 97). However, Caliban is not aware of the "Christian" nature of either Setebos or the Quiet as Christian. It is not so much that Caliban is "forced against his will" as he submits his will to speculation and that speculation is controlled by the range of his imagination.

47. Theseus (in) Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream, V, i, 15-17.

48. Cf. Coleridge's concept: "The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM," Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross, I, 202.

49. Cf. William Blake's vision: "This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we

shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This world of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There exist in that Eternal world the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination," "A Vision of the Last Judgment" (in) The Complete Writings of William Blake, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 605.

50. Again, for a discussion of this kind of imagination see Langbaum's "Romanticism as a Modern Tradition." Cf. Plotinus' sense of the function of the imagination, "We must bear in mind that the arts do not simply imitate the visible, but go back to the reasons from which nature comes; and further that they create much out of themselves. . ." Quoted in The Great Critics, 3rd ed., ed. J. Smith and E.W. Parks (W.W. Norton & Co., 1951), p. 5.

51. A radically different interpretation of both this poem and of Browning's interests as artist is to be found in William Whitla's The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Robert Browning's Poetry (University of Toronto Press, 1963). Whitla sees Caliban "to exist in an eternity of non-being where he can scarcely help being sub-human" (p. 43) because he has "not enjoyed the light of Christian revelation," (p. 42). Whitla acknowledges Caliban's "active imagination" (p. 41) but is unwilling to take Caliban as a serious persona. This study of Browning's religious faith moves too far from actual textual consideration which is required to "shed light" on the poems.

52. Again, this interest in the relationship of bauble and Real, actual and Now is an aspect of Browning's romanticism and is indicative of his aesthetic relationship to Shelley. See C.M. Bowra, The Romantic Imagination (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), on Shelley: "The Poet's task is to uncover this absolute real in its visible examples and to interpret them through it. . . Shelley tried to grasp the whole of things in its essential unity, to show what is real and what is merely phenomenal, and by doing this to display how the phenomenal depends on the real," p. 21.

53. See Honan's definition of "imagery" as figurative language, and "image" as an instance of it, p. 166.

54. See Christine Brooke-Rose, A Grammar of Metaphor (London:

Secker & Warburg, 1965), "Any identification of one thing with another, any replacement of the more usual word or phrase by another is a metaphor," p. 17.

55. See Stephen J. Brown, The World of Imagery (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), "We might have called it 'figurative language'. . . I have given to it the name of metaphor," p. 25.

56. See Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of the Symbolic Mode (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1964), "Allegory says one thing and means another," p. 2. See also Soren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, trans. Lee M. Capel (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), "Irony belongs to the metaphorical sphere, for the concern of the ironist is to seem other than he actually is," p. 273.

57. See Colin Turbayne, The Myth of Metaphor, rev. ed. (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), "The fable, the parable, the allegory, and the myth are like the model, extended or sustained metaphors," p. 19. For another view of the relationship of allegory to metaphor see Leech, A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry, "Allegory stands in the same relation to an individual symbol as extended metaphor does to simple metaphor--allegory might be described as a 'multiple symbol' in which a number of different symbols, with their individual interpretations, join together to make a total interpretation," p. 163. Leech's description depends on a concept of the symbol as static.

58. See Richard Ohmann, "Prolegomena to the Analysis of Style" (in) Essays on the Language of Literature, ed. Chatman & Levin (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1967), "The world in itself, the infant's world, is barren of form, without order, mere raw material for man's perceptual and verbal manipulation. The forms of thought, then, are not inherent in things as they are," p. 401. Style is the "writer's method of dissecting the universe, as expressed by the infinite number of choices he makes," p. 411.
See also Kevin Kerrane, "Nineteenth Century Backgrounds of Modern Aesthetic Criticism" (in) The Quest for Imagination, ed. O.B. Hardison, Jr. (Cleveland, Ohio: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1971), "The mind does not receive a ready-made, dependently 'objective' reality; the mind itself always enters into that which it perceives and understands. Thus 'seeing' is 'seeing as'," p. 4.
See also Wittgenstein on "seeing as," p. 197e.

59. I refer to Turbayne's sense of metaphor here, as "the presentment of the facts of one sort as if they belonged to another," p. 22. Turbayne differentiates between using a metaphor and being used by it, "Between using a model and mistaking a model for the thing modelled. The one is to make believe that something is the case; the other is to believe it," p. 22. Caliban is used by his metaphor. The "make-believe" of playing Prosper is mirth; his belief in Setebos is Life.

60. The instances of doubling, of pairs, contraries, and analogies throughout the poem are extensive. The following catalogue is only a partial list but is an indication of Caliban's methodology: "the pair"(22), "both"(4), "couple" (239), "two flies"(258), "kills both"(259), "two black painful beetles"(260), "his own self"/"Touching that other" (15/16), "other kind of water, not her life"(39), "meant other"(173), "otherwise with such another"(237), "summertime"/"wintertime"(189/19), "moon"/"sun"(24/25), Caliban/Setebos (each: so He), Caliban/Prosper (150-168), "pipe"/Caliban (117-126), Caliban/"clay bird"(77), Setebos/Quiet (132, 170, 247), "crabs"/Caliban(100), "sea-beast"/Caliban (166), "sea-beast"/Setebos(184), "Himself"/"secondself"(57), this world/"no new world"(244), Caliban/"squirrel"(226), Caliban/"urchin"(229), "cut a finger off"/"Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip"(271/293).
See also these elaborate analogies: icy fish (33-43), clay bird (68-97), prattling pipe (117-126), bauble world (143-148), all of which are discussed in the text.
See also the following compound verbs:
"touch and tickle"(9), "lives and grows"(29), "rounds and ends"(30), "hating and loving"(43), "floats and feeds"(48), "admires and mocks"(65), "bill and kiss"(70), "making and marring"(97), "found and fought"(130), "cower and couch" (158), Each pair indicates Caliban's way of perceiving.

61. See my discussion on the significance of "as a brow its eye" above.

62. For an account of this peculiar usage see E.K. Brown, "The First Person in 'Caliban Upon Setebos'," (in) Modern Language Notes, 66 (June, 1951), 392-395. Brown sees the switch from first to third person as a device used to heighten the drama "in which there is a sudden slow rise towards thinking oneself as great as one's god and a sudden fall to grovelling as a slave before that god," p. 395. Shapiro's explanation is no more illuminating, "despite his bragging, he is so afraid of being overheard that he refers to himself in the third person through most of the poem and

keeps his "I" well hidden. In a few places where he lapses into the first person, generally he conjures up some cruelty he might perform on a weaker creature," p. 59.

63. Langbaum, p. 208.

64. Langbaum, p. 209, "As in all poetry of experience, the final perception is a fusion of subject and object, an instant when the speaker sees and understands the object because, seeing it through his own perspective, he sees and understands himself in it." This, however, is not the kind of epiphany in "Caliban Upon Setebos." Caliban does not see Setebos (the objective world) as a figuration of his own mind. He is fused with the object because he is both subject and object.

65. Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell," p. 153.

66. Both Shaw and Harrold (although to a lesser extent than Shaw) complete their studies with statements that attempt to situate Browning in a religious state of some silent communion with God. Both critics are concerned with "final union" (Shaw p. 317) and "eventual unity" (Harrold p. 235). Both see The Ring and the Book as Browning's achievement of this end; both argue that his dialectical temper and complementary technique are methods only--means to that end. I question these conclusions. I see Browning's poetic preoccupation, up to and including The Ring and the Book, to be with "the way of the world" and its representation and not with religious or mystic resolution. See Browning's "Essay on Shelley" where he states: "If the subjective might seem to be the ultimate requirement of every age, the objective in its strictest sense must still retain its original value. For it is with the world, as starting point and basis alike, that we shall always have to concern ourselves; the world is not to be learned and thrown aside, but reverted to and relearned. The spiritual comprehension may be infinitely subtlized but its raw material must remain."

67. "Essay on Shelley."

68. This is Keats's "Negative Capability." See his letter to George and Tom Keats, 1817 (in) The Selected Letters of John Keats, ed. Lionel Trilling (Garden City, New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956), p. 103.

69. In a letter to Woodhouse, October 27, 1818 Keats writes: "What shocks the virtuous philosopher, delights the Camelion Poet. It does no harm from its relish of the dark side of

things anymore than from its taste of the bright one; because they both end in speculation," p. 166.

70. "Essay on Shelley."

71. C. Day Lewis, on the role of the poet, p. 157.

# CHAPTER II

## "Abt Vogler": The Dissipation of Soul

with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

Coleridge. "Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream"

And soon the fragments dim of lovely forms
Come trembling back, unite, and now once more
The pool becomes a mirror.

Coleridge. "The Picture; or, The Lover's Resolution"

Caliban's relationship to "Caliban Upon Setebos" is that of character to mirror--a mirror which reflects to the audience and viewers the world and life enacted.[1] This connection of character to the world is part of the relationship of the concrete to the absolute: the poem is that dramatization.

"Abt Vogler," also a dramatic monologue published in Dramatis Personae, is structured with the same concerns and correlations that "characterize" "Caliban Upon Setebos."[2] Both speakers outline a relationship between the character and his God. Both speeches are libations or praise-prayers. And both characters are vitally concerned with the creative process.[3] Vogler is more overtly preoccupied with the function of art; he is less playful than Caliban and less aware of his mask.

"Abt Vogler" has been treated, largely, as something other than character study or "imaginary utterance," something outside a dramatic context.[4] The poem has been described as lyric,[5] as statement,[6] and as Browning's personal testimony of religious faith.[7] Vogler's speech is applauded as "all triumphant art" while Vogler is revered as one highest on the artist

roll.[8]

My reading of the poem attempts to establish that Vogler is more an object of satire than an example of the greatest of artists. While Caliban is treated with some empathy by Browning, Vogler is portrayed as something of a charlatan.[9] I do not insist that Vogler's values and interests are necessarily at odds with those of Browning or that the poet aligns himself more closely to Caliban's voice--only that Vogler's use of language be considered in the context supplied by the poem itself.

Perhaps "Abt Vogler" is Browning's gesture at self-parody, where the poet acknowledges, once more, the vacuous gulf between perception and expression. Perhaps the poem is intended to represent a reaching towards some ungraspable phantom or perfect form. Nonetheless, the speech collapses on its narcissistic and self-seeking energy. Vogler's purported interest in his God is consistently translated in terms of self-love. His concern with the creative process and with his palace of music is replaced by his concern for his own place in the scheme of things. He is out of harmony with his location: earth to him is "alien ground."[10] His soul is dislocated.

This study will outline the disparity between Vogler's musical/verbal accomplishments and the context of his experience. It will examine, thereby, the poet's use of irony in the revelation of the distinction between what is stated and

what is implied. This involves a consideration of the nature and function of the dramatic mask,[11] both as a method of presentation and as a comment on the presentation itself--the dramatic monologue form. The concept of soul developed in the poem will be pursued as an index of the man/God, creator/created correspondence which organizes Vogler's commentary.

The Browning monologue often uses some aspect of "soul" to indicate the separation between the known (appearance) and the unknown (reality). Browning's characters regularly abuse or misuse their souls and in the process deny themselves whatever it is they seek. Their success is in direct response (and proportion) to their recognition of the value and function of the soul. When the soul is "bruised" the body suffers. And, concomitantly, the misuse of the body in efforts to "pleasure" the soul results in stasis and collapse.

In 1863 Browning added a notation to Sordello, the narrative poem he had written twenty-five years earlier: "My stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study."[12] In "Abt Vogler," published in 1864, Browning again traces the development of a soul that is lost in a journey towards self-fulfillment. The poem is metaphorically concerned with the separation between the substantial and the ephemeral. Soul represents the ephemeral; experience the substantial.[13] Vogler, who purports to seek substance, is unable to use his aspirations profitably. He is

unable to locate a form which achieves anything more than a semblance of permanence. His soul is in contest with his experience. Like Sordello he does not make use of the "body" of his experience. Both their souls prove "incomplete for Eternity:"

> The soul's no whit
> Beyond the body's purpose under it.
>
> (Sordello, Bk VI, l.563-64)

Vogler feels his art is insufficient because it cannot provide him with immortality. He is distraught by the fact that his music does not create a lasting pleasure-palace for his soul. He is obsessed with the separation between himself and his music.

This dilemma is common among Browning artists. Cleon despairs because his works do not achieve a concrete permanence for his soul. Like Vogler he cannot recognize the value of art for its own sake:

> Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
> And Aeschylus, because we read his plays!
>
> ("Cleon," ll.304-05)

The failure of the art to bring the artist substance and permanence is a reflection on the artist and not the art object. The art object exists independent of the musician, painter or poet. Vogler's obsession with the disparity between his intentions and his accomplishment is a main force in promoting

the collapse of his soul. Ironically, the absence of the substantial contributes to the demise of the ephemeral. "Abt Vogler" is built on this system of irony. The ironic method exposes the separation between appearance and reality,[14] between the soul and the life, and between the reach and grasp.

Irony may be operative in any literary context in that each item in any lexicon has denotations and connotations which may be separate.[15] Dramatic irony occurs where there is a discrepancy of any order, and, in the dramatic monologue, where there is a departure from what is said at one point to what is revealed at another.[16] Although "Abt Vogler" is a representation of the connection of the absolute to the concrete, the Ideal to the real, it is certainly also an imitation of human activity. As a dramatic poem "Abt Vogler" presents the reader with a perspective on a perspective: we are given Vogler's view of the world as well as a frame through which to examine his view. The context of his speech is in ironic juxtaposition to the speech itself. "Abt Vogler" offers a commentary on Abt Vogler. The poem presents a piece of virtual life but its method is to reveal the nature and semblance of illusion.[17]

The poem is an extended metaphor where Vogler's creativity is emblematic of the relationship between body and soul and between fact and fancy.[18] His creative effort combines with its products--the musical and verbal constructions--and

in the process illustrates the differences between the substantial aspects of body/fact and the ephemeral qualities of soul/fancy. Vogler's understanding of the value of his creativity is at odds with his creative energy. Ironically, this energy is larger than Vogler's accomplishments; his creative instincts encourage him to articulate his musical experience in terms of the speech. In spite of his personal failure Vogler's "story" is a reminder of the value and potential of the reaching creative effort.

Vogler's commentary is allegorical[19] in that it is imposed on his extemporizing. His method is symbolic of the relationship between perceptual experience and the formal presentation of it. He uses the "facts" of his experience to manufacture a relational form. He attempts to interpret experience by using an analogous "fanciful" structure. Vogler's commentary is related to the facts of his experience much like his musical ability is related to fancy. He "makes" one form in terms of another: the "beautiful building" (l. 9) he constructs is fortified and framed by the commentary. Necessarily, each structure is dependent on the other. Both are weakened by this particular interrelation. Vogler's articulation fails him and "silence resumes her reign" (l. 89) when the memory of his extemporizing fades and he is removed from the experience which initiated the verbal rendition. Literally, his commentary is a memorial to his music, another form for his soul.

His soul depends on the existence of this extraneous structure for its survival just as it depended on the palace of music for its sustenance. Both auxiliary constructions prove non-supportive.

In the Browning monologue character bears the same relation to the poem as the subjective does to the objective; the character's subjective world is related to the external world in the same way that the speaker's character is related to the poem. The character's articulation of his experience is the body/fact aspect of the poem and provides the subjective correlation to the soul and fancy of the objective world.[20] The body holds the shape and character while the soul relates the containing form to the external. This relationship is consistently ironic: the character's experience (body/fact), which is the speech itself, is metaphorically replaced by the implications of the speech. The poem is that issue.

In "Abt Vogler" the character verbally "paraphrases" his lost musical extemporizing; he constructs an imitation of his music by describing his emotional and psychological relationship to his music. This character action relates Vogler's subjective world to the objective world of creation--language and music--at large. Vogler's brand of artistry places him at odds with that objective world. His music and his commentary are linked in conflict because the very attempt to resuscitate the musical accomplishment through language creates a conflict

of forms.

As an artist Vogler is representative of that aspect of the imagination which is self-reflective. He purports to be concerned with the realms of the Ideal and the achievement of soul but his efforts lodge him in the mundane. Like Browning's Johannes Agricola, Vogler uses his meditation less as an effort to know God than to rationalize his failure to do so.

> God, whom I praise; how could I praise,
> If such as I might understand,
> Make out and reckon on his ways,
> And bargain for his love, and stand,
> Paying a price, at his right hand?
>
> ("Johannes Agricola in Meditation," ll.56-60)

Like Agricola, Vogler's impulse to "know" God and to live the godly life is undercut by his dogmatism and arbitrary claim to salvation. The quasi-mystical role he assumes early in his speech reverses its direction and comes back resounding with illusions.[21] This role is part of his dramatic mask. His function as character is to reveal the limitations of the particular structure and position he represents.

Like Caliban Abt Vogler has only himself for an audience; but while Caliban's speech is an exertion towards self-discovery, Vogler's is a vehicle for self-justification. His audience is not part of the subjective world but an extension of its speaker.[22] Vogler offers his monologue "after he has

been extemporizing upon the musical instrument of his invention." Vogler is no longer creating music; he is providing his understanding of the creative process. In so doing, he presents himself as an artist who uses language in an attempt to comprehend his relationship to his God and to heaven. This, too, is a feature of his dramatic mask. Although the metaphor he constructs uses the mechanics of the creative process, in actuality he is concerned with the disparity between the Ideal to which he aspires and the real which he attains.[23] His commentary becomes a rationalization of that disparity.

Vogler builds a verbal artifice which is in ironic juxtaposition to the form he purports to describe.[24] Although his commentary is a reflection and recollection of his musical experience, his description is in the present tense ("the manifold music I build," l. 1). Ironically, the verbal structure is metaphorically equated to the dissipated music. This manifold music is described as "structure brave" (l. 1), "beautiful building" (l. 9), and as "palace" (l. 11). What is constructed, however, is made of language[25] and attains the permanence Vogler wished for his music. Vogler's discourse is structured with "musical" prosody[26] but this feature of the language-building is effective in creating an ironic perspective on what he actually does describe.

Vogler wishes that the building which his "keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise" (l. 10) would "tarry"

(l. 9) like the palace Solomon built "to pleasure the princess he loved" (l. 8). He uses the first two stanzas to relate this wish that the ephemeral music become substantial. The second verse is an extension of the wish developed in the first; it completes the analogy between Vogler's organ music and Solomon's pleasure-palace. In the third, Vogler has returned to the experience his keys provoked. He has lost his initial purpose in that he begins to lapse into lamentation for the lost experience rather than describe the creation of the music. In the fourth and fifth verses Vogler has left his music completely and has succumbed to recollection of the visionary climax his music erected. The remainder of the discourse is devoted to a series of justifications for the collapse of the "beautiful building" and the dissipation of his soul.

Vogler acknowledges that his creative effort was for the fulfillment of "the pride of [his] soul" (l. 24), and that he instructed his notes to lift the musical walls so that his soul would bear the reward. His soul functions in a dual role as both the symbol of his creative energy and the object to be glorified. The "pride" of his soul, the artifice, and the "wish of [his] soul", the creative desire (l. 41), are linked so that each might be identified with the divine "flash of the will that can" (l. 49). By making this connection Vogler identifies with his creator but unwittingly ranks the "pinnacled glory" (l. 24) his music reaches with his own status as a

created object, incapable of attaining the permanence of God and heaven. This is the irony of his predicament as creator that he does not permit himself to acknowledge. Although he argues that God's "will" is capable of greater creative effort than man's mere "wish," he does not realize that his despair is the result of wishing he could possess sustaining will. This relationship between wishing and willing stretches the gulf between the Ideal and the real, forcing Vogler's soul to oscillate in unresolved suspension.

Because Vogler's interest is towards self-glorification, he views his keys as slaves, subservient to his needs and legislation. His keys, like Solomon's "legions of demons" (l. 4) are "importuned" to take "a blind plunge down to hell" (l. 13) so that they will effectively "heighten their master his praise" (l. 12). But the roots of his palace are in hell--"fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs" (l. 16) and the "rampired walls of gold as transparent as glass" (l. 19) are weakly fortified. Vogler discovers that the palace is not well based, that it proves insubstantial because it is not well founded. Therefore, the "gone thing [had] to go" (l. 60). The implication is that Vogler lacks faith--that he has built his house on sand.

Vogler uses a series of reductions to reveal, ironically, the vulgar, self-gratifying value of his art. "Armies of angels that soar" give way to "legions of demons that lurk"

(l. 4). Eternity is reduced to an hour: "eternity affirms the conception of an hour" (l. 76).[27] "Man" is reduced to "brute, reptile" and finally to "fly" (l. 5). As Vogler's power declines, so does his ambition. This declining capacity becomes a comment on the potential. The "passion" that "made effort" to "scale the sky" (l. 28) in his original vision is later described as the "passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky" (l. 78). What he willed in the first stanza he can no longer even dream of in the last. When Vogler says, "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist" (l. 73), he indicates that he is further from good in dreaming than he is in willing. Ironically, the conversion system he appeals to for confirmation of his faith moves from the splendid to the mediocre. Gold becomes glass and the Ideal moves to the mundane.

> Well it is earth with me; silence resumes her reign.
>
> (l. 89)

This reversal of traditional alchemical direction indicates the self-deceiving aspect of his ambition. What he says is in ironic contradistinction to what he would have himself believe. Vogler contends that the real substance and "not its semblance" (l. 74) awaits him in the Ideal realm beyond the earthly confine, but he is involved in delusion and rationalization.

> There shall never be one lost good! What was shall
> live as before;
> The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
> What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much
> good more;
> On earth the broken arcs; in heaven, a perfect round.
>
> (11. 69-72)

"Good" and "beauty" are potential concepts in so far as they are manufactured in response to the absence of their effects.

Vogler presents himself more as conjurer than musician. He commissions his organ to build a dome in air,[28] "as a runner tips with fire/. . . Outlining round and round Rome's dome from space to spire" (11. 21-23). Like Solomon, he wishes to command legions of demons when he names "the ineffable Name" (1. 7). Like Solomon Vogler uses his art to create a pleasure house and to promote self-aggrandizement. And like Marlowe's Doctor Faustus Vogler is an overreacher: "swoln with cunning of a self-conceit."[29] Vogler, too, trades his soul in his passion to "scale the sky" (1. 28). And like Faustus, Vogler is not satisfied with the value he gets for the price of his soul. His creativity is not large enough to grant him a sustained vision of the union of heaven and earth. Because he regards his soul to be an aspect of that creativity and because his musical structure is a "house" (1. 36) for his soul, the very completion of his composition results in his soul's dissipation.

Vogler's reading audience, like the speaker in "A Toccata of Galuppi's," is compelled to question the nature and quality of commitment the composer has made. Neither Vogler nor Galuppi is dedicated to the creation of a truly soaring edifice for its own sake. Both "play" at composition, inadvertently manipulating it towards their own ends. We are forced to feel the cold irony the "music" leaves:

> The soul, doubtless, is immortal--where a soul can be discerned
>
> (l. 36)

and

> What of soul was left, I wonder, when the kissing had to stop?
>
> ("A Toccata," l. 42)

In keeping with his delusions, Vogler insists his accomplishment is his "palace of music" (l. 57) and he suggests that this palace is the seat of his soul. The palace is imposed on earth, based in hell, reaching to heaven. It is engendered by "a wish of [his] soul" (l. 41); it represents "the pride of [his] soul" (l. 24). Vogler relates his soul to his music and to the musical instrument in a manner that links these features to the world structures of earth, hell, and heaven. The phrases, "All through my keys" (l. 41),"All through my soul" (l. 42), "All through music and me" (l. 43), correspond to the trilogy pattern of body/soul/God threaded through the speech.

Because Vogler is inspired with major concern for his soul and its relationship to God, he cannot find sustaining solace on earth or in the performance of the "body" or keys.

Vogler's keys are commissioned to build the music which his soul wishes to create. The keys are instruments, aspects of his organ, and are identified with Solomon's demons. They are "slave" to some purpose outside their awareness. They are building blocks without volition, made to "obey" (l. 2). They do not create but serve. Vogler says it was his "keys in a crowd" which raised his "beautiful building." These keys have no independence; they are parts only, contributions to a whole.

> One and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
> Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
>
> (ll. 11-12)

The keys bear the same relationship to the music as the palace of music does to the world. Both are devices used to construct larger entities which hold little or no resemblance to the parts. Both are in service and their effort is to praise. Vogler declares that the keys are

> Eager to do and die, yield each place to the rest
>
> (l. 20)

but he cannot accept that in accord with the same conditions

his palace of music must give way as well.

Like Tennyson's persona in "The Palace of Art," Vogler is out of harmony with his own tune. He does not recognize that his palace can never be more than a manifestation of the transitory experience. He celebrates his accomplishment as if it were a trophy. Vogler's collapsed experience and the ensuing rationalization is emblematic of his loss of soul. As his experience and its recollection thin, his soul loses its house; as his reach into cosmic explanations becomes didactic, his soul joins the transitory music. Without a supporting structure, Vogler cannot maintain a soul.

The poem is a parody of Tennyson's "The Palace of Art." It mocks the sentiment which is sufficiently ostentatious to construct such a palace and then sufficiently self-indulgent to mourn its transformation.

> I built my soul a lordly pleasure-house,
> Wherein at ease for aye to dwell.
> I said, "O Soul, make merry and carouse,
> Dear Soul, for all is well."
>
> ("The Palace of Art," verse I)

Tennyson's poem purports to reveal the vanities of such an artist. Its speaker finally attempts self-expiation.

> Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
> So lightly, beautifully built:
> Perchance I may return with others there
> When I have purged my guilt.
>
> ("The Palace of Art," last verse)

Browning ridicules the motives of both the poet and the speaker. His Vogler stands in the same relation to Tennyson as Vogler's commentary does to "The Palace of Art." Vogler is like the poet in that his artistry is expended on issues that are intrinsically self-destructive and unresolved except by moral or didactic departures. Vogler's commentary is like "The Palace of Art" in that it reflects the composer's confusion involving the body/soul/spirit separation as well as his willingness to depend on moralistic generalities.

Vogler is ridiculed to the extent that he offers judgments on the purpose of art. His motives are revealed so that his perspective can become the definition of interest. His commentary creates his "portrait"[30] and the portrait reveals the limitations inherent in his judgments and constructions. The poem is the "play" of the speaker in his world; it reflects the possibilities beyond the speaker's grasp and at the same time defines those "world" possibilities in terms of the general texture of the speaker's life. The poem is not merely a censure of Vogler's methods and perceptual movements; it describes the circularity of perception and experience.

As Vogler's language defines his expression and as his expression defines his perception, so, too, is his soul confined by his palace of music:

> Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.
>
> (l. 24)

As his palace is lodged between heaven and hell, but not on earth, so is his soul. Although the boundaries and distinctions between his soul, his music, and his palace fluctuate throughout the speech, clearly the separations dictate that the perfection he seeks can only be known in terms of the desire he feels. His commentary is a eulogy to the inspiration and the soul which has "passed through the body and gone" (l. 37).

Vogler cannot resolve the disparity between the Ideal and the real precisely because he cannot separate the semblance from the actual. His subject is his object. His palace is his soul. Like Caliban, Vogler conceives in object pairs; he matches one item with another.[31] If heaven is "a perfect round," then earth represents "the broken arcs" (l. 71). He describes his philosophical quandaries with similar dual vision:

> Sorrow is hard to bear, and doubt is slow to clear.
>
> (l. 85)

Vogler is committed to this linkage method of perception because he believes "effect proceeds from cause" (l. 45).[32] One-half of the world responds to complete the gesture begun by the other half:

> the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort
> to reach the earth,
> As the earth had done her best, in my passion
> to scale the sky.
>
> (l. 27-28)

This is similar to the sentiment expressed by Browning's Francis Furini:

> Type needs anti-type
> As night needs day, as shine needs shade, so good
> Needs evil: how were pity understood
> Unless by pain?
>
> ("Parleying with Francis Furini, X, ll. 132-38)

Both characters confine themselves to a dialectical movement from "A" to "non-A" in an attempt to neatly categorize the disparate elements of their experience. Vogler does not use his contraries to proceed, to grow, or to propel his soul forward in any progressive terms.[33]

Although Vogler separates the world into two major factions--created and creator, some objects in that world participate in both functions. The divisions alienate the art object from its composer. Vogler describes the tools and individual items of the creation as something other than created or creator. Solomon's "legions of demons" may "pile him a palace" (l. 8) but they are neither part of the finished structure nor acknowledged creators. The "palace of music"

that Vogler builds exists and then does not exist precisely because the conception and resulting form are temporal--distinct from the creator as soon as issued. Vogler describes this separation as "the process so wonder-worth" (l. 45). He argues the superiority of music for this reason: either a painting or a poem would have kept its shape but lost the steps of its process. Because color or language or line are retained aspects of the creation, they are different from the notes issued through the keys. Ironically, it is the absence of such sustaining features in his palace of music which prompts both the discourse itself and the despair resounding throughout.

Just as the notes are the vehicle for the presentation of the music, character is the vehicle for the presentation of the action in the poem itself. Vogler does not include the work of his keys in his pattern of creator/created and therefore he cannot locate himself in the production. Truly, he rests on "alien ground." He seems unaware that he performs through the touch of his keys; he calls them to their work but only through them may he be heard. Vogler's intention is to achieve praise and glory through self-expression but it is his organ which"make[s] the cry [his] maker cannot make" ("Caliban Upon Setebos," l. 124).

Vogler expects that his music, loud and long, should bring him permanence by creating a house for his soul. When the palace collapses, he turns to the "ineffable Name" (l. 65),

the other creator:

> Builder and maker, thou, of houses not made with hands!
>
> (l. 66)

He again seeks the permanence Solomon achieved when "he named the ineffable Name" (l. 7). Vogler is still the conjurer-artist, looking to find personal security in some ultimate, Ideal, form. He borrows from Paul's "Second Epistle" to supplement his sense of incompletion:

> For we know that if our earthly
> house of this tabernacle were dissolved
> we have a building of God, an house not
> made with hands, eternal in the heavens.
>
> (II Corinthians, 5:1)

Vogler attempts to justify the dissipation of his palace and the loss of his vision by subscribing to faith in the ephemeral:

> For the things which are seen <u>are</u> temporal;
> but the things which are not seen <u>are</u> eternal.
>
> (II Corinthians, 4:18)

He secures his faith in something beyond his conception, in a time

> When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.
>
> (l. 76)

He expects eternity, the other life, the world of God, to prove

the value of his hour. In similar juxtaposition, God's house will confirm the validity of his palace. God's macrocosm will prove the worth of Vogler's microcosmic existence. The semblance will prove the real.

Ironically, Vogler declares that his music was in God's realm, "The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard" (l. 77). His vision was Godly and so, to regain it, he must enter eternity. He expects this other life to reflect his vision and to sustain it for him. Beauty, good and power, in true form, "not its semblance but itself" (l. 74), will be manifest. Although Vogler believes that his music has merely afforded him a glimpse of the magnificence of God's kingdom, he is not interested in communion with his creator. He wants to see again his palace of music, to revitalize his vision of "the wonderful Dead" (l. 37) and those "Presences plain in the place. . . fresh from the Protoplast" (l. 34). His request for immortality is not so that he can sit at God's hand but so that he might escape the "alien ground" of earth and the "C Major of this life" (l. 96). He descends from his visionary experience to his "resting-place" (l. 95); he relinquishes his life to wait for a return to "the glare and glow" (l. 33).

Vogler's music is "sent up to God" (l. 79) by mistake. The music escapes him; it leaves the ground "to lose itself in the sky" (l. 78). It is not offered as praise to glorify

God. Rather, this "palace" is to be his own house. Vogler is interested in a one-to-one relationship with his God only after his palace dissipates. He sees himself as "the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,"(l. 49) because this links his creative powers to the whole of creation. His ability is increased by the association and the lapse of his vision is justified. Vogler sees himself not as an agent of God but at one with him. He does not recognize the contradiction in his construction: if he is the finger of God and if his fingers activate the keys, then he, like his keys, is in service. In terms of his own structure, he is an overreacher. He assumes the same creative capacity he attributes to God. He does not understand the lesson he preaches:

> each tone in our scale is naught;
> It is everywhere in the world. . .
> Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
> And there! Ye have heard and seen: consider and bow the head!
>
> (ll. 53-56)

Vogler expects his "gift" to be an ability to construct something larger than a series of sounds. He takes three sounds so that he can "frame, not a fourth sound, but a star" (l. 52). He expects to be capable of erecting his "beautiful building" in the shape of a star. Ironically, the brilliant burning and nebulous star mass can never sustain the structural solidity of a building.[34] Vogler uses another fire image to describe

the construction of his palace: "as a runner tips with fire. . . Outlining round and round" (ll. 21-23). He does not recognize the dual nature of the fire or the star which is to illuminate by destruction. He is the scientist who can only anticipate the extremities of his universe with limited measuring devices. His inadequacy is not a comment on the width and breadth of the universe.

Either metaphor of the star as harmony or the star as edifice serves as a reflection of the desperate eagerness of Vogler's attempt to hold in language what he could not retain in extemporizing. The mysterious qualities of "star" are most appropriately compared to Vogler's vision of the union of earth and sky where

> Novel splendors burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
> Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
> Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
> For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.
>
> (ll. 29-32)

Vogler's music begets the vision but it is not identified with it. His "structure brave" activates Nature so that

> What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon,
>
> (l. 39)

but it is not the experience itself. Vogler uses his musical composition to achieve another state. He needs the process and activity of the music to attain perfection.

> And what is,--shall I say, matched both? For I was
> made perfect too.
>
> (l. 40)

No other artistic expression would serve as well because the method is more significant than the resulting structure. Vogler proposes that if he "had painted the whole" (l. 43) or "written the same" (l. 45), he would not have managed the same achievement. Ironically, his success is not the "beautiful building" he raised but the process of construction. He asks for permanence for the creative process and not for the object itself. Like Caliban he feels

> No use at all i' the work, for work's sole sake;
> 'Shall some day knock it down again.
>
> ("Caliban Upon Setebos," ll. 111-12)

Vogler's rationalization begins as soon as he is removed from the experience initiated by the music. He attempts to rebuild his palace verbally so that he might recreate that experience. The failure to do so causes him to seek "the gone thing" in realms outside both his experience and comprehension. He patterns this "elsewhere" in terms of the lost vision:

What was, shall live as before;
The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound.

(ll. 69-70)

The result of this movement towards perfection is that earth comes to represent silence--Vogler's life is reduced to a frozen potential.

I feel for the common chord again,
Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor.

(ll. 91-92)

At this point, clearly, Vogler is an object of satire. His resolution is not to "redeem from decay the visitations of divinity in man"[35] but to wait out his existence until the "by-and-by" when he might hear his music and see his vision again.[36]

Vogler rationalizes the "logical" dissipation of the extemporized music by supposing that God has some justifiable reason or plan for the pain:

Why else was the pause prolonged but that singing
might issue thence?
Why rushed the discords in but that harmony should
be prized?

(ll. 83-84)

He interprets the collapse of his palace to be indicative of the imperfection which is his life on earth. Because he supposes that this life is merely an experience of "the broken

arcs," Vogler is willing to trust his soul to heaven and thereby lose it. Confronted with no method which sustains or defines the creative process, Vogler is impelled to justify his own "failure" in terms of the curious will of God. All evil and all pain are equated with the collapse of his "palace of music" (ll. 70-72). Christ-like, Vogler takes on the world's burden and in a state of martyrdom waits his rebirth. He claims some secret knowledge that ranks him higher than painter or poet:

> God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
> The rest may reason and welcome: 'tis we musicians know.
>
> (ll. 87-88)

His very method, the fact of his speech, argues the lie of this knowledge. Vogler's concept of God has been created to compensate for his loss of his soul. God exists as a substitute for the process that by its very nature cannot endure. Vogler's faith evolves out of the gulf left by the elapsed process. The deductions Vogler makes based on this faith are descriptive primarily of the narcissistic quality of his perceptions.[37]

Vogler subscribes to the same method Caliban uses to explain the ways of God to himself. Vogler compensates for his fall from inspiration by aligning himself with "the same, same self, same love, same God" so that "what was, shall be" (l. 64). Like Caliban he posits a "reality" that justifies the known: God, eternity, and Good exist because discord, failure, and agony occupy such a large space in his life.

Vogler uses his fancy to create fact. He depends on the same "reason" he disparages to intuit the features his fancy demands:

> And what is our failure here but a triumph's evidence
> For the fulness of the days?
>
> (ll. 81-82)

He demands that meaning and purpose be attached to process. He can accept the dissipation of his composition only if he can construe the passing to indicate some future return to greater fulness and glory.

Vogler's movement out of pain, effected by the knowledge God "whispers in the ear" (l. 87), is artificial. He violates his "knowledge" by committing himself to stasis and mediocrity:

> I will be patient and proud and soberly acquiesce.
>
> (l. 90)

He submerges his will and, effectively, his life and surrenders to a system he only pretends to understand. Fancy and fact have been intermingled and distorted to such an extent that Vogler is prepared to use the same keys that built his palace to "sink to the minor" (l. 92).

Vogler's descent to earth provokes a kind of lethargy that increases the dislocation he causes his soul. As he cannot live with his music, he must create an object/concept which justifies even the possibility of musical composition.

Ironically, his music must then be a gesture of praise made towards some larger construction. The analogy of the palace of music to sexual experience is significant here because it emphasizes the necessity of collapse. The music builds in majesty to a climax, dissipates into melancholy, and is resolved and soothed through sleep. Sleep provides the transition between the musical experience and the mediocrity of life. But ironically, Vogler suggests that sleep is his response to the loss of "the heights" (l. 94). His finish is not to restore life but to deny it. Sleep provides the transition not to re-awakening but to dreams of heavenly perfection. His creative/procreative role is resigned.

Browning ridicules Vogler's misuse of his powers and talents. Vogler's wish for the "perfect round" as a compensation for the "broken arcs" supplies the same kind of irony to the poem as Pippa's protestation--in spite of all evidence to the contrary--that

> God's in his heaven
> All's right with the world!
>
> (Pippa Passes, "Morning," ll. 227-28)

And just as Pippa's naivete is in constant ironic contrast to the havoc and pain she passes, Vogler's stated hopes and aspirations reveal the disparity between what he achieves and what is potential. This potential is not to be sought in heaven.

Pippa's single day is hers not to squander but to use and Vogler's music is his to build.

Pippa finishes her day singing the mocking hymn she first used to bless her New Year:

> All service ranks the same with God -
> With God, whose puppets, best and worst,
> Are we: there is no last nor first.
>
> ("Night," ll. 294-96)

Vogler concludes his speech with much the same sentiment, equally oblivious to the implication that he is "the finger of God," a puppet without substantial will, chained to service.[38] We are again reminded of Galuppi's ironic message: "souls shall rise in their degree" ("A Toccata," l. 38).

Browning uses the ironic framework of a character in a "religious" disguise in several other monologues. The speakers, supposedly, are concerned with God in his heaven and the security of their own position on the chain between the "broken arcs" and the "perfect round." They reveal themselves to be in some state of self-deception or dissembling behaviour, behind a dramatic mask.

The relationship between God and man delineated in "Abt Vogler" is again evident in "Saul." And again this poem is structured by a series of ironic correlations which reveal the speaker's curious mismanagement and misunderstanding of the value and function of his soul. David's mission is to

bring salvation of the flesh to King Saul but his effort is diverted along the way and he pursues instead the "whole round of creation" ("Saul," l. 238). David separates this world into doubles, contraries, and dialectical pairs.[39]

> In our flesh grows the branch of this life, in our soul it bears fruit.
>
> (l. 150)

He relates the fruit of his soul to his fancy and to the powers of imagination. He describes the unknown world beyond "this life" in terms of the known; like Caliban he explains his experience and his hopes for permanence by assuming the rightness of such a structure in a world elsewhere. Like Vogler David "imagined" "perfection" (l. 249 and l. 248). The style of his vision comments on its validity:

> Then fancies grew rife
> Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep
> Fed in silence--above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
> And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
> Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt the hill and the sky:
> And I laughed--"Since my days are ordained to be passed with my flocks,
> Let me people at least, with my fancies, the plains and the rocks.
> Dream the life I am never to mix with, and image the show
> Of mankind as they live in those fashions I hardly shall know!"
>
> (ll. 136-143)

David shares his understanding of his vision--the creative process and purpose--"alone with [his] sheep" (l. 201). But the "truth" of his recognitions and deductions is held in question by this context.

David uses his soul to beget his vision just as Vogler so used his music. David enlists his creativity not just "to save and redeem and restore" Saul (l. 277), but to explain "the future beyond the eye's scope" (l. 90). Although David acknowledges he is "a work of God's hand" designed to "report as a man might of God's work" (l. 242),[40] he drops his harp and song to speculate and lecture on "this abounding experience, this deity known" (l. 255). His energy pursues more than "some gift of [his] own" (l. 256); he seeks glory and praise--to "know that [his] service is perfect" (l. 299).

David finds his perfection in a Christ who reflects David's own qualities.

> 'Tis the weakness in strength, that I cry for! my
> flesh, that I seek
> In the Godhead! I seek and I find it. . .
> A Face like my face . . . a Man like to me,
> Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever: a Hand like
> this hand.
>
> (ll. 308-311)

David uses his soul's fancy to project a vision of an all-loving, human Christ who will disperse justice and rewards to the worthy. He convinces himself that he will be gratified for the aid he gave to Saul: "He who did most, shall bear most" (l. 307).

David equates his song/art with "spell" and "charm" (l. 128), all of which he uses to create the "soul-wine" (l. 175) Saul must drink so that his eyes can reach beyond "the actual" (l. 176). David's language reflects the delusions, euphoria and inebriation of his vision. Both the vision and the conclusions he constructs from it are designed to cope with the despair he experiences when he cannot restore Saul to his original strength. David creates a bauble world beyond "the dream, the probation, the prelude" (l. 281) of his world in an effort to explain the pain of life. He confirms "the next world's reward and repose, by the struggles in this" (l. 286). David intuits that the reason he was unable to remake Saul is that the "creature" must not "surpass the Creator" (l. 268). This world and its creatures are but shadows of the divine: "'tis not what man Does which exalts him, but what man Would do!" (l. 295). Ironically, he reads the perfection beyond more as a reflection of man's potential than as an extension of his deeds.

While Vogler moves from his vision of heaven and earth into lethargy and despair, David speeds from despair to frenzied delirium. Just as he imaged a Christ who represents his own narcissistic figure, he reads the world to be a reflection of his emotional state:

> The whole earth was awakened, hell loosed with her crews;
> And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot

Out in fire the strong pain of pent knowledge.

(ll. 318-20)

Although David's art and the vision procreated sustain his soul and his sense of harmony with the universe more effectively than Vogler's do, David is also involved in a similar state of delusion and rationalization. The constructions both characters make are used to fill the reach to "God's throne from man's grave" (l. 198) with "wonder and dread" (l. 329).

The cosmological aspirations of Vogler and David recur in "An Epistle," where the "not-incurious" Karshish (l. 2) attempts to resolve the tension and conflict he feels in response to Lazarus' resurrection.

> Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth,
> Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing heaven.
>
> (ll. 141-42)

Karshish uses the separation between "man's flesh" (l. 3) and that "puff of vapor from his mouth, man's soul" (l. 6)[41] to illustrate the disparity between God, "Creator and sustainer of the world" (l. 269), and man, "the picker-up of learning's crumbs" (l. 1).

Karshish witnesses how a "just-returned and new-established soul" (l. 94), only holds some "thread of life" (l. 178). Lazarus is fractured by the simultaneous rising and sinking he experiences. He waits for

> that same death which must restore his being
> To equilibrium, body loosening soul
> Divorced even now by premature full-growth.
>
> (11. 206-08)

Lazarus has seen too much; his "spiritual life" is in direct conflict with "the earthly life" (l. 183). As a result of the salvation his body suffers, his life is in limbo. He is dumb, "apathetic" (l. 226), and "as harmless as a lamb" (l. 232).

Neither Lazarus nor Karshish make much use of the resurrection. Lazarus is trapped between the "wearied soul and worried flesh" (l. 114); Karshish is unable to cope with the implications of some power so far outside the grasp of his science/art.

Saint Praxed's Bishop is also trapped between the soul and flesh, an impostor whose "religious" values are in conflict with his materialistic pretensions. His reach is beyond his grasp not because he has entered a world unknown to earthly man (as in Lazarus' case), but because his material ambitions elude him. His tombstone will be "clammy squares" of sweating gritstone (l. 116) and not the lapis he would have "delight the world" (l. 118).

The dying bishop identifies his soul with the lapis lazuli (l. 105), the "blue lump" he would have his sons "poise between [his] knees/Like God the Father's globe on both his hands" (ll. 47-48). This lump is the organizing image of the

poem. It is

> Big as a Jew's head cut off at the nape,
> Blue as a vein o'er the Madonna's breast.
>
> (ll. 43-44)

As a symbol of both his soul and the world in God's hands, the lump connects the macrocosmic creation with the bishop's life and "pilgrimage" (l. 101). It is ironic that the bishop would have his knees perform the same function as God's hands. The implications are complete with disrespect for anything but the sensual aspects of the spiritual life-after-death. The bishop expects death to be a continuation of the life. He will "hear," "see," "feel," and "taste" (ll. 81-83). His concern for his soul and for salvation is only so that he can perpetuate his sensual and "ungodly" pursuits. Still, the bishop's aspirations are in keeping with the church-life reflected about him. He will be repaid in kind for his "evil and brief" (l. 101) exploitations; alive or dead, experience is much the same: "the world's a dream" (l. 9).

The bishop's solipsistic vision is not unlike that of these other grasping "religious" characters. And he, too, reaps what he sows. The world reflects his expectations. The irony of the context surrounding the bishop's ambitions is no more overt than the affection Browning displays towards the character. His attack is gentle. This bishop is not deceiving himself as to the working of the world. He takes the sacraments

literally: God is "made and eaten" (l. 82). The sensation he feels in his "church for peace" (l. 122) only "seems" (l. 13). He does not compromise in his first and final question--"Life, how and what is it?" (l. 10). His energies are more honest and life-giving than those of Vogler, David, or Bishop Blougram.

Blougram's "religious" perspective is in ironic contrast to the entire context of his speech. His stated interests are in conflict with the implications. He pretends to be interested primarily in the relationship between faith and doubt, yet he shows himself to be obsessed with material comfort and splendor, gain, Gigadibs' opinion of him, personal power, and status.[42] Like Vogler he justifies his conduct in terms of some behavior norm he has discovered and made law.

> I act for, talk for, live for this world now
> As this world prizes action, life and talk.
>
> (ll. 769-770)

Like Caliban, Vogler, and David, Blougram splits his life into here and there, now and then, "black and white" (l. 212), and "body and soul" (ll. 19-20). Like the bishop ordering his tomb Blougram's concern for his soul is considerably outweighed by his concern for his sensual gratification. Both pleasure their bodies at the expense of their souls.[43] According to Blougram, Shakespeare's "soul's works" (l. 508) are not so gratifying as the former's incense or wine. This is his core justification for his materialism.

For Blougram, any art misses the reality of life: "Paint a fire, it will not therefore burn" (l. 566). He is not an "artist whose religion is his art" (l. 939). His "long crumpled" mind (l. 979) is that of a character substantially without imagination; he is without "a mad ideal in reach" (l. 936). He must rely on the testimony of his human comforts to confirm the nature of his "reality." These same comforts are also used to declare the virtue and value of his position of faith; he rests on dogma for any further justification.

> God means mankind should strive for and show forth
> Whatever be the process to that end.
>
> (ll. 622-23)

Blougram is unaware of the irony implicit in such manufactured contentions. Ironically, his speech is an unacknowledged attempt to emulate the artist whose religion is his art.

Blougram mocks Gigadibs' belief that "the trying shall suffice,/The aim, if reached or not, makes great the life" (l. 491-92). Blougram argues that the body is more comforted because he does not reach beyond his capabilities. He contradicts himself saying that he has achieved an equilibrium--"a soul and a body that exact/A comfortable care" (l. 320-21), because he indulges in his creature wants. Later he acknowledges that this is "no way of holding up the soul" (l. 370), but after all, he remembers, the soul is a subject more properly fit for the literary critic's "pencil-scratch" (ll. 946-47).

Blougram moves comfortably from contradiction to contradiction, from faith to doubt, leaving his soul between God and Satan "i' the middle" (ll. 694-96). Like Vogler he justifies his stance by appealing to the hereafter.

> Next life relieves the soul of body, yields
> Pure spiritual enjoyment. . .
> Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
> May be to make the next life more intense?
>
> (ll. 776-79)

God made the puzzle; the truth will be revealed when "we can bear its stress" (l. 657).

In a style similar to Caliban's, Blougram explains the fact of evil in terms of his own inability to see and know God.

> Some think, Creation's meant to show him forth:
> I say it's meant to hide him all it can,
> And that's what all the blessed evil's for.
>
> (ll. 652-54)

Blougram reveals that he is not fit or equipped to cope with the demands made by his soul. He, too, waits Vogler's "by-and-by." He resigns his soul and his imagination, pretending that the "common problem" is

> not to fancy what were fair in life
> Provided it could be,--but, finding first
> What may be, then find out now to make it fair
> Up to our means.
>
> (ll. 88-91)

Blougram is no overreacher. He does not acknowledge his desire and drive to excel.

> My business is not to remake myself,
> But make the absolute best of what God made.
>
> (ll. 354-55)

The ironic treatment of the bishop's motives is explicit. Each justification underlines the weakness of his limited imagination and his thwarted soul.

Blougram's relation to other characters presented at moments of "religious" reflection is that he, too, is involved in deception and rationalization. He is self-destructive, purporting to understand a game he is not fully aware of playing. He unwittingly links himself to the Pope in his all-the-world's-a-stage analogy (ll. 66-77). He is the actor imitating Death "with pasteboard crown, sham orbs and tinselled dart" (l. 68).

Blougram also seeks a God in his own image: "what else seeks God--nay, what else seek ourselves?" (l. 635). Ironically, Blougram's entire apology takes the step he declares he dare not take--his discourse makes "Fichte's clever cut at God himself" (l. 744). God is seen as an idea in Blougram's mind, created to fill out the gap between this life and the next.

> why, what else do I,
> Who want, am made for, and must have a God
> Ere I can be aught, do aught?
>
> (ll. 845-47)

Blougram is the "atheistic priest" (l. 823) whose life style demands some concept of God both to justify his professional existence and to account for all otherwise unresolvable features of his experience.

Caliban, Vogler, and David share this dilemma. Each character, in the attempt to discern the largest aspects of the creation in which he finds himself, creates a creator to explain or justify the fabric of his world. This relationship between God and man is not the one celebrated. God is a metaphor for the larger repetition of activity outside the speaker's own sphere. The creation of God is part of the character's artistry. Ironically, the relationship proposed becomes larger than the art itself.

Cleon, self-professed master of all arts, explains the progress of the artist in studying the soul:

> I have written three books on the soul,
> Proving absurd all written hitherto,
> And putting us to ignorance again.
>
> (ll. 57-59)

Cleon's despair results from his recognition that his soul is unsatisfied because his art does not support or fortify "the pleasure-house,/Watch-tower and treasure fortress of the soul" (ll. 231-32). This symbol of the "beautiful building" or tower, representing the soul in its outward-bound discovery or quest, appears again in "'Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'."

> What in the midst lay but the tower itself?
> The round squat turret, blind as the fool's heart,
> Built of brown stone, without a counterpart
> In the whole world.
>
> (ll. 181-84)

Abt Vogler, David, Johannes Agricola, and the bishops might well be the characters "ranged along the hill-sides" (l. 199) waiting for Childe Roland. There is no God, no counterpart for the soul. The characters stand in awareness of the mockery of the tower--"after a life spent training for the sight" (l. 180). Still, their common spirit seeks a substance, still hopes that the world of art can provide salvation and permanence.

> O sages standing in God's holy fire
> As in the gold mosaic of a wall,
> Come from the holy fire. . .
> And be the singing-masters of my soul. . .
> and gather me
> Into the artifice of eternity.[44]

# NOTES

1. I refer to the sense of character as that entity which is active in the objective-world field. Cf. Bernard Beckerman's Dynamics of Drama (Columbia University: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), for a similar definition: "character is the interpretation we attach to an individual's activity," p. 213.

2. Because "Character in Action" appears to be the structure of both poems, characterization is usually read as the very purpose of the poem. I use the sense of character not merely as personality but as a method for interpretation of experience. Character cannot be extracted from its dramatic, active context. Cf. J.L. Styan's "Manipulating the Characters" (in) The Context and Craft of Drama, ed. Robert W. Corigan and James L. Rosenberg (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1964). Styan reminds us of the function of character in a drama. "The playgoer can finally admit character only as a mask in its meaning and a puppet in its action, and judge it only by standards of reality and conviction which orchestration and total purpose of the play demand," p. 122. In the dramatic monologue the context is the play of the "dramatic utterance."

3. I include Aristotle's definition of character as "that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids." Character is the agent, the imitator of the action. "By character I mean that in virtue of which we ascribe certain qualities to the agents," from S.H. Butcher's translation of The Poetics, in Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Arts (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951), pp. 29 and 25. Again, the character action--in this poem the consideration of the creative process--is never less significant than the character-personality revealed.

4. "Abt Vogler" is usually read as a sounding stage for Browning's own poetic. See C. Willard Smith, Browning's Star-Imagery: The Study of a Detail in Poetic Design (New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1965), pp. 182-83. See also, Roma A. King Jr., The Bow and the Lyre: The Art of Robert Browning (The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor Paperbacks, 1964), "Abt Vogler implies what seems to be Browning's aestnetic theory," p. 128.

5. De Vane notes that Browning chose "Abt Vogler" and "Saul" as poems "which should represent their writer fairly. . . in the lyrical category," p. 292, Handbook. His source is the Letters of Robert Browning Collected by Thomas J. Wise, ed. Thurman L. Hood (London, 1933), p. 235. Other critics have used Browning's remark as evidence to interpret the poem as principally lyric rather than dramatic. See Donald S. Hair's Browning's Experiments with Genre (University of Toronto Press, 1972), "this lyric spirit manifests itself in characterization as well as theme," p. 89.
See also, Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, pp. 140 and 230. He states: "In Abt Vogler we cannot suppose that we are listening to any other voice than that of Browning himself," p. 230.

6. E.D.H. Johnson, in The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, sees "Abt Vogler" as an illustration of "the true nature of artistic inspiration," representative of "Browning's belief that the creative instinct can only function at its highest potential under divine inspiration," p. 115.
See also, Smith, who argues that the poem's statement of aesthetic practice "warrants our assuming it to be the design for poetry which [Browning] considered noblest and best," p. 186.

7. See H.B. Charlton, "Browning as Poet of Religion" Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 27, No. 2 (June, 1943), 271-307. Charlton argues that because Browning considers "Abt Vogler" to be one of his greatest, the poem must be an example of his religious faith. However, Charlton does not find the poem successful: "the implications of [Vogler's] vision rely for their conviction on propositions which the poem does not make valid by exciting a sense of their poetic inevitability," p. 302. Clearly, Charlton's problem is the direct result of reading the poem as an expression of Browning's own faith.

8. The consistent reading of the poem is that Browning regards music to be the highest expression of the creative imagination, that the verses of the poem are all triumphant and that Vogler is the greatest of artists. Again, see Smith, p. 182; Whitla, The Central Truth, p. 85; De Vane, p. 292; Herbert E. Greene, "Browning's Knowledge of Music," PMLA, 62 (1947), 1095. One article, Alan Bishop and John Ferns' "'Art in Obedience to Laws': Form and Meaning in Browning's 'Abt Vogler'," Victorian Poetry, 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1974) 25-32, takes exception to this interpretation that music is superior to all other forms of art. The paper argues that the poem itself is "all triumphant

art" and that music "provides the natural paradigm of art's divine inspiration--not a superiority of kind, but in the nature of its creation," p. 26.

9. Considerable scholarly exercise has been spent determining the extent of Browning's knowledge of music. Often this would seem to be for the purpose of justifying Browning's treatment of his musician characters rather than to provide an approach to a specific poem. None of the following readers recognize any ironic or satiric treatment of Abt Vogler.
Wendall Stacey Johnson, "Browning's Music," Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 22 (1963), 203-07, "The extent to which poetry can imitate music is limited, as a study of Browning's work reveals," p. 207.
R.W.S. Mendl insists that Browning's knowledge of musical theory was extensive, "Robert Browning, the Poet-Musician," Music and Letters, 42 (1961), 142-150.
Sir Charles Villiers Stanford declared that "'sliding by semitones Till I sink to the minor' is indeed the refuge of the destitute amateur improviser," quoted in Greene, "Browning's Knowledge of Music," p. 1096.
In "Abt Vogler, the Man," Browning Society Papers, 2 (1885-89), 221-236, Helen J. Ormerod follows the career of the musician. She labors in her effort to assert that Vogler was indeed worthy of the recognition Browning gave him. "And at first it seems to border on the profane to bring the dream of heaven down to the level of every-day existence," p. 222.
See also, De Vane where he acknowledges that much of Vogler's work is still extant and that his devoutness was questionable: "Perhaps Browning imagines Vogler as more spiritual than he really was, for he seems now more inventive than pious, more active in founding schools of music and perfecting systems, than meditative," p. 291.

10. All line references are to the poem as reprinted in Poems of Robert Browning, ed. Donald Smalley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), pp. 278-281.

11. In the Browning monologue the dramatic mask is a tool of the poet's ironic method. The mask is both a disguise and a doubling device. What is stated is on one side and what is revealed is on the other. Cf. "Irony is nothing other than the spiritual quintessence of the mask," Jean Starobinski, "Truth in Masquerade" (in) Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, ed. Gregory Polletta (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), p. 244.

12. "To J. Milsand, of Dijon" (in) The Complete Works of Robert Browning (Ohio University Press, 1970), II, 123.

13. For an alternate perspective on the function of soul in the poem see James Fotheringham, Studies in the Mind and Art of Robert Browning (London: Horace Marshall & Son, 1900), pp. 454-55 and p. 312. "Abt Vogler, interpreting the scope of music, reads the scope of the soul." Fotheringham states that it is music which carries the soul into high emotion. My suggestion is that Vogler's own concept of soul is combined with his exploitation of it to provide a larger focus in the poem.

14. See G.G. Sedgewick, Of Irony Especially in Drama (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948). Irony is the "clash between appearance and reality in events and language," p. 26.
See also, P.D. Ortega, "The Toad and the Spider: Paradox and Irony in Browning's Poetry," Barat Review, 5 (1970), 75-81. "Irony is the juxtaposition of appearance and reality, pointing out obliquely the discrepancy between them," p. 75.

15. Cf. Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn (New York: Harcourt Brace, & World, Inc., 1947), "Paradoxes spring from the very nature of the poet's language: it is a language in which the connotations play as great a part as the denotations," p. 8.
See also, Booth, A Rhetoric of Irony, on Brooks' perspective that "every literary context is ironic because it provides a weighting or qualification on every word in it, thus requiring the reader to infer meanings which are in a sense not in the words themselves: all literary meanings in this view become a form of covert irony, whether intended or not," p. 7. Although Booth regards this concept of irony as too general for acceptance in his own discussion, he also expects that a reader be responsive to the essential ambiguity inherent in language itself. As an epigraph to his first chapter, Booth quotes D.C. Muecke: "Since. . . Erich Heller, in his Ironic German, has already quite adequately not defined irony, there would be little point in not defining it all over again."
I use the term irony to indicate the method which is not metaphoric but which Kenneth Burke describes as an operation where "what goes forth as A returns as non-A." from A Grammar of Motives, quoted in frontispiece to Bert O. States, Irony and Drama: A Poetics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

16. Cf. Booth, dramatic irony "occurs whenever an author deliberately asks us to compare. . . what a character says now with what he says or does later," p. 63.

17. This concept is close to Frye's definition of conceit (in) Anatomy of Criticism: "the deliberately strained union of normally disparate things," p. 92. Irony creates the same conditions developed by the conceit.

18. For an alternate approach to the relationship between Fancy and Fact see George M. Ridenour, "Browning's Music Poems: Fancy and Fact, "PMLA, 78 (1963), 369-77. He reads Browning's music poems as a stage in the poet's development where he learned to unite Fancy and Fact so that Fancy is seen as Fact. Ridenour feels that Browning discovered, in the process of writing the music poems, that "the multiplicities of experience could be caught in webs of music or myth," p. 377. Ridenour argues that Browning wrote the music poems to show that music can overcome "the conflict between conceptual elaboration and lyric intensity. . . in a way hard to parallel in words," p. 376.
I see Browning to be concerned with the relationship between fact and fancy; the correlations, separations, and expansions between the two are more significant than their "union."

19. Cf. Frye's statement that "all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas" to the art structure, p. 89. Vogler acts as his own critic. He looks at his music as a "potential allegory of events and ideas." This is the first level of operating irony in the poem: Vogler seeks to embody his music in language form.

20. Throughout the monologues, Browning seems to use the concept of "fancy" synonymously with "imagination." This is particularly evident in The Ring and the Book.

21. Neither Johannes Agricola nor Abt Vogler are successful or even primarily interested in explaining God's ways to man. Neither character is convincing in the "mystic" role.
For views on Vogler as mystic see Whitla, p. 86; Smith, pp. 186 and 215; Johnson, p. 115; and Rufus M. Jones, Mysticism in Robert Browning (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1924), p. 27.
See also, Jack Mattews, "Browning and Neoplatonism," Victorian Newsletter (Fall, 1965), 9-12.

22. See S.S. Curry, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue (New York: Haskell House, 1965). Curry stresses the audience

participation factor which distinguishes the monologue from the lyric: "the monologue is a study of the effect of mind upon mind, of the adaption of the ideas of one individual to another, and of the revelation this makes of the characters of speaker and listener," p. 13.

23. This is usually read as evidence of Browning's subscription to the "philosophy of the imperfect." See De Vane, p. 292; Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), "This philosophy of the imperfect, of 'success in failure' takes on a color of rationalization," p. 294; Norton B. Crowell, The Triple Soul: Browning's Theory of Knowledge (The University of New Mexico Press, 1963), "more important than Abt Vogler's intuitive vision into truth is his instinctive apperception of the limitation that denies man steady vision to the whole truth, which would destroy the wonder of becoming, 'The process so wonder-worth'," pp. 188-89.

24. Cf. Brooks' definition: "irony is the most general term we have for the kind of qualification which the various elements in a context receive from the context. . . irony is our most general term for indicating the recognition of incongruities," The Well Wrought Urn, p. 209.

25. Note that "the structure brave" is referred to by the definite article, as if the reference is to one structure--the present verbal one.

26. Bishop and Ferns discuss this structure and organization. They offer the most elaborate argument of the poem as "exquisite craftsmanship," "'Art in Obedience to Laws'," p. 32.
See also, Smith, Browning's Star Imagery, p. 186-87. Neither study acknowledges the effected irony between the structure of the poem and Vogler's heresies.

27. The allusion is to Blake's "Augeries of Innocence." The following section underlines the ironic nature of the reference.

> We are led to believe a Lie
> When we see not throu' the Eye
> Which was Born in a Night to perish in a Night
> When the Soul Slept in Beams of Light.
> God appears and God is Light
> To those poor souls who dwell in Night,
> But does a human Form Display
> To those who Dwell in Realms of day.
>
> The Complete Writings of William Blake, pp. 150-54.

28. Ridenour observes the connection of "Abt Vogler" to "Kubla Khan." "The creator himself is something of a conjuror, and so a bit suspicious. But this is not to be stressed," p. 374.

29. The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, Act I, Prologue, 20.

30. Booth describes the dramatic monologue form as ironic portraits, "with a character giving away more weaknesses or vices than he intends," p. 141.

31. Like Kubla Khan Vogler oscillates from "sunny dome" to "caves of ice." The following list of pairs, contraries, and doubling is intended to indicate Vogler's "dialectical temper": "structure brave"/"manifold music" (1), "Armies"/"legions" (4), "angels"/"demons" (4), "scar"/"sink" (4), "heaven-high"/"hell-deep" (6), "dispart now"/"now combine" (11), "mount and march" (17, "do and die" (20), "half" (25), "seemed"/"was certain" (25), "match" (25), "heaven"/"earth" (27), "earth"/"sky" (28), "Nature"/"I" (26), "found and fixed" (30), "pale nor pine" (31), "earth"/"heaven" (32), "near nor far" (32), "glare and glow" (33), "old world"/"new" (38), "what never had been, was now"/"what was as it shall be anon" (39), "matched both" (40), "loud"/"soft" (54), "heard and seen" (56), "consider and bow" (56), "builder and maker" (66), "what was, shall be" (64), "what was shall live as before" (69), "silence"/"sound" (70), "evil"/"good" (71), "earth"/"heaven" (72), "broken"/"perfect" (72), "arcs"/"round" (72), "ground"/"sky" (78), "failure"/"triumph" (81), "withered or agonized" (82), "pause"/"singing" (83), "discords"/"harmony" (84), "sorrow"/"doubt" (85), "weal and woe" (86), "few of us"/"the rest" (87/88), "reason and welcome" (88), "reason"/"know" (88), "patient and proud" (90), "earth"/"alien ground" (89/93), "heights"/"deep" (94), "dared and done" (95), "life"/"sleep" (96), "minor"/"major" (96/92), "Sliding"/"sink" (92). The regular ab ab, cd cd rhyme scheme is also indicative of this dome/cave method of perception.

32. Mrs. Orr observes that "the effect was incommensurate with the cause; they had nothing in common with each other," Handbook, p. 245. It is Vogler's delusion that nature and himself can create a perfect whole or that heaven resolves the earth's broken arcs.

33. Vogler's "progression" is often confused with Browning's beliefs. In an essay entitled "Browning's 'Whatever Is Is Right'," College English, 12 (April, 1951), 377-82, Hoxie N. Fairchild compares Pope's and Browning's "view of life" by tracing the latter's "passion for movement,"

p. 379. Fairchild argues that Browning's sense of progress is equivalent to process--"a hope that our desires necessarily frustrated on earth, will be satisfied in heaven," p. 379. Fairchild mocks Browning because he takes Vogler's sentiments to be the poet's. In Matthews' article "Browning and Neoplatonism," the author argues that Browning's Neoplatonism is most evident in the poet's "unique belief in progress," p. 12. Matthews reads Vogler as a personality, speaking in accord with Browning's theology, whose soul is progressive but whose language is insufficient to convey abstract concepts.

34. For an alternate view on the function of "star," see Smith, p. 187; and The Explicator, 26, No. 5 (February, 1958), item #29. Both studies read the star as an image "indicative to the religious Browning of divine agency," The Explicator.

35. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (in) English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins, p. 1085.

36. Bennett Weaver, "A Primer Study in Browning's Satire," describes Browning's satiric impulse: "Browning holds that the purpose of life is to live and that whatever denies life, therefore, is the great abuse. . . his dramatic attack is always made upon those who waste life," p. 77, College English, 14, No. 2, (November, 1952), 76-81.

37. For a reading of the relationship between God and the speakers in the monologues see Patricia M. Ball's excellent article "Browning's Godot," Victorian Poetry, 3, No. 4 (Autumn, 1965), 245-53. "Whenever God enters the poems, he comes as the property of the speaker's self-made universe," p. 248.

38. Vogler's sentence is to wait the "by-and-by." He suffers what Ball describes as Browning's view of the human condition, where each character "constructs his Setebos, or his Quiet, each lives in accordance with his conception, each awaits confirmation of his own god, his own universe," p. 249. Vogler, too, is "living to a rhythm of endless expectation, clinging to. . . illusion. . . waiting beneath the tree in the silence of Godot's world," p. 253.

39. David's system of perceiving is similar to that of both Caliban and Vogler. The following list indicates the patterns: "neither drunken nor eaten" (4), "of prayer nor of praise" (8), "Saul"/"spirit" (9), "knelt"/"rose" (15), "withered and gone" (18), "Saul"/"tent-prop",

"once more" (20), "each side" (29), "both arms" (28), Saul/ "king-serpent" (31/33), "drear and stark" (33), "blind and dumb" (33), "sunbeams"/"swords" (35), "one after one" (36 and 40), "star follows star" (40), "so blue and so far" (41), "one another" (44), "half bird and half mouse" (46), "our love and our fear" (47), "we and they" (48), "hand/ Grasps at hand" (49/50), "eye lights eye" (50), "man runs to man" (58), "from rock up to rock" (70), "head"/"body" (66), "heart"/"soul" (79), "father"/"mother" (80/82), "wonder and hope" (89), "beauty and strength" (93), "love and rage" (93), "spirit"/"heart, hand, harp and voice" (96), "each" (97), "fold on fold" (108), "Released and aware" (117), "gone"/"remained" (118), "hope and despair" (119), "Death"/"life" (120), "Base with base" (126), "arm folded arm" (126), "what spell"/"what charm" (128), "sustain"/ "restored" (128), "strength and the beauty" (131), "potent and perfect" (132), "life"/"die" (134/135), "Dream"/"image" (142), "best rules and right uses" (144), "courage"/ "prudence" (144/145), "once more" (146), "man"/"brute" (149), "flesh"/"soul" (150), "spirit"/"wine" (159), "flesh"/ "spirit" (160), "age"/"youth" (161-162), "Dies"/"revives" (164), "passion and prowess" (168), "South and the North" (170), "his power and his beauty" (174), "not half" (183), "side by side" (187), "each other" (188), "my shield and my sword" (193), "soul"/"servant" (194), "thy word was my word" (194), "God's throne"/"man's grave" (198), "my voice to my heart" (199), "last night"/"this morning" (200/201), "glory"/"sleep" (202), "dawn"/"night" (204), "the same" (215), "one arm"/"the other" (219/220), "all men in all time"/"to the man" (221), "on each side around" (224), "life of the past, both the future and this" (234), "saw and spoke" (238 and 241), "approval or censure" (241), "all's love"/"all's law" (242), "no more and no less" (248), "God is seen God" (249), "within and around" (251), "bending"/"upraises" (252), "man's nothing-perfect"/"God's all-complete" (253), "Giver"/"gift" (260), "far"/"no farther" (263), "great and small" (263), "least"/"greatest" (265), "faith"/"distrust" (265), "creature"/"creator" (268), "end"/"Began" (268), "soul"/"body" (273/274), "one more" (276), "save"/"redeem"/"restore" (277), "life's day-spring"/ "death's minute of night" (278), "failure"/"ruin" (280), "new light"/"new life" (282), "continued"/"ended" (283), "reward"/"struggles" (286), "next world"/"this" world (286), "givest"/"receive" (287), "first"/"last" (288), "thy will"/ "my power" (288), "will"/"wishes" (292/296), "poor"/"enrich" (297), "fill up his life"/"starve my own out" (298), "wouldst thou"/"wilt thou" (300), "up nor down" (302), "A face like my face"/"a Man like to me" (310), "shalt love"/"be loved" (311), "a Hand like this hand" (311), "to left and to right"

(314), "Life or death" (318), "earth"/"hell" (318), "wonder and dread" (329), "'E'en so, it is so!'" (335).

40. Often this is read to be Browning's own sense of the artist's function. For example see Hoxie N. Fairchild, "Browning the Simple-Hearted Casuist," University of Toronto Quarterly, 18 (August, 1949), 234-240, "The poet, who must faithfully render all the tangled phenomena of mental life, must also apprehend God's truth and impart it to others," p. 234. See also, Robert Danie, "Robert Browning, Poet of Affirmation," The Forman University Bulletin, NS, I, No. 3 (Spring, 1954).

41. For a convincing discussion of the incidence and purpose of similar separations, see Wilfred L. Guerin, "Irony and Tension in Browning's 'Karshish'," Victorian Poetry, 1 (1963), 132-39.

42. For a careful reading of Blougram "as an egoist and materialist," see Arnold Shapiro, "A New (Old) Reading of Bishop Blougram's Apology: The Problem of the Dramatic Monologue," Victorian Poetry, 10 (1972), 243-56.

43. Further indication of Blougram's dialectical perception is available throughout the entire discourse: "half baked" (7), "despise"/"respect" (22/25), "All alone, we two" (35), "half-said" (42), "Believed or disbelieved" (56), "whole and sole" (58), "give and take" (46), "truth and worth" (60), "plain and true" (77), "weigh and find" (79), "I am much, you are nothing" (84), "fancy"/"fact" (88/49), "you don't and can't" (150), "absolutely and exclusively" (152 and 163), "could not, cannot" (166), "both of us" (169), "unbelievers both" (173), "calm and complete" (174), "belief"/"unbelief" (177/178), "hopes and fears" (185), "old and new" (186), "he could do, if he would"/"Would, if he could" (192/193), "soon or late" (195), "doubt diversified by faith"/"faith diversified by doubt" (210/211), "faith"/"doubt" (215/216), "faith and unbelief" (218), "belief or unbelief" (228), "sleeps"/"waking" (246/247), "day"/"night" (250/251), "midnight doubt"/ "dayspring's faith" (254), "sleep"/"wake" (242), "unbelieve"/ "believe" (263), "half the fight" (266), "half an eye" (268), "Conclusive and exclusive" (273), "care little"/ "care much" (279), "wealth or poverty" (284), "labor or quiet" (285), "otherwise" (286), "soul and body" (320), "naked"/"clothed" (329), "my hand"/"the Church's hand" (336), "another way" (338), "what is"/"what might be" (346), "otherwise" (347), "man"/"beast" (348/349), "believes"/ "disbelieves" (415/416), "who wonders and who cares" (423

and 427), "the this, the that" (429), "unbelief"/"belief" (440), "self-dispraise"/"praise" (496), "a Shakespeare"/ "no Shakespeare" (497/499), "much"/"somewhat" (506), "doubt"/ "faith" (602 and 603 and 604), "false"/"true" (628), "here or there" (646), "keeping what I must"/"leaving what I can" (733/734), "tighten or relax" (758), "this world"/"next world" (770/771), "hereafter"/"meanwhile" (774), "soul"/"body" (776), "this life"/"next life" (778/779), "half way" (787 and 789), "on and off" (789), "North to South" (790), "worldly in this world" (797), "both of us" (813), "act"/"appear" (814/815), "other day" (833), "you can, but won't" (837), "slave"/ "master (843/844), "knowledge and power"/"ignorance and weakness" (856/857), "here or there or anywhere" (859), "something we may see, all we cannot see" (865), "may eat"/ "don't eat"/"would eat" (879/880/881), "know"/"conceive" (910).

44. William Butler Yeats, "Sailing to Byzantium" (in) The Collected Poems (Macmillan, 1950), p. 217, stanza III.

# CHAPTER III

## The Love Song of Andrea del Sarto

Would it have been worth while,
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
To say: "I am Lazarus, come from the dead,
Come back to tell you all, I shall tell all"-
If one, settling a pillow by her head,
    Should say: "That is not what I meant at all.
    That is not it, at all."

Eliot. "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Andrea del Sarto's "twilight-piece"[1] encapsulates the faultless painter's life, love, and art. His speech is both his effort to articulate the reach and grasp of his experience and his attempt to reconcile his failure to fulfill his aesthetic, social, and interpersonal objectives. Throughout his monologue Andrea judges and is judged. His linguistic habits effectively enclose him within the limitations he labors to overcome. He is "fettered" (l. 51) by his very attempt to reach outside the system to which he is committed. The entire poem represents the circularity of reaching beyond grasp, of attempting to seize a heaven which is seen only in terms of a reflection of the inadequate life.

Andrea's love song is set up to ensnare Lucrezia's attention, but the method he employs reveals both his inability to do so and his propensity toward self-condemnation. Andrea knows only too well that the mermaids do not sing for him, that his love song limits and confines his latent creativity. We witness him drowning in his indecisions and revisions. His own human voice echoes the mockery of his position as lover and painter. As this song fails to persuade Lucrezia of its

author's compromises and devotion, so, too, it convinces Andrea of his faults and his mediocrity.

Andrea is fully aware that his imprisonment is in response to a substantial absence of soul.[2] He has expected Lucrezia to provide such substance: "Had you enjoined them on me, given me soul,/We might have risen to Rafael, I and you!" (ll. 118-19). At the same time, he recognizes that the absence is his own failing:

> incentives come from the soul's self;
> The rest avail not.
>
> (ll. 134-35)

Andrea both disparages the accomplishment of other painters and, simultaneously, mourns the lack of its benefits in his own works and life. A copy of a Rafael drawing is faulty in its "body" but "its soul is right" (l. 113). When Andrea dares to amend the "faulty" sketch, he is confronted once more with his own inadequacy and remorse overwhelms him:

> Give the chalk here--quick, thus the line should go!
> Ay, but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out!
>
> (ll. 196-97)

By "pouring his soul" (l. 108), Rafael achieves a quality Andrea and his "superior" craft cannot manage. And although Andrea believes that his uxorious attention to Lucrezia controls his potential to match Rafael, Agnolo, or Leonardo, he

describes his commitment in terms of some inevitable deception from the outside:[3]

> the low voice my soul hears, as a bird
> The fowler's pipe, and follows to the snare.
>
> (ll. 124-25)

His failure and despair are confirmed not by his submission to Lucrezia, her Cousin, and her demand for gold, but by his willingness to accuse her. This willingness is based on his need to remain restricted and enclosed.[4]

Andrea del Sarto and Abt Vogler are both insufficient creators because their souls are directed at purposes outside their artistic capacities.[5] Both characters are isolated in their failure because they are without primary imagination. Both are obsessed with perfection and the grasp of an ideal, and both are circumscribed and limited by the energy which supports their effort. Both misuse their art, purportedly to serve their lives. The result is the desecration of both the art and the life.

The motivation for Andrea's speech is less to ensnare Lucrezia than to justify this misuse of his own potential.[7] The poem reveals Andrea's deficiency and his vulgarized concept of art. His art is his commerce, inextricably bound to Lucrezia's monetary demands and to his desired standard of living. Although his monologue form imitates both his life style and his painting

style, the effort of the speech is not to understand his life or his art but to rationalize their inadequacies. Andrea uses Lucrezia to justify failure and lack of ambition.

> Had the mouth there urged
> 'God and the glory! never care for gain.
> The present by the future, what is that?
> Live for fame, side by side with Agnolo!
> Rafael is waiting: up to God all three!'
> I might have done it for you. So it seems:
> Perhaps not.
>
> (ll. 127-33)

Andrea creates his own isolation; he discovers, like Eliot's Prufrock, "That is not it, at all." Andrea uses his "old age" (l. 244) as a justification for cancelling his aspirations for love and fame. He uses his speech as a means to squeeze his universe into a ball so that he might comprehend its features. This effort freezes Andrea in the twilight setting. The universe does not assume its former shape; it is not resilient to the manipulations he performs against it. He is unable to regain his aspirations and so sits "idle" (l. 228), basking in the light of unreflecting love.

The dual effort of forgiving and condemning both Lucrezia and himself inevitably abuses the substance so that it cannot retain its quality or shape. Andrea's simultaneous contempt/respect, reward/punishment dialectic results in the polarization of his universe. He grows impotent and "peaceful as old age to-night" (l. 244) in response to the oscillation

between perfection and imperfection, acceptance and denial. This is the balance he strikes; this is his reward.

The movement from body to soul, failure to redemption, and rage to peace is the feature characteristic of the dramatic monologue form. Andrea's nemesis is the result of the sacrifice of his life to the commerce of his art and of his refusal to work within his love for Lucrezia. His acknowledgement of this serves to further imprison him:

> No doubt, there's something strikes a balance. Yes,
> You loved me quite enough, it seems to-night.
> This must suffice me here.
>
> (ll. 257-59)

Andrea is equipped with a perspective that interprets the same coin to have different faces and opposing functions. This is the method of irony:[6] to imply two meanings at the same time, to say yes but to mean no, yet to propose, by implication, an otherwise which is not open to investigation. An alternative is built into the very form of Andrea's description. Each item in his discussion invites denial: "So it seems:/Perhaps not" (ll. 132-33). He is therefore riddled with such doubt that his self-awareness becomes part of his past; he can see his life only in retrospect.

When Andrea comes to the necessary stasis as a result of his system of rationalizations, his complacency is restored but the over-riding doubt and pain of his predicament populates

the overpoem.[7] Like Vogler he waits his "by-and-by."

> In heaven, perhaps, new chances, one more chance.
>
> (l. 260)

Andrea's hope that he might excel in this "New Jerusalem" is framed by the irony of its context. He acknowledges that he will again be "overcome" (l. 265) by his choice of Lucrezia and by the "Four great walls" that define his concept of heaven. The time for "decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" has escaped him. Evening has become night and his "twilight-piece" a eulogy for the death of his potential. The message is not unlike that of Pope's Dunciad:

> Art after Art goes out, and all is night. . .
> 'Thy hand great Dulness! lets the curtain fall,
> And universal Darkness covers all.'
>
> (The Dunciad Variorum, Bk. III, ll. 346, 355-56)

Andrea's vision of New Jerusalem is a measure of similar doom. His revelation of the four walls "Meted on each side by the angel's reed" (l. 262) is not of a new heaven and a new earth but of the apocalypse begun when the first angel sounded

> and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood,
> and they were cast upon the earth.
>
> ("Revelation" 9:7)

Andrea is judged because he does not overcome the confinements of his own judgments.[8]

> At the end
> God, I conclude, compensates, punishes
> 'Tis safer for me, if the award be strict,
> That I am something underrated here.
>
> (ll. 140-43)

Here or there, Andrea is damned not by the Lucrezia he purports to love but by the dupe he makes of himself.[9] The poem plays off Andrea's conscious mask against his unconscious presentation.[10] The poem juxtaposes Andrea's statements with the character-revelations apparent in what he says and it relates this information to the question of the value and function of art.[11]

Andrea's love song does not convince either his audience or himself that his art is a viable means of self-fulfillment. What he says about his art, or his love, he contradicts at the next moment. Where first he sees his own accomplishments to be limited, he soon generalizes that this is the condition of human kind. His eyes apply the "common grayness" that "silvers everything" (l. 35);

> the whole seems to fall into a shape
> As if I saw alike my work and self
> And all that I was born to be and do,
> A twilight-piece.
>
> (ll. 46-49)

His art reflects this "placid and perfect" (l. 99), "silver-gray" (l. 98) quality so much so that he cannot distinguish between the features of life and those of art. The poem satirizes Andrea's muted and passive capacity to see and to conjecture on the value of art when his own artistic expression accomplishes so little for himself. Andrea's recognition, that he is

> the weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt
> Out of the grange whose four walls make his world,
>
> (ll. 169-70)

is an admission in the spirit of self-pity and serves only to reaffirm that his weakness is his inability to stand in the light of "a fire of souls" (l. 160). The world, Andrea projects, is responsible for his failure:

> In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
> And who would do it, cannot, I perceive.
>
> (ll. 137-38)

As an artist Andrea is an imitator. His paintings are not informed by either his spirit or his soul. His pictures of the Madonna are of Lucrezia's face. His style is realism and his work is photographic: "no sketches first, no studies, that's long past" (l. 68). Andrea copies Lucrezia's pose, her face, her aura:

> You smile? why there's my picture ready made.
>
> (l. 33)

Although he pretends to engage her presence for the "gray remainder of the evening" (l. 227), the stronger implication is that Andrea's interest is to recapture Lucrezia on his canvas so that she becomes his property. His statement:

> you must serve
> For each of the five pictures we require:
> It saves a model,
>
> (ll. 23-25)

is less a request for a preliminary study than a ploy to freeze her. Like Ferrara's Duke, Andrea wants his wife

> painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive,
>
> ("My Last Duchess," ll. 1-2)

but without the blood and energy of her own desires.[12]

Andrea does not compose; instead he reproduces the object, "Rightly traced and well ordered" (l. 95). Harmony, to Andrea, means a "common grayness" (l. 35). Even he complains

> All is silver-gray
> Placid and perfect with my art: the worse!
>
> (ll. 98-99)

Perfection seems to mean dullness, order, and self-reflected passivity. But it is in keeping with Andrea's ego that he scorns any measure of perfection other than the shadowy reality he achieves.

> I, painting from myself and to myself,
> Know what I do, am unmoved by men's blame
> Or their praise either.
>
> (ll. 90-92)

Just as Andrea is oblivious to the color and texture of the outside world, so, too, is he effectively uninvolved with the attitude and presence of the other personalities that intrude upon his life. Lucrezia, his God, King Francis, Rafael, Agnolo, and Leonardo are props for his own introspective self-justification. If Lucrezia is not listening (ll. 199-200), she is no less attentive to Andrea than he is to her and to the field outside his rationalizations.[13]

Clearly, Andrea's monologue is a self-portrait[14] in which he demands that his language provide an articulation his art does not achieve. But Andrea does not speculate or conceive, he deduces. He describes his reasoning in terms of this non-conceptual, non-imaginative rationale: "I perceive" (l. 138), "I conclude" (l. 141), "I resolve to think" (l. 183). While he claims disregard for the opinions of others or for his status as an artist, his speech is woven with ironic reconsiderations. His self-judgment is reflected in his interest in the evaluation of others:

> I want you by my side
> To hear them--that is, Michel Agnolo--
> Judge all I do and tell you of its worth.
>
> (ll. 231-33)

Like the bard in Pauline, Andrea is overcome by his concern with greater artists and his relationship to them. Both artists are imitators and both occasionally recognize the flawed quality of their work and inspiration.

> I rather sought
> To rival what I wondered at than form
> Creations of my own,
>
> (Pauline, ll. 390-92)

and

> how I envy him whose soul
> Turns its whole energies to some one end,
> To elevate an aim, pursue success
> However mean.
>
> (Pauline, ll. 604-07)

And like Pauline's lover Andrea necessarily comes to an overwhelming confrontation with the void of his complacency:

> And thus it is that I supply the chasm
> 'Twixt what I am and what I fain would be:
> But then to know nothing, to hope for nothing,
> To seize on life's dull joys from a strange fear
> Lest, losing them, all's lost and nought remains!
>
> (Pauline, ll. 676-80)

Although Andrea falls back on Lucrezia as his final excuse for failure and mediocrity

> --still they overcome
> Because there's still Lucrezia,--as I choose,
>
> (ll. 265-66)

this is held in ironic balance by his earlier acknowledgement that he is committed to a system outside his control: "Let each one bear his lot" (l. 252). This is balanced again by his recognition of his own rigidity:

> I regret little, would change still less
> Since there my past life lies, why alter it?
>
> (ll. 245-46)

Andrea's vacillation between blame and praise, less and more, and acceptance and discontent is the movement between black and white that accomplishes and perpetuates the common grayness of his art.[15] Andrea finds that it is impossible to say precisely what he means because he is caught by his propensity to judge and his desire to be judged. The overwhelming question he rolls towards is one that queries the deserts of his love and his art. He feels both rewarded and unrewarded, compensated for his imperfection and unacknowledged for his perfection. His sentence, in part, is due to his poor judgment. Lucrezia drags her robes across his painting yet he trusts her to recognize the quality of his art.

> When I say, perfectly,
> I do not boast, perhaps: yourself are judge.
>
> (ll. 63-64)

When Lucrezia proves uninterested in fanning his ego Andrea retreats to more self-judgment, recalling "Someone" (l. 76) who

finds the substance of his "low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand" (l. 82) inferior to that of other Renaissance painters whose work is less accomplished:

> Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
> There burns a truer light of God in them.
>
> (ll. 78-79)

When he cannot comprehend why or how he fails to exact greater recognition he relies on his assumption that God is somehow responsible:

> Love, we are in God's hand.
> How strange now, looks the life he makes us lead;
> So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!
> I feel he laid the fetter: let it lie!
>
> (ll. 49-52)

Both Lucrezia and Andrea's God are made culpable for the painter's faultlessness and fault.[16] Andrea feels he is judged by both.

> All is as God over-rules.
>
> (l. 133)

God's heaven is proposed as a measure to insure some grasp beyond Andrea's earthly reach and then rejected for the heaven Lucrezia offers.

> You called me, and I came home to your heart.
> The triumph was--to reach and stay there; since

I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?

(ll. 172-74)

Andrea moves back and forth between his two concepts of heaven because neither rewards him sufficiently. Andrea first turns to his creator to justify the absence of fulfillment in his own "silver-gray" art:

a man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what's a heaven for?

(ll. 97-98)

God's heaven becomes of interest only when the artist fails to secure recognition elsewhere. Like Shakespeare's sonneteer, Andrea looks to heaven as a last resort;

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes
I all alone beweep my outcast state
And trouble deaf Heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate. . .
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope.

("Sonnet 29")

God represents the Glory Andrea might have had if Lucrezia had been a more valuable muse. This God is created to compensate for the "heaven that's shut" (l. 84) to the painter. He is constructed in Andrea's own image.[17] God, he assumes, will punish him for his indiscretions just as he makes Lucrezia pay for her infidelity by enclosing her for "this hour" (l. 204), exacting

her smiles and then dismissing her contemptuously. He plays the same puppeteer role he projects as God's function in the world. "All is as God over-rules" is Andrea's method for justifying the essential inadequacy of Andrea's rule. God and Lucrezia are conceived as rulers so that Andrea's indulgence in self-pity will be masked but still predominate.

Andrea manipulates God, Lucrezia, and King Francis as symbols made to represent the source of his inspiration[18] and, simultaneously, the shackles on his grasp. This trilogy functions as the three Graces, Clotho, Lachesis, and Atropos,[19] who control human life and destiny, and who, by their very presence in the believer's cosmology, convince him that he is without free-will. In Andrea's case he believes he is also without responsibility for his own predicament.

These three Graces or Fates are sisters to Nemesis and grouped as the Moerae--linked to the three phases and persons of the moon.[20] One of the three is embodied by Lucrezia who is related to the moon in her inconstancy and in her power over the flux and flow of Andrea's life:

> my moon, my everybody's moon,
> Which everybody looks on and calls his,
> And I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
> While she looks--no one's.
>
> (ll. 29-32)

God is linked to the moon in that he is associated with the "silver-gray" perfection and "harmony" (l. 34) that composes

Andrea's "twilight-piece" (l. 49) and "fettered life" (l. 51). God is connected to Lucrezia as both are beyond Andrea's grasp and both function as obstacles to Andrea's success.

God is connected to King Francis because they share the "glory" (l. 128 and l. 152) Andrea would seek were he unfettered. Francis can "crown the issue with a last reward" (l. 164), just as God, "at the end" (l. 140), "compensates, punishes" (l. 141). Andrea leaves the golden court to return to Lucrezia because the glory was too close: "Too live the life grew, golden and not gray" (l. 168). Andrea's "kingly days" (l. 165) were too near the heaven and perfection of his work and therefore too threatening to his need to feel separated from his art and to his need to sustain his self-pitying martyrdom. Andrea's complaint, that his "works are nearer heaven" (l. 87) while he is grounded, is an attempt to disguise the solidity this relationship secures for him.

Andrea links God and King Francis ("God is just./ King Francis may forgive me" ll. 213-14), because he associates the gold he took from Francis, the "fierce bright gold" (l. 217), with the strict "award" he will receive in the New Jerusalem. This gold is not in conflict with the silver but rather in contrast to the graying effect it has on Andrea's art. The king's "golden look" (l. 153) and "gold chain" (l. 157) are ironically connected to that "gold of his" (l. 218) which Andrea used to build his chamber. The final worth of the gold is to pay "more

gaming debts" (l. 222). The golden inspiration offered by the king is a means of gaining more gold; each painting buys more smiles from Lucrezia and more delusion for Andrea.

> While hand and eye and something of a heart
> Are left me, work's my ware, and what's it worth?
> I'll pay my fancy. Only let me sit
> The gray remainder of the evening out,
> Idle, you call it, and muse perfectly
> How I could paint, were I but back in France.
>
> (ll. 224-29)

Andrea moves from the "great monarch's golden look" to Lucrezia's golden hair (l. 175) but the gold of both supports and inspires his silver art. The art begets more gold which is used to treat the creature comforts of Andrea, Lucrezia and her Cousin. Andrea's art is valuable primarily in this respect. Its worth is that it can be exchanged for gold. The irony of this conversion is that the gold is little more than a few "scudi" (l. 241) to be turned over to Lucrezia's Cousin. The art is silver and not gold because it shadows the potential of the unspent coin.

Andrea links Francis to Lucrezia in that he feels she has more than repaid him for his offence to the king:

> Nay, Love, you did give all I asked, I think--
> More than I merit, yes, by many times.
>
> (ll. 120-21)

Lucrezia functions as the arbitrator between Francis and himself. She is his nemesis; she confirms the mediocrity of his existence.

Francis was too golden; Lucrezia is too perfect; God is too remote. Still, Andrea relates to each in such a way as to allow him to remain complacent: "let it lie!" (l. 52), "I must bear it all" (l. 149), "Let each one bear his lot" (l. 252), and "This must suffice me here" (l. 259). Francis spins the gold; Lucrezia determines its use; God, "at the end," rewards and punishes. Andrea builds this system so that he need not face the overwhelming existential question his life and world has shaped. Lucrezia is his smiling "serpentining beauty, rounds and rounds," (l. 26) wringing "all the play, the insight and the stretch" out of him (l. 117); Francis is his smiling benefactor with "one arm about [his] shoulder, round [his] neck," (l. 156) "plying" (l. 161) Andrea with the "jingle of his gold" (l. 157).[21] Andrea can avoid decisions by enclosing himself in the concerns and capabilities of others.

Andrea sets up both Lucrezia and Francis as foils between himself and the question of his worth (l. 225 and l. 233). He sets up Leonard, Rafael, and Agnolo to "judge" all he does and tell Lucrezia "of its worth" (l. 233) and thereby to keep him within his self-imposed prison.[22]

Andrea is enclosed by the choices he makes. The melancholy house he "built to be so gay with" (l. 213) keeps him prisoner because it is constructed with gold he took from Francis.

> I dared not, do you know, leave home all day
> For fear of chancing on the Paris lords.
>
> (ll. 145-46)

This "chamber" is also restricting because its view reflects Andrea's state of mind:

> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> The last monk leaves the garden; days decrease,
> And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
>
> (ll. 42-45)

The twilight that he deliberately watches through his window sustains his self-judging temper:

> I, at every point;
> My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
> To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole.
>
> (ll. 38-40)

Andrea makes no effort to cut away the fetters. He stretches his half-hour to an hour (l. 204) to prolong the pain. When he is finished with Lucrezia he calls her away from the window, "come in, at last, inside," (l. 211-212) even though they have been inside all through his monologue. His love song is a trap which catches only himself. Lucrezia does not remain curled "inside" his hand (l. 22) but goes with the Cousin who "waits outside" (l. 220).

This enclosure imagery is indicative of the inner/

outer movement which characterizes Browning's dramatic monologue form.[23] Andrea describes his confinement in ironic contraries. Lucrezia's hand "curls inside" Andrea's (l. 22); he holds her by the hand as they sit by the window. Ironically, Andrea feels fixed (l. 7) by Lucrezia. He will "shut the money" (l. 8) gained from her "friend's friend" (l. 5) into her hand. This irony, a central feature of the monologue form, is stressed to indicate that any definition is a confinement; any attempt to attain the outside by enclosing the inside wraps the speaker in his own delusions. The speaker reads his own face in an effort to perceive what is outside but the result is a circumscription of both himself and what he sees.

Andrea builds walls so that he can huddle safe inside like the trees behind the convent-wall. He perpetuates this incarceration in the "grange whose four walls make his world" (l. 170) and projects four more "great walls in the New Jerusalem" (l. 261) as a mirror of the life he lives. This ideal world to which he aspires is a resolution of the real world he experiences with Lucrezia only in that it repeats the features of that experience. He does not require any kind of personal introspection which would re-shape his life or his future. Even his painting is a means of building walls:

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

Andrea sees what he wants to see. He encloses his vision rather than opens his perspective. While Rafael

> was flaming out his thoughts
> Upon a palace-wall for Rome to see,
>
> (11. 186-87)

Andrea was erecting his prison. Rafael uses the wall as part of his medium to "reach many a time a heaven" (l. 84). Andrea uses his "craftsman's hand" (l. 82), "God's hand" (l. 49), and Lucrezia's hand (l. 21) not to achieve heaven--"Above and through his art" (l. 110)--but to keep his reach and grasp inside the walls of his "melancholy little house" (l. 212).

Irony reveals the balance demanded by the tension between the real and ideal. The difference between Andrea's aspiration and capacity is exaggerated because the tension is resolved by his complacency. The irony implicit in this separation/resolution becomes the irony which sustains the dialectical "here-and-there" movement[24] "characterized" throughout the speech. The significance of this ironic method is that it moves away from the character presentation and away from the explicitness of what is said and revealed towards the metaphoric inferences of the scope and fabric of the "elsewhere" world.[25] The irony which structures "Andrea del Sarto" is dual in that what is revealed is held against what is said and that portrait, in turn, is measured by the world view described and by the method of description.[26]

Andrea argues his concept, or non-concept, of art, his philosophy of life and of love, but in the process provides his own criticism of his efforts and conclusions. The dramatic monologue is not a picture-taking imitation of a character with a certain perspective in a specific predicament, but a dramatization of an act which defines, circumscribes, and limits its own energy and even its purpose. The movement between desired and attained is the same movement as that between the conception and the articulation.[27] Andrea's language and his metaphors are proposals that the poem itself completes.

Andrea is one of the "half-men" (l. 140) whose capabilities are a mockery of the potential outside the range of his methods. His failure implies some field of success beyond his scope but still available. He is half-man just as what he says is half-poem. The other half is in ironic contrast but also an extension of the metaphoric beginnings displayed in his language and attitudes.

His art is a shadow, his love song a pale disguise for self-hate. The terms of reference he uses imply alternatives. Painfully he compares his situation with that of Rafael, Agnolo, and Leonardo:

> Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know
> Reach many a heaven that's shut to me,
> Enter and take their place there sure enough,
> Though they come back and cannot tell the world.
>
> (ll. 83-86)

It is Andrea's articulation that damns him. He, like Prufrock, is compelled to aspire to the role of Lazarus, to squeeze the universe into a ball, behind the walls of no-man's land. Andrea has no one with whom he can communicate, least of all himself. He cannot report a vision to the world because he is without association with heaven or the earthly world.[28] Ironically, "the Faultless Painter" attempts to report the perfection he construes to be of heaven in terms that only describe his failure to do so. The result is regression, stasis, and perpetuation of the subjective/objective polarity which defines "seeing as" in terms of "seeing."[29]

Andrea's art and his attitude towards perfection are indicative of the way in which he perceives and the way in which he interprets and evaluates his perceptions. This direct relationship between the perceiver and his method of description may be symbolic of the correlation between the speaker and his monologue and even of the poet and his style; however, in no way can the statements and attitudes fairly be connected to Browning's concept of art or theory of aesthetics. The only appropriate method to discern the poet's sense of the purpose or function of art is an examination of the structure of the dramatic monologue form. Browning's style is Andrea's only in so far as both use language as their means of articulation. Patterns recur throughout the monologues which would indicate that Caliban, Vogler, and Andrea depend on a similar rhetorical

method, but to assume this to be Browning's mask is to disregard the ironic agency which characterizes the various poems.

Browning presents a character whose mind is incapable of reaching outside its fetters, but the poem, with precisely this presentation and its ironic structure, takes the reader into the purpose of poetry as the re-creation, the re-shaping of the universe. Browning would seem to borrow directly from Shelley's aesthetic:

> All things exist as they are perceived; at least in relation to the percipient. "The mind is its own place, and of itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life's dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being. . . It compels us to feel that which we perceive, and to imagine that which we know. It creates anew the universe, after it has been annihilated in our minds by the recurrence of impressions blunted by reiteration.[30]

In several monologues the function of art in the lives of Browning's characters is one part of the relationship between creator and created and between man and God. The purpose or value of art is subordinate to the relationship between the art object and the artist. In his essay on Shelley, Browning argues that the sun-trader's poetic is "towards a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual and of the actual to the ideal." This correspondency is in evidence in each of Browning's

dramatic monologues which consider the role of the artist and the purpose of art. The body of the speech is in some harmonious or discordant relationship to the implication and soul of that speech. These implications create the over-poem which, in turn, provides the theory of aesthetic which informs the main query of the speech: how does art contribute to the artist's life? Consistently this relationship is delineated in terms of creator and created. Only in the correspondence between creator and creature, between man and God, are the values available to critical commentary.

Each of the poems on art reiterates that the art object must illumine the divinity which is the human imagination and that the poem, the painting or the music must reveal the potential of the soul to reach the absolute which is inherent in the life of the body and the immediate present. The soul puts itself into the work in order to activate the divinity which informs it.[31] Art mirrors the divine in that it reproduces the aspects of the absolute in terms of the artist's aspirations. This sense of the function of art is presented in an ironic representation. Browning's artists do not demonstrate this capacity but the dramatic monologues in which they feature certainly do. Each poem reveals the limitations of the individual artist and thereby comments on the "other" potential. Each speech reveals another approach that the artist might have assumed; each speaker's action implies an alternative which would have

brought the absolute within his reach.

That Browning's artists fail to use their creativity to realize the features of the ideal in terms of the real is not an indication that man cannot bear the true white light of God's plan.[32] Rather, such failure argues that their individual souls are "incomplete," incapable of moving outside their own nature. These artists are not equipped to extend themselves through love, an out-going of their own nature, and thereby achieve a relationship with the outside.

The aesthetic deduced from the ironic portraits of these artists states that art is not a ladder to be used to reach heaven and the One above the artist, but a reflection of the effort of the artist to move through contraries towards true progression. Heaven and the God therein are metaphors for the reach of the imagination. The attainment of either is in response to the artist's capacity to extend himself by moving outside himself and identifying with others. The failure of Browning's artists in this respect is not a statement that imperfection is a necessary quality of earthly man,[33] but a delineation of the inter-relatedness of subjective/objective, body/soul, earth/heaven and man/God.

Art must serve the life and increase the soul's faculty to "bring man's objective life into correlation with subjective truth....The poet provides the pattern, the impetus, for bringing man into harmony with the divine dialectic of existence."[34]

Such a poet, Browning argues,

> does not paint pictures and hang them on the walls, but rather carries them on the retina of his own eyes; we must look deep into his human eyes to see those pictures on them.[35]

In Pippa Passes, Jules reforms his aesthetic and uses his love for Phene to complete his Psyche, to blend body and soul, to begin art anew.[36]

> Shall to produce form out of unshaped stuff
> Be Art--and further to evoke a soul
> From form be nothing? This new soul is mine!
>
> ("Noon," ll. 298-300)

Jules had used his art as a substitute for life and love:

> why before I found
> The real flesh Phene, I inured myself
> To see, throughout all nature, varied stuff
> For better nature's birth by means of art:
> With me each substance tended to one form
> Of beauty--to the human archetype.
>
> ("Noon," ll. 81-85)

Jules experiences his redemption only after his soul is knit with his body so that his flesh serves the ideal his passive art merely approached.

> This body had no soul before, but slept
> Or stirred, was beauteous or ungainly, free
> From taint or foul with stain, as outward things
> Fastened their image on its passiveness.
>
> ("Noon," ll. 293-96)

While Jules overcomes, Browning's "Unknown Painter," Pictor Ignotus, suffers Andrea del Sarto's submission to a passive life and art.[37] He attests that he might have reached higher, lived more, loved more, if he had not sold his art to his religious affiliations:

> nor would my flesh have shrunk
> From seconding my soul, with eyes uplift
> And wide to heaven, or, straight like Thunder, sunk
> To the centre, of an instant; or around
> Turned calmly and inquisitive, to scan
> The licence and the limit, space and bound
> Allowed to truth made visible in man.
>
> ("Pictor Ignotus," ll. 6-12)

His is the poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven. Like Caliban this painter acknowledges his capacity to shape but he is not prepared to take Caliban's next step and match his life and heart to his imaginative theories.

> My heart sinks, as monotonous I paint
> These endless cloisters and eternal aisles. . .
> Only prayer breaks the silence of the shrine.
>
> ("Pictor Ignotus," ll. 58-59, 65)

Like Andrea the Unknown Painter expects a world elsewhere to compensate for the mediocrity of his existence. God will reward in heaven what earth and the artist himself do not recognize. The artist construes, then, that the purpose of art is to serve God and thereby achieve the shut heaven.

The artist becomes God's "recording chief-inquisitor" ("How it Strikes a Contemporary," l. 39) whose task it is to tell God all, and to keep the people's moral character in good health.

> We merely kept a governor for form,
> While this man walked about and took account
> Of all thought, said and acted, then went home,
> And wrote it fully to our Lord the King
> Who has an itch to know things, he knows why,
> And reads them in his bedroom of a night.
>
> ("How it Strikes a Contemporary," ll. 41-46)

This poet is not unlike Setebos' raven ("There scuds His raven that has told Him all," "Caliban Upon Setebos," l. 286) and this Lord the King is not unlike the same Setebos. His communication with his subjects and their legislator is not effected by their queries:

> Frowned our Lord,
> Exhorting when none heard--"Beseech me not!
> Too far above my people,--beneath me!
> I set the watch,--how should the people know?"
>
> (ll. 66-69)

The allegorical implications of God as this Lord, the King, indicate the absurdity of the position taken by an artist who attempts to serve God and thereby achieve a state above and beyond the conditions of his life.[38]

Fra Lippo Lippi takes another approach to the pure white light of God. He sees his function to be that of a

recorder who renders the actual so concretely that others are able to see form anew and thereby revere the ultimate Creator.

> we're made so that we love
> First when we see them painted, things we have passed
> Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
> And so they are better, painted--better to us,
> Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;
> God uses us to help each other so,
> Lending our minds out.
>
> ("Fra Lippo Lippi," ll. 300-06)

Lippo believes that art serves God because it awakens our sense of beauty.[39] And

> If you get simple beauty and nought else,
> You get about the best thing God invents:
> That's somewhat: and you'll find the soul you have missed,
> Within yourself, when you return him thanks.
>
> (ll. 217-220)

Lippo's understanding of the body/soul dialectic is as impoverished as Andrea's. His interest in "simple beauty without soul" is a defence of his realism.[40] His method, to reproduce body at the expense of soul, is more than a response to the Prior's command: "Give us no more of body than shows soul" (l. 188); it is his justification for his inability to conceive or to image the sense of soul.[41]

Lippo's concept of realism is in ironic juxtaposition to his limited imaginative powers. His understanding of truth and beauty is ironically projected against the background of his experience and his employment. "I let Lisa go, and what

good in life since," (l. 56) adequately expresses the monk's aesthetic and personal interests. His absence from the community of women is a consistent concern.

> I'm grown a man no doubt, I've broken bounds:
> You should not take a fellow eight years old
> And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
>
> (ll. 223-25)

His statements on the function of art are largely a means of creating a mask which will disguise, as well as justify, his adventures with "a sweet angelic slip of a thing" (l. 370). His concepts and judgments on the function of art are as ironic and limiting as the comments made by Keats' Grecian Urn:[42]

> "Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"--that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
>
> ("Ode on a Grecian Urn," ll. 49-50)

The summations he offers serve to re-open speculation, but Lippo means these statements to close the issue.

The love songs of Andrea del Sarto and Fra Lippo Lippi are only marginally separated even though Lippo's speech brings the "gray beginning" of dawn (l. 392) and Andrea's brings the night which follows the gray remainder of the evening. Both characters are imitators; both use their art to secure their "meat and drink" ("Fra Lippo Lippi," l. 315).[43] Both use their speech as a means to "interpret God" ("Fra Lippo Lippi," l. 311) and his ways, and both witness "art's decline" (l. 233) in their

own work.

Lippo suffers from his enclosure as a monk and as a painter who must satisfy someone else's concept of soul and art. His statement

> I'm my own master, paint now as I please--
>
> (l. 226)

is in ironic contrast to his next utterance:

> So, I swallow my rage,
> Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight and paint
> To please them--sometimes do and sometimes don't.
>
> (ll. 242-44)

Lippo is both master and slave, a beast (l. 270) and not a beast (l. 80), yet he sees himself to be above the common man:

> What would men have? Do they like grass or no--
> May they or main't they? all I want's the thing
> Settled forever one way. As it is,
> You tell too many lies and hurt yourself:
> You don't like what you only like too much,
> You do like what, if given you at your word,
> You find abundantly detestable.
>
> (ll. 258-64)

This system of either/or rationalization is similar to the pattern Andrea builds:

> In this world, who can do a thing, will not;
> And who would do it, cannot, I perceive.
>
> ("Andrea del Sarto," ll. 137-38)

Both constructions attempt to compensate for the absence of vision in the lives of the speakers and both catch these speakers in the labyrinth of the either/or system.

Lippo does not appreciate the tension of his existence as artist and monk; he depends on simplistic reductions of the world's texture to justify the reach of his own artistic capacity.

> This world's no blot for us,
> Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.
>
> (11. 313-14)

What it means in terms of this good is not apparent in what Lippo says. His statement that

> The world and life's too big to pass for a dream
>
> (1. 251)

is an explanation for his experiences with the "sportive ladies" (1. 6). His need to satisfy his sensuality encourages him to feel that the "miserable world" (1. 95) he renounced at eight years old is more significant than the "dream" existence of the cloister.

Lippo's method of securing reality through his representational art form is at least twice removed from the source and meaning he purports to seek. His art is used to stir the people to make greater contributions for the church and to

compete with the decoration in the churches of the Camaldolese and Preaching Friars. Lippo, like Andrea, proposes another painting which will in some way redeem him, "a plot to make amends" ("Fra Lippo Lippi," l. 343). And like Andrea, Lippo would appease the guard who has accosted him in the streets by promising a pastiche of pious figures as a "pretty picture" (l. 389) for the church.

> I shall paint
> God in the midst, Madonna and her babe,
> Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood. . .
> And then i' the front, of course a saint or two. . .
> And Job, I must have him there past mistake.
>
> (ll. 347-49, 353, 357)

Lippo uses his art to play off "this presence, this pure company" (l. 368) against his own figure:

> up shall come
> Out of a corner when you least expect,
> As one by a dark stair into a great light,
> Music and talking, who but Lippo! I!
>
> (ll. 360-63)

His art must bear his stamp: "Iste Perfecit opus" (l. 377); it must superimpose his non-pious presence and "adulterous" consorting on the "saints and saints/And saints again" (ll. 48-49) who clutter his canvas. This ironic presentation interprets the honesty of the painter's contention that by painting body he gets soul.[44]

> Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue
> Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash
> And then add soul and heighten them three-fold?
>
> (ll. 212-14)

Lippo's error consists in his will to interpret art as life and life as art.[45] He takes the "shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades" (l. 284), transfers them to canvas and hopes to "let a truth slip" (l. 296). A retort to this aesthetic is made in Browning's satirical "'Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books'," where the speaker cites the effectiveness of non-discursive writing in creating the sense of an object or concept.[46] The poet is Mage and Maker[47] who

> vents a brace of rhymes,
> And in there breaks the sudden rose herself,
> Over us, under, round us every side. . .
> Buries us with a glory, young once more,
> Pouring heaven into this shut house of life.
>
> ("'Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books'," ll. 39-41, 44-45)

The poet uses the shaping spirit, the active imagination, to drape "naked thoughts. . . in sights and sounds" (ll. 3-4). But the mimetic imagination, shared by Andrea and Lippo, is non-transcendental, grounded on earth, to and for the flesh, soulless.[48]

That art is not to be a substitute for life and that art must serve life and not merely reproduce it, is the informing

aesthetic of both "Youth and Art" and "The Statue and the Bust." When the artist does not use his art to satisfy the drives of his life and his soul, he is successful in neither.

> I earned no more by a warble
> Than you by a sketch in plaster;
> You wanted a piece of marble,
> I needed a music-master.
>
> ("Youth and Art," ll. 13-16)

Art is insignificant unless it brings the artist closer in his relationship to the world and the outside of his experience. Art is the agent and not the end. Art is process and not object.

When the characters of "The Statue and the Bust" substitute inanimate art objects in lieu of the fulfillment of their desire and the acknowledgement of their love, they invite the speaker's contempt.

> And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
> Is--the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin.
>
> ("The Statue and the Bust," ll. 246-47)[49]

Art does not provide a sanctuary where experience can be gained vicariously. The creature who lives in art and not through it and with it takes a "dream for a truth" (l. 155). Such an error is evident when the artist merely gains the art object but not the world and the life.

The true has no value beyond the sham:

> As well the counter as coin, I submit,
> When your table's a hat and your prize a dram.
>
> ("The Statue and the Bust," ll. 235-37)

"Old Pictures in Florence" takes up this contention that the art object is subordinate to the process of its creation and to the artist who grew with the process. The speaker asks if Michael Angelo and Rafael are still concerned with the praise or blame of the earth and the symbolic art object she represents now that they have attained the heaven where they are recognized as artists.

> Do their eyes contract to the earth's old scope,
> Now that they see God face to face?
>
> ("Old Pictures in Florence," ll. 53-54)

The answer appears later in the speaker's tirade against the abuse of old pictures and old masters:

> There's a fancy some lean to and others hate
> That, when this life is ended, begins
> New work for the soul in another state,
> Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins:
> Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
> Repeat in large what they practiced in small,
> Through life after life in unlimited series;
> Only the scales to be changed, that's all.
>
> (ll. 161-68)

This heaven is a repetition of the experience of the earth. It is never grander than the life it reflects. Art reproduces the image of heaven on earth's scale and heaven rewards the progres-

sion made by the artist on earth. The soul informs the body; the body verifies the soul and houses its image.

> When Greek Art ran and reached the goal,
> Thus much had the world to boast. . .
> The Truth of Man, as by God first spoken,
> Which the actual generations garble,
> Was re-uttered, and Soul (which Limbs betoken)
> And Limbs (Soul informs) made new in marble.
>
> ("Old Pictures in Florence," ll. 83-88)

This ideal represented in Greek art is indicative of the ideal relationship between man and the God he images as an aspect of the soul, heaven, and the objective texture of the world.[50] Later artists argued that this ideal is undesirable because any perfection closes "wider nature," (l. 119) and "limits their range" (l. 121).

> What's come to perfection perishes.
> Things learned on earth, we shall practice in heaven.
>
> (ll. 130-31)

But the ideal of Greek art is closer to the whole and the "golden hope of the world" (l. 283) than the Christian art which measures the scope of earth "according to God's clear plan" (l. 112). The artist who is not "Measured by Art" (l. 107), but who measures with and through his art is he who achieves

> Through earth and its noise, what is heaven's serene.
>
> (l. 171)

Such an artist is representative of Browning's subjective poet cum objective poet. He is the subjective poet who considers his "own soul" but who, like the objective poet, moves to "things external." His truth is imaged "in reference to the aggregate human mind" and "in reference to the Supreme Intelligence."[51] This Supreme Intelligence, the "One above" the subjective poet, refers to the oversoul and the ultimate Imagination. This "God" is symbolic of the creative force and the effort the poet emulates. The poet attempts to reflect this power; his work is an "effluence." He is Creator in so far as he relates to this concept of the God who resides within his heart and breast.

Browning opens the second volume of Men and Women with "Andrea del Sarto" and closes it with a dedication to Elizabeth Barrett: "One Word More." In the latter he asks,

> Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also.
>
> ("One Word More," l. 4)

His poem is a statement of the value of art to gain a prize beyond a search for meaning or the world's truth, to gain instead the absolute of love.[52]

> What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's picture?
> This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not
> Once, and only once, and for one only,
> . . . to find his love a language
> Fit and fair and simple and sufficient--
> Using nature that's an art to others,

> Not, this one time, art that's turned his nature.
> Ay, of all the artists living, loving,
> None but would forego his proper dowry,--
> Does he paint? he fain would write a poem,--
> Does he write? he fain would paint a picture,
> Put to proof art alien to the artist's,
> Once and only once, and for one only,
> So to be the man and leave the artist,
> Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow.
>
> ("One Word More," ll. 58-72)

If we see Browning plain here, it is to read that love obliterates any search for purpose that does not include the fulfillment of its own out-going energy. The intellect, the art, must "all-express" the soul of the heart's love.[53] Again, Browning borrows Shelley's contention that

> The great secret of morals is love; or a going out of our own nature, and an identification with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person, not our own.[54]
>
> It is that powerful attraction towards all that we conceive, or fear, or hope beyond ourselves, when we find within our own thoughts the chasm of an insufficient void, and seek to awaken in all things that are, a community with that which we experience within ourselves.[55]

Browning is not God's "chief-inquisitor" come back to tell all like Lippo, Andrea, or Caliban who make it their business to interpret God's great plan. He is the artist who uses his "joys and sorrows/Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving" ("One Word More," ll. 133-34) to explore his heart and save his soul. His poetry argues that if art were to serve the man, the heart, then it would be worth it after all. If imagination

were to serve love, then the song would make "a strange art of an art familiar" (l. 124), and "the fruit of speech" (l. 139) would tell us all.

# NOTES

1. According to DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 245, "'Andrea del Sarto' grew out of Browning's attempt to describe the painter's portrait of himself and his wife. . . to John Kenyon. . . Kenyon desired a photograph of the picture, and when one was not available, Browning wrote the poem and sent it instead." Andrea's speech is his "twilight-piece." All line references are to the poem as reprinted in Poems of Robert Browning, ed. Donald Smalley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), pp. 213-19.

2. See E.D.H. Johnson, The Alien Vision, "the error lies not in his hand with its matchless skill, but in the soul which directs that hand," p. 111. See also, Ian Jack, Browning's Major Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), p. 232.

3. See Honan, Browning's Characters, "the tragedy of Andrea's character is that the soulless facility of his work--represented in Lucrezia--has become inextricably merged in his own being," p. 158.

4. In The Poetry of Experience, Robert Langbaum argues that Andrea needs to implicate Lucrezia so that he can wash "away with an enchanting vagueness all moral issues," p. 150. Andrea does not realize that he enjoys playing her victim since it means that he has resigned his will to her and can blame her for his moral failure in art," p. 149. I read this aspect of Andrea's character as part of his dramatic mask. Lucrezia is his puppet.

5. For an alternate discussion of this relationship, see Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, "If Abt Vogler mounts to the 'perfect round' only to fall into the 'broken arcs' of his moralizing, Andrea del Sarto is a victim of the aesthetic life who has mounted to the ethical stage only briefly, during his kingly days at Fontainebleau, and who now merely apes the postures of the ethical and religious man," p. 145. I argue that the two characters are related by the fact that they are both posturing, both fall into the "broken arcs" because they lack the where-with-all to sustain any association with the "perfect round." Both characters moralize and can be seen in the "etnical stage." Both are victims

of the type of aesthetic they preach.

6. In The Bow and the Lyre, Roma King outlines this sense of irony. He quotes from Empson's Some Versions of Pastoral (London: Chatto and Windus, 1935), p. 56; "An irony has no point unless it is true, in some degree, in both senses; for it is imagined as part of an argument; what is said is made absurd, but it is what the opponent might say," p. 13.

7. See Roma A. King, Jr., The Focusing Artiface (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1968), p. 108, "His tragedy is to know at once what he aspires to and what, in contrast, he can achieve." King differs from Langbaum in the latter's estimation of Andrea's awareness. King argues that Andrea "comes eventually to understand himself but can only accept and endure, not remedy his situation," p. 104. My own reading includes both arguments. Andrea is simultaneously aware and unaware. This is the ironic method which informs the poem and creates the dramatic mask, moving with a steady back and forth, to and fro rhythm.
David Shaw states that the "only activity that Andrea is wholly unironical about is self-justification," p. 154, but even this is questionable.

8. In The Revelation of St. John the Divine, salvation and the New Jerusalem is promised only to those who overcome:

> To him that overcometh will I give
> to eat of the tree of life, which is
> in the midst of the paradise of God.
>
> (2:7)

9. See Richard D. Altick, "'Andrea del Sarto': The Kingdom of Hell is Within" (in) Browning's Mind and Art, ed. Clarence Tracy, pp. 18-31. Altick argues that Andrea's condition and fate are his own responsibility, that his "capacity for self-deception is tragically insufficient for even his momentary comfort," p. 18. "Like all men cursed with too much self-knowledge and lacking the saving grace of rationalizations that will stick, he carries the kingdom of hell within him," p. 31.

10. See Robert Garratt's "Browning's Dramatic Monologue: The Strategy of the Double Mask," "Andrea chooses the mask of weakness and non-control to appear as victim. Using his mask in an attempt to gain attention, Andrea gradually extends his self-pity and martyrdom so that Lucrezia will appear as a cruel and selfish tyrant. He plays the victim,

completely and helplessly devoted to his wife, in order that it might be easier for him not only to excuse his failures but to fix the blame for their existence on someone else," pp. 118-19. The degree to which Andrea is aware of his manipulations is open to various interpretations but the fact that he presents himself to the reader as something other than what he intends is less flexible. The point Garratt stresses is that a character plays a character "in order to develop a rhetoric of persuasion. In this regard the dramatic monologue pits a character against a situation, which demands that the character fight for psychological survival," p. 125. The issues raised in the effort become as significant as the character's mask and methods.

11. Andrea's speech is not the poem but Andrea's statements on art are often regarded to be a transparent mask for Browning's theories. Paul A. Cundiff, "'Andrea del Sarto'," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 13, (1968), 27-38, sees the poem as part of Browning's endeavour to establish the superiority of love," p. 31. Cundiff depends on biographical information about Andrea and his wife to explain "the superficial identity existing between the artist known to Vasari and Browning and the real Andrea," p. 34, and to explain Browning's treatment of a "mythological crisis in the painter's life and art," p. 34. Cundiff's interest in "the real Andrea" requires that, essentially, he rewrite the poem to correct Browning's "historical error." This is the result of reading the monologues as a platform for Browning's theory of love and life: "it is tempting to believe Browning wanted the real Andrea's love, as displayed in the Madonnas, to inhere in, if not permeate, his poem," pp. 37-38.
Dougald B. MacEachen, "Browning's Use of Sources in 'Andrea del Sarto'," Victorian Poetry, 8, (1970), 61-64, is also sympathetic to the historical character. He accuses Browning of an "absence of fidelity to historical fact," p. 63. He reads the poem as Browning's excuse to convey "one of his ethical teachings, that a man's reach should exceed his grasp, or, more bluntly put, that a man should pass his life in a state of divine frustration," p. 63. The article becomes an indignant attempt to venerate the painter at the expense of the poet: "Poor Andrea, kindly, unacquisitive, in love with his wife, and a great painter besides, had the misfortune to fall into the hands of an able poet with strong fixed ideas and a greater than average capacity for strong prejudices," p. 64.
Browning readers are often tempted to relate the poet to his characters in even more personal direction. Betty Miller, Robert Browning, A Portrait (London: John Murray,

1952), wants to argue that Browning is in sufferance to Elizabeth Barrett just as Andrea is to Lucrezia. Browning's wife is made responsible for Browning's suppression of "the deepest creative forces of his own being," pp. 175-76. Although DeVane calls this "a perversion of interpretation," p. 248, Handbook, even David Shaw is tempted to draw analogies: "Even if we question the domestic parallel and reject Mrs. Miller's hypothesis that Browning was uxorious in his attachment to Elizabeth, the artistic parallels are clear," The Dialectical Temper, p. 149.

12. See Honan, Browning's Characters, Lucrezia "is one of his paintings, come to life," p. 157.
Julia Markus, "'Andrea del Sarto (Called 'The Faultless Painter')' and William Page (Called 'The American Titian')" (in) Browning Institute Studies, 2 (1974), 1-24, notes the comparison between "My Last Duchess" and Andrea's Lucrezia, p. 9.

13. A central issue in a discussion of the form of a dramatic monologue is this relation between speaker and listener. See Altick, "The Kingdom of Hell is Within," Andrea's monotonic language belongs "to soliloquy rather than a monologue--for Lucrezia can scarcely be called an auditor in the literal sense," p. 20. See Shaw, "Andrea's most important auditor, the person he most wants to persuade, is not Lucrezia but himself," p. 146.
See King, The Bow and the Lyre, "he speaks more to himself than directly to Lucrezia, and although we never forget that she is with him, we feel that she too is overhearing. Actually, the poem belongs somewhere between dramatic conversation and internal monologue," p. 22. And see Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience, "the utterance is in its ultimate effect a private dialogue of the speaker with himself, leading to a private illumination," p. 196.
My argument is that the dramatic monologue moves consistently between the speaker and the speaker's otherwise, and that any other listener is part of the prop or setting that defines the context of the speech.

14. See Leonard Burrows, Browning the Poet (Nedlands, Western Australia: University of Western Australia Press, 1969), Burrows argues that Andrea's monologue is a verbal painting made with "the utmost self-consciousness and an alertly sensitive appreciation of all the compositional and tonal values. The result is a self-portrait in which it is triumphantly evident that the painter has been able to regard himself with sufficient emotional and aesthetic distance to produce a work of art combining astonishing psychological

insight with painterly perfection of form," p. 188.

15. Julia Markus draws an interesting parallel between Andrea's "common grayness" and the painting style of William Page. Page's technique used gray and black "in such a way that when 'seen by twilight, the whole picture seems to sink into a flat tone'," p. 6. Due to this practice, Page's portraits darkened and eventually turned black. Markus draws other parallels between the two painters, their art and wives, to prepare a convincing suggestion for Browning's source for his "Andrea del Sarto."
Other source possibilities are discussed in DeVane, p. 245, and Barbara Melchiori's Browning's Poetry of Reticence (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), pp. 199-204.

16. See Altick, "The admission that men strive, and through struggle achieve a glimpse of heaven, disposes of a fore-ordaining God as a scapegoat. We are not 'fettered fast': man's will is free. God not serving his need, Andrea seeks some other reason for his failure--and Lucrezia is at hand," p. 27.
See also, Shaw, the "premise that he wants to establish is: 'All is not as God, but as Lucrezia over-rules'," p. 150.

17. For comment on the relationship of Browning's creatures to their God, see J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God, "what has happened to the desire of created things to embody God in time and space, to express the infinite in the finite? In building a private world around themselves man and beast have gradually cut themselves off from God, until, in the end, they cannot even remember that there is anything but their own petty circle lotted out of infinite space. Within that narrow sphere they revolve endlessly, like animals in a cage, and ultimately their lives may stagnate for want of fresh air, as Andrea del Sarto suffocates in the circle of his own perfection," p. 139.

18. See Mario L. D'Avanzo, "King Francis, Lucrezia, and the Figurative Language of 'Andrea del Sarto'," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 9 (1968), 523-36, where he states that Lucrezia is an "antimuse" and that "Andrea's one true, but brief, emparter of inspiration is King Francis. He serves as the divine agent of Andrea's imagination in ways Lucrezia could never accomplish," p. 527.

19. Clotho spins the thread; Lachesis determines its length; Atropos cuts it off. Robert Graves, The Greek Myths (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955), I, 48.

20. Graves, I, 33.

21. For a discussion of the silver/gold (and objective/subjective) dialectic of the poem, see D'Avanzo, pp. 528-30. He links silver and the objective world with Lucrezia and the moon; he links gold and subjective capability with Francis, the sun and Apollo. Lucrezia, he states, "plays the symbolic role of adversary-destroyer of Andrea's hoped-for Apollonian world of art, constricting, overcoming, and clearly dominating the artist whom Francis once inspired to glorious, golden, kingly days of creative effort," p. 536. Elizabeth Bieman, "An Eros Manque: Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto'," Studies in English Literature, 10, No. 4 (1970), 651-68, also traces the sun/moon, body/soul relationships in the poem. However, she uses Neoplatonic theories of aesthetics to determine that Andrea's artistic performance is degraded by his inability to reach the quality of love shared by the Brownings. "Andrea, the passive, purblind bat, in failing to transmit erotic light to Lucrezia, has fallen away from that virtue which is proper to him as a bi-sexual, the virtue of justice. He has not given Lucrezia her due: a lover's right to the beloved," p. 668.

22. Eleanor Cook, Browning's Lyrics: An Exploration (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), cites much of the enclosure imagery Andrea uses to build his prison, pp. 126-27.

23. This is my point of difference with Eleanor Cook. She outlines patterns of Browning's enclosure imagery but argues that this is his method of protesting the Romantic concept that reality is located within the self, p. 122. She reads this imagery in "Andrea del Sarto" as Browning's statement on "attainment in love," p. 126. "The dilemma is that the lover must pursue his lady in order to find her, yet she must be left free to wander, otherwise, the quest deteriorates to a chase, an effort to trap her and stop all her movement. Somehow a balance must be found between separation and intrusion," p. 147. I agree that one large question is how to achieve balance, but that balance must be between Andrea's own inside/outside.

24. Cf. Roma A. King, The Bow and the Lyre, King argues that the action of the poem is given complexity and intensity by "a series of dialectical movements witnin the poem. Part of the intensity comes from the opposition of pairs, all symbolic: summer and autumn, twilight and darkness, youth and age, past and present, heaven and earth, hope and failure," p. 12.
See also, above, footnote number 6.

25. See A.E. Dyson, The Crazy Fabric: Essays in Irony (New York: St. Martins Press, 1966), Dyson concludes his study acknowledging that irony is more than a rhetorical technique and that the method might be construed "as a vision of the universe itself. . . we constantly return to this larger theme: to the perception of cross purposes, of absurdity, of tragic suffering, in the enigma of events that happen to us, and in 'the crazy fabric of human nature' itself," pp. 222-23.

26. See F.E.L. Priestley, "Some Aspects of Browning's Irony" (in) Browning's Mind and Art, pp. 123-142, "we recognize easily the ironic play between Andrea's dream of what he might have been, of what, given a new chance, he might still be, and his resigned acceptance of what he takes to be his inescapable nature; also the irony of his alternating boasts of his powers and potentialities and his self-condemnation," p. 124. Priestley, in his discussion of "Karshish," hits on the nature of the ironic method: "the ironic paradox that full knowledge unfits for human life is thus made to suggest the corollary, that incomplete knowledge gives life meaning and activity. This irony operates directly between poet and reader," p. 128.

27. Cf. Browning's testimony that the creative mind misses the full conception by the time it catches the paper, in a letter to Elizabeth Barrett, quoted in Charles Rivers, "The Twin Revealment: Subjective-Objective Polarity in the Poetry of Robert Browning," Northwest Missouri State College Studies, 28 (1964), 3-31, p. 19.

28. Cf. the epigraph to "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," taken from Dante's Inferno, XXVII, 61-66: "If I thought that my reply would be to one who would ever return to the world, this flame would stay without further movement; but since none has ever returned alive from this depth. . . I answer without fear of infamy." Andrea's conjectures are safe. Lucrezia does not hear, and he is too far depressed to recollect his experience in another time. Heaven is shut to him.

29. See above, Chapter I, footnote number 58.

30. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," p. 1085.

31. Cf. William John Alexander, An Introduction to the Poetry of Robert Browning (Folcraft, Pa: The Folcraft Press, 1889), that the true artist "is one in whom the imperfect shows of the world awaken a more adequate reminiscence. . . of abso-

lute truth and beauty. He is, further, gifted with the power of reproducing, more or less successfully,--whether in marble or colors or music or language,--these anticipations of the divine idea, so as to stimulate the less penetrating vision of ordinary men to a more perfect perception of the absolute," p. 114.

32. For an alternate opinion see Miller, The Disappearance of God, p. 149, "the real truth exists hidden in any event or experience--God's own truth, the gold center behind the husk of lies. This truth is formless, invisible to man."

33. See Alexander, p. 116, where he argues that perfection "implies a low ideal" and is "the mark of stunted spiritual development." Alexander believes that Browning's theory is Andrea's --"'A man's reach should exceed his grasp'." "The works of a great artist will. . . always bear the marks of imperfection, of the failure of the artist to attain his ideal." See also, Donald Smalley, Poems of Robert Browning, note to "Old Pictures in Florence," p. 510, where he states that Browning develops Ruskin's doctrine, the philosophy of the imperfect, "no good work whatever can be perfect, and the demand for perfection is always a misunderstanding of the ends of art."

34. See Charles Rivers' excellent article, "The Twin Revealment: Subjective-Objective Polarity in the Poetry of Robert Browning," p. 31.

35. "Essay on Shelley".

36. Ian Jack, Browning's Major Poetry, connects Jules to "Andrea del Sarto" in that Jules "addresses Phene very much as Andrea del Sarto addresses Lucrezia," p. 67.
See also, Honan, p. 88, "Jules' self-characterizing discussion of his art has a relationship to much of the matter and technique of the monologues of Andrea, Lippo, and Cleon." Both writers see Jules as similar to Andrea.

37. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, links "Andrea del Sarto" and "Pictor Ignotus," as poems which "seem to exemplify the corrupt extremes" of Browning's objective poet or "'fashioner'," p. 112.
Ian Jack reads both as "a study of failure," p. 213.
See Robert Tunis Howling, "Browning's Theory of the Purpose of Art," Susquehanna University Studies, 4 (1951), 215-28, in "Pictor Ignotus. . . the artist is criticized for failing to infuse in his work the truth of nature," p. 216.
See also, Vincent C. DeBaun, "Browning: Art is Life is

Thought," CLA Journal, 14 (1971), 387-401, "Andrea might well be contrasted with. . . the nameless artist of Browning's own "Pictor Ignotus"--who sought to stress the soul and considered the body but as a fleshy frame," p. 400.

38. Charles Richard Sanders, "Carlyle, Browning, and the Nature of a Poet," Emory University Quarterly, 16 (1960), 197-209, reads the poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary" as one of "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind," p. 207. Howling does not account for the ironic implications either. "In 'How It Strikes a Contemporary' Browning considers poets as 'God's spies'," p. 223.

39. Lippo is usually read as a voice for Browning. See William R. Thurman, "Carlyle, Browning, and Ruskin on One Purpose of Art," South Atlantic Bulletin, 37 (1972), 52-57, "For Browning, the work of the artist leads us to see and love in Divinely created reality the beauty which we might otherwise overlook," p. 56.
See also, DeBaun, p. 392, "we might go so far as to wonder if Browning's aesthetic philosophy does not reach its fullest expression in Lippo." See also, pp. 393 and 395.

40. See Richard Benvenuto, "Lippo and Andrea: The Pro and Contra of Browning's Realism," Studies in English Literature, 13 (1973), 643-52, p. 648. And, "In 'Fra Lippo Lippi' the soul of meaning of things exists in the world outside imagination, requiring the painter to make the flesh of his work resemble its original," p. 649.

41. For an alternate view, see Glen Omans, "Browning's 'Fra Lippo Lippi,' A Transcendentalist Monk," Victorian Poetry, 7 (1969), 129-145, "the contemplation of the flesh is the best way to an awareness of soul," p. 134.

42. Howling argues that Lippo's understanding of the relationship of truth and beauty is in accord with Browning's but he then states that "to be valid, poetry must offer an interpretation of life," p. 222. This is certainly a reasonable test but Lippo does not survive such an evaluation. His understanding of the world, and of truth and beauty is confined to the visual and concrete items of his experience.

43. See Burrows, p. 187, for a discussion of the relationship between Fra Lippo Lippi and Andrea del Sarto. He reads the poems as companion pieces but "vastly dissimilar in the particular personalities they reveal and create, and hence strikingly dissimilar in their poetic and dramatic texture." See also, L. Robert Stevens, "Aestheticism in Browning's

Early Renaissance Monologues," Victorian Poetry, 3 (1965), 19-24, where Stevens compares Lippo and Andrea, but finds that Lippo gains "the mastery of his own soul," p. 23.

44. For an alternate opinion see Omans, p. 132 and p. 136.

45. De Baun construes this identification to be that of Browning: "for within him, art was life, and life was thought, in a perfect union," p. 388. And, "It is given to Lippo to express many of Browning's most deeply felt theories of life as well as art," p. 393.

46. In poems where the speaker's voice is explicitly satiric, as in "'Transcendentalism' and "Youth and Art," or narrative, as in "Old Pictures in Florence" and "The Statue and the Bust," the dramatic monologue format is not prevalent. The ironic tension between the speaker's statements and their implications is diminished. Comments made by these speakers can be read on a literal level.

47. This is Roma King's concept of Browning as poet and maker, not philosopher, "Browning: 'Mage' and 'Maker'--A Study in Poetic Purpose and Method," The Victorian Newsletter, No. 20 (1961), pp. 21-25.

48. Omans argues the opposite, p. 139.

49. Cf. Blake, "Proverbs of Hell" from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence."

50. This passage is usually read as Browning's statement that Greek art is too perfect. See DeBaun, p. 391; Walters, pp. 115-19; and Alexander, pp. 133-34.

51. See Rivers, p. 31, "the function of the poet, for Browning as for Shelley, is to bring man's objective life into correlation with subjective truth."

52. "One Word More" is not a dramatic monologue. The poem is clearly labelled as a dedication "To E.B.B."

> There they are, my fifty men and women
> Naming me the fifty poems finished!
> Take them, Love, the book and me together.

K.W. Gransden, "The Uses of Personae" (in) Browning's Mind and Art, argues that "One Word More demands to be related to Browning's persona-poetry instead of the sonorous rhetoric. . . of his public art, it in fact displays the

very mannerisms it purports to be rejecting," pp. 54-55. This is more a comment on the "embarrassing" quality of the dedication than an argument for the dramatic features of the poetic statements made in the poem. H.B. Charlton, "Browning: the Poet's Aim," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library, 22 (1938) 98-121, refers to "One Word More" as "purely personal and non-dramatic," p. 111.

53. Benvenuto calls "One Word More" a "dejection ode," p. 646. He feels that Browning's search for a poetic which would break the silence of "One Word More" is matched with his belief in the Incarnation: "In 'Fra Lippo Lippi' and 'Andrea del Sarto' . . . Browning tested the capacity of realism to make the Christ stand," p. 464. Again, a study of the ironic features of the poems indicates that this Incarnation is to be found in the life and loving-temper of the human imagination.

54. Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry," p. 1076.

55. Shelley, "On Love" (in) English Romantic Writers, ed. David Perkins, pp. 1070-71.

# CHAPTER IV

## Mirror and Metaphor: The Ring and the Book and "The Ring and the Book"

Suit the action to the word, the word to the action, with this special observance, that you o'erstep not the modesty of nature. For anything so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature--to show Virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.

"Hamlet," III, ii

I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up.

Thoreau. Walden

The Ring and the Book uses a Roman murder story to outline the difference between the objective texture of experience and the subjective voice of expression. The poem is a study of the creative process, of the role of the artist, and of the function and purpose of poetry. It is concerned with imitation; it is strictly mimetic in the sense that it provokes memory and recollection and in that it revitalizes and locates the form and substance of the forgotten. Broadly, the poem is a circular quest for the nature of truth and the "truth" of nature. It reproduces the subject of the inner eye and the object of the outer.

The Ring and the Book is structured by this involvement of the inner with the outer and with the subject and the object. The poet's eye becomes the speaker's "I" and this in turn defines the flow of the creative process. Nature and "reality" become reflections of the speaker-viewer's subjective consciousness. The truth of this nature, then, is a function of the speaker's personality, a reflection of his inside imposed on the outside.[1] The eye sees only itself.

The poem proceeds from the poet's eye through the poet's world, and back to the poet's "eye." It is imaged in terms of the contraries and variances, the dark and the bright, "shine or shade"[2] of the seen and unseen world. The poem is epistemological in energy and in its engendered form. It seeks embodiment for its central questions concerning the nature of truth, reality, perspective, God, and the imagination.

The Ring and the Book is non-didactic; it is not directed by a "moral" predisposition.[3] It studies process, transformation, and the effect of attitudes; it uses metaphor and the relationships between opposites to establish, not so much the validity of representative points of view,[4] but to delineate the correspondence of subject and object--the poesis itself.

The poem follows the movement from the apprehensions of items or concepts to the significance of the act of apprehension and to the repercussions of the concepts so attained.[5] Is the capacity to perceive and to order part of the design or is it the creation of design? Is the figure significant in some unseen overall pattern or does it perpetuate the illusion of pattern and purpose? What is the value of defining relational patterns if these patterns are indicative only of the method? Is the creative act, the playing, an effort to hold a mirror up to nature or to substantiate the act by placing value on the referential function? Is poetry an imitation of reality in

terms of the seen, visible, concrete objects of the world or does it attempt to project beyond into the significance of an unseen ideal, beyond literal apprehension? Is poetry an effort to justify the perpetuation of the imagination? Is the imagination a means to obliterate the mediocrity of visual and empirical experience? To what degree is the imaginative act merely a repetition of visual acknowledgement of form, but so transformed and metamorphized as to obscure the original perspective and to add dignity and grandeur to the unglossed vision?[6]

The Ring and the Book is a speculative enquiry into the process of metaphor. How does an object-thing become fact or truth? How do we know truth from illusion? Can illusion become truthful? Is the ideal more real than what we perceive to be the truth of nature? Is truth on earth a reflection of "as it shall be" in heaven, or is heaven a metaphor which justifies the facts of life and death? How can art, the reproducing agent and imaged object, approach heaven and the unseen while remaining true to the features of earth? How is God, as imaged object, a justification for the decay and mutability which man must experience? Is the impulse to complete the seen with the unseen an effort to immortalize the facts and features of death, change and loss? Finally, The Ring and the Book provokes the most existential query--what is the end and profit of existence?

Book I, "The Ring and the Book," is the first voice

for these concerns on the limitations of human vision. Its principal question is how do we know the object from the subject, the part from the whole? How can the human eye gain a larger perspective, an eagle's view, and still live on "mother-earth" merely "cognizant of country in the clouds" (l. 1341)? Is the only way to heaven up Jack's "beanstalk-rungs" (l. 1347)?

The poet of Book I measures the vacancy between man's reach and his grasp; he climbs towards that "novel country" (l. 1348) in order to see what God sees. He moves "step by step" (l. 1330) to the "wide prospect round," "Higher than wistful eagle's horny eye" (l. 1342) could manage in order to bring into memory the life and death of facts and records long "forgotten" (l. 417).[7] The poet of "The Ring and the Book" becomes God, making heaven his (l. 1348). Using both his eyes, "more insight and more outsight" (l. 747), he is the camera man catching the image and flashing the "fragment of a whole" (l. 752) back to earth. He brings the unseen into focus,

> Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
> Completes the incomplete and saves the thing.
>
> (ll. 733-34)

> God must have a big eye to see everything
> That we have lost or forgotten. Men used to say
> That all lost objects stay upon the moon
> Untouched by any other eye but God's.
> The moon is God's big yellow eye remembering
> What we have lost or never thought. That's why
> The moon looks raw and ghostly in the dark.
> It is the camera shots of every instant in the world

> Laid bare in terrible yellow cold.
> It is the objects tnat we never saw.
>
> Jack Spicer, "Imaginary Elegies, I-IV"

The poet of "The Ring and the Book" ironically takes up Plato's attack on poets. He feels that the artist "Repeats God's process in man's due degree" (l. 717), that the poet only imitates form conceived elsewhere. The poet

> Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps,
>
> (l. 719)

because the ideal, "the good beyond him" (l. 716), is higher than his reach (l. 715): The poet, he says, can only "mimic creation" (l. 740), and

> the imitator. . . is a long way off the truth, and can do all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image.[8]

The poet is the mage, "stopping midway short of truth" (l. 743), dealing with appearance and reflections. He turns "a mirror round and round" to

> make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants. . . in the mirror.[9]

The nature this poet appeals to is all the world he sees within the frame of his analogies and his assumptions.[10] This is his

subjective temperament, his mind emanating out to reproduce and perpetuate the unseen in terms of the seen.

> The mind of the [artist] should be like a mirror which always takes the color of the thing that it reflects and which is filled by as many images as there are things placed before it. . . You cannot be a good master unless you have a universal power of representing by your art all the varieties of the forms which nature produces.[11]

The relationship of reality to appearance and of appearance to the ideal is part of the circularity which defines the ring metaphor of Book I.[12] The questions of defining truth, fact, nature, reality, the ideal, and the imagination are all related to vision, perspective, evaluation and to some degree judgment.[13] They are all related to how we see and how we apprehend. The poem is a study of the movement from the mirror images of truth, fact and recollection to their relationship to the world. The mirror of nature becomes the link between the objective outer eye and the subjective inner. Because the poet uses both his eyes and because his eyes are his means of seeing, everything he describes is metaphoric and engenders new images to express the forms perceived. The poet sets up a series of linked objects, each of which takes its color and design from the objects which precede and follow, "Till, justifiably golden, rounds [his] ring" (l. 1389).

Throughout "The Ring and the Book" concepts of truth are juxtaposed against speculation as to the human capacity to

experience or to perceive anything which is objectively truthful. The poet-narrator uses "truth" to represent an objective correlative,[14] the ideal, fact, and relativity.[15] Such usage indicates an ironic methodology--the purpose of which is to initiate speculation rather than formulate a statement which is objectively accurate but not subjectively truthful or in keeping with emotional or social demands.

Critical studies of The Ring and the Book consider Book I as man's quest to perceive God's truth[16] and his inability to do so,[17] but principally as a testimony to the many-sided, kaleidoscopic features of any event.[18] The bulk of critical commentary assumes Browning to be the poet-narrator, accepting the concept of art which is developed in Book I as Browning's statement that man's reach should exceed his grasp and that heaven and God's truth will be available when the soul shuffles off its mortal coil. This reading requires that Book I be taken out of its dramatic context and that the reader attribute to Browning carelessness in his use of language,[19] and needless repetition of plot line and substance.[20]

The consistent dramatic setting for Book I makes such a reading exceedingly difficult. An actor steps up to the audience and asks "Do you see this Ring?" (l. 1) and shortly, "Do you see this square old yellow Book?" (l. 33). He engages the attention of the "British Public" (l. 410), asking them to see, hear, and feel the import of his facts and subject.[21] The

actor's emphasis is on seeing; his story is intended to set his listener's "orbs"

> --white styled, black stigmatized,--
> A-rolling,
>
> (ll. 1374-75)

to have his audience move around his ring and find another "light than we perceive" (l. 316).

The poet is the master of ceremonies,[22] a conjurer,[23] a Harlequin guide,[24] a clown-deceiver.[25] His field is a circus and he is a myth-maker. He frolics, plays, acts, and dissembles;[26] he is the receiver of stolen goods. He is certainly a character in his own drama:

> Let this old woe step on the stage again!
> Act itself o'er anew for men to judge.
>
> (ll. 824-25)

This direction is more than an effort to revitalize dead facts or "live fact deadened down" (l. 834); it is an invocation to his "lyric Love" (l. 1391), his means to understand his own mortality and to gain the heaven

> Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
> For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
>
> (ll. 1411-12)

would go, were they large enough.

The poem is an attempt to create a new cosmology, to explain the ways of god to man,[27] to make mythology from the

> pure crude fact
> Secreted from a man's life when hearts beat hard
> And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since.[28]
>
> (ll. 35-37)

The connection of a mythic to a dissembling method[29] can be explained as part of the process of metaphor.[30] When an object is identified with another, and that one a substance for the abstraction of the first, a concreteness is given to the unseen emotive properties of the first. The first object is a form of the second, but the second is a mask for the first.[31] The mask is a means of representation, a means of bringing into active life the unfelt or unrealized aspects of the "thing signified" (l. 32). The poet in Book I uses his ring as a mask for the old yellow book; the old yellow book becomes the ring, but the ring "a figure, a symbol" (l. 31), contains the meaning, contents, and significance of the old yellow book. Ironically, the "facts" of the book need the transformation into ring to attain form. They are materialized only through their transformation.

The poet's perceptive act becomes the creative act. What he sees and how he sees it is transformed into "miracle" (l. 1364), a ring, the surface of which shows no trace of the "added artistry" (l. 29) which constructed its "prime nature"

(l. 29). This movement from the identification of one object to its significance in terms of another is mythic--a means of giving form and purpose to unmanageable or unreasonable data. The "prime nature" and its crude facts are given shape by the mirror of the language applied to it. The language imitates its reality, providing a mask, a way of appearance. To answer what is nature, the poet starts with "what is it like?"[32] Always, then, the "thing's sign" (l. 32) reflects more of the method than of the "thing signified" (l. 32).[33]

The Ring and the Book is a play, a "tragic piece" (l. 523), "acted. . . over again once more" (l. 522), so far removed from "truth" in any empiric sense as to be a play on a play, an imitation of imitation. The poet-clown of Book I resuscitates "the voices" (l. 838) of "the actors" (l. 948) so that they will demonstrate the methodology of the reconstruction of "fact" and "truth" and therein the deception perpetuated by their "guess" work (l. 842). The representative for Half-Rome feels "after the vanished truth" (l. 845) only to find himself unequipped to grasp the "deceptive speck" (l. 858).

> Some prepossession such as starts amiss,
> By but a hair's breadth at the shoulder-blade,
> The arm o' the feeler, dip he ne'er so brave;
> And so leads waveringly, lets fall wide
> O' the mark his finger meant to find.
>
> (ll. 853-57)

The method he uses to "feel for truth" (l. 852) is not informed

by the "figure and substance" (l. 843) of the thing itself, but only its reflection in a pool. His perspective is distorted. Like Plato's poet, he deals in appearances only;

> the same objects appear straight when looked at out of the water, and crooked when in the water; and the concave becomes convex, owing to the illusion about colors to which the sight is liable. . . Imitation is only a kind of play or sport.[34]

By giving voice to such deluded characters, the poet of Book I comments on his own capacity to represent dead "truth" (l. 696) in a "shapely ring" (l. 683). He parodies his own limited vision by telling his tale (l. 680) through other characters whose perceptions he feels to be more restricted than his own.

But he is the child of God, energized by him and able to see with his eyes. God's "Hand,""always above" his shoulder (l. 41), guides him first to the book stall where he finds his prize amid the rubbish. He is Elisha (l. 760), inspired by the breath of God:

> A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
> And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
> Letting me have my will again with these.
>
> (ll. 776-78)

He is magician, commissioning forth half of his soul (l. 750) to enter the dead bodies of his actors, to stretch himself on their flesh (l. 770), to "breathe on and relume" (l. 738) their wasted forms.

> I enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
> Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
> (By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
> What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
> Mistakingly felt: then write my name with Faust's!
>
> (ll. 755-59)

Like Setebos, the poet-mage makes a bauble world to mock yon real. His effort is finally self-fulfilling. He projects

> his surplusage of soul
> In search of body, so add self to self
> By owning what lay ownerless before.
>
> (ll. 723-25)

This image of the poet as gigantic bellows has necrophiliac overtones. The poet gives life to "the corpse, dead on the couch" (l. 765), by putting

> his mouth upon its mouth, his eyes
> Upon its eyes, his hands upon its hands,
>
> (ll. 766-67)

because he can "not make" (l. 713) original forms. He holds the mirror up to nature. He puts his mask on the dead forms and uses his breath and voice to initiate their action. Thus, he effects "a manageable mass" (l. 21) whereby he can remove himself from the face of his ring[35] and let the chorus-characters wear his mask. He deceives and he reveals. His ring miracle which

> Hammered and filed, fingered and favoured, last
> Lay ready for the renovating wash
> O' the water,
>
> (ll. 684-86)

is a means of baptism for the poet. He "disappeared; the book grew all in all" (l. 687) only after the poet is assured of his identification with God. His presence, then, is masked by the voices he resuscitates. He is free to deceive and to reveal. His "book" will act out the ring's shape through his agency but without his overt presence. He is the puppeteer.

> Action now shrouds, now shows the informing thought,
> Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
> Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
> Shows one tint at a time to take the eye:
> Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,
> Shifted a hair's-breadth shoots you dark for bright,
> Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so
> Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.
>
> (ll. 1366-73)

> God's other eye is good and gold, So bright
> The shine blinds. His eye is accurate. His eye
> Observes the goodness of the light it shines
> Then, pouncing like a cat, devours
> Each golden trace of light
> It saw and shined.
> Cat feeds on Mouse. God feeds on God. God's
> goodness is
> A black and blinding cannibal with sunny teeth
> That only eats itself.
>
> Jack Spicer, "Imaginary Elegies, I-IV."

The metaphoric method of The Ring and the Book is cannibalistic in the sense that each book issues in the next while the third book of each sequence consumes and cancels the first two. The poem feeds on each speaker's monologue in order to shine its meaning. "Half-Rome" is matched with "The Other-Half Rome" and both are cancelled by "Tertium Quid." Pompilia attempts to dissolve the testimony of both Count Guido Franceschini and Giuseppe Caponsacchi; the Pope is superimposed over the "testimony" of Archangelis and Bottinus; Guido's second exposure absorbs the Pope's judgment before "The Book and the Ring" closes the case. The "Ring and the Book" becomes "The Book and the Ring"; the Book is absorbed to become the Ring. The old yellow Book is internalized so that the Ring of Book I becomes the Ring of Book XII, an enclosing "rondure brave" (l. 27), a gold surface masking the features of the book. Gold feeds on gold. The poet feeds on facts to create more facts which become fiction glossed with a gold surface.

The poet refers to his ring as a gilded lily, masked by the "artificer" (l. 18) and decorated with "lily flowers" (l. 16). It is

> lilied loveliness,
> Gold as it was, is, shall be evermore,
>
> (ll. 27-38)

covering the "pure crude fact" (l. 35) which masks the fictive

composition. His craft is "trick" (l. 18), an "approved device" (l. 9). The poet employs "imitative craft" (l. 2); he "melts" (l. 18), "mingles" (l. 19), "temper[s]" (l. 20) his "slivers of pure gold" (l. 10), "such mere oozings from the mine" (l. 11) to shape "the thing" (l. 22) into a ring. He mixes wax with honey, "so to speak" (l. 19), or "gold/With gold's alloy" (ll. 19-20).[36] He is an alchemist who wishes to turn all he touches into gold.

The poet's use of fact becomes a debate on the nature of fact and the function of fact in the ascertainment of design. An item or event is considered to be fact if an agent perceives it as such. As the omniscient perceiver, the poet designates factual features to everything within his perspective.

The poet's eye is golden because it turns all it looks at to gold. He devours the golden images and turns them by "the file's tooth and the hammer's tap" (l. 14) into a golden ring. He shapes his images so that

> Fancy with fact is just one fact the more.
>
> (l. 464)

His fancy is his "live soul" (l. 469), which he fuses with the "inert stuff" (l. 469) he finds in the old yellow Book. He digests the "piecemeal gain" (l. 460) of gold, the "lingot truth" (l. 459) to give it new significance and to identify it in terms which match his conception of the way and meaning of

the universe. His fancy informs what he sees (l. 465), and gives his facts new form which keeps its shape and is "self-sufficient" (l. 26) because it is tied down and restricted.

> To-wit, that fancy has informed, transpierced,
> Thridded and so thrown fast the facts else free,
> As right through ring and ring runs the djereed
> And binds the loose, one bar without a break.
>
> (ll. 465-68)

The poem, the presentation, binds the facts to make another fact, in the sense of information held in context. Fancy binds the rings to make one Ring which is an aspect of truth similar to the thing symbolized, the Book. The poet's imagination functions as a javelin, binding the reflection of the facts to illusion and make-believe. He deals

> in poetry, make-believe,
> And the white lies it sounds like.
>
> (ll. 455-56)

This poet's representation of his creative process is a part of his dramatic mask. His description of fact as gold is part of his play.[37] He feeds on fact, "the ingot, ere the ring was forged" (l. 141), in order to activate his charade with truth. From the book the poet takes his "absolutely truth,/Fanciless fact" (ll. 143-44) and gives it voice. The process of giving voice to what he found in print[38] is the principal manifestation of metaphoric transformation--seeing as--

and is a comment on the beholder. The poet says

> I had mastered the contents, knew the whole truth
> Gathered together, bound up in this book,
>
> (ll. 117-18)

but his speech and the ensuing books, where his masked actors take over, articulate the disparity between knowing "the whole truth" and finding a mimetic form for it. His audience, the "British Public," demands that truth be well-represented, that the facts keep their own shape, but they are about to be duped. The poet gets his laugh first (l. 412).

> Truth must prevail, the proverb vows; and truth
> --Here is it all i' the book at last, as first
> There it was all i' the heads and hearts of Rome
> Gentle and simple, never to fall nor fade
> Nor be forgotten.
>
> (ll. 413-17)

The poet's contempt for his audience ("you know best," l. 403), is part of his self-justification. His perceptions are greater and grander than those for whom he labours (l. 1380), the careless public which reads his "issue" (l. 1386). His game is to "baffle" (l. 1372) his readers and to cause them to re-evaluate their judgments and pre-conceptions. A fact by any other name would seem as truth. The actor's voices are intended to ruffle the boundaries of absolute truth and thereby extend the parameters of vision so that

Oft would you rub your eyes and change your names.

(l. 1378)

The details and the facts of the poet's tale are the "untempered gold, the fact untampered with" (l. 365), insignificant by themselves. The poet's function, he says, is to preserve "the memory of this Guido and his wife" (l. 368) because without his agency and his imagination the "so-called" truth is not

> Able to take its own part as truth should,
> Sufficient, self-sustaining.
>
> (ll. 373-74)

The poet argues that if the facts were significant in themselves, the old yellow Book would have performed his function. He engages the attention of his audience as evaluators and judges in order to involve them in the process of history and in order to validate his own activity.

> I may ask,
> Rather than think to tell you, more thereof,--
> Ask you not merely who were he and she,
> Husband and wife, what manner of mankind,
> But now you hold concerning this and that
> Other yet-unnamed actor in the piece.
>
> (ll. 377-82)

The poet purports to invite this participation while in "fact" he demands it. This British public is requested to judge "the

right or wrong" (l. 388 and l. 392) of the actor's action, and at the same time they are ridiculed for making a judgment based on facts which are insubstantial. He supplies the frame through which the readers see events, then mocks those readers who draw conclusions. He disclaims his own presence in the finished piece, yet taunts his readers to find his features.

> Perchance more careful who so runs may read
> Then erst when all, it seemed, could read who ran,--
> Perchance more careless whoso reads may praise
> Than late when he who praised and read and wrote
> Was apt to find himself the self-same me,
>
> (ll. 1381-85)

The Ring and the Book, in part, is a maze which the reader is persuaded to follow in order to locate its maker. The story is a trap, a snare for the unwary. The hunt for truth is an endeavor to penetrate this poet's mask and thereby see the face of God and the mirror of his design.

The poet's metaphoric constructions are part of his attempt to begin a new mythology. He identifies his methods with those of the jeweler, the conjurer, and the alchemist. He identifies his golden facts with the fancy which transforms them. The re-shaped forms bear new resemblance to their old existence. They breathe life where formerly they were forgotten or undiscovered.

> Mythology is the ghost of concrete meaning.
> Connections between indiscriminate phenomena,
> connections which are now apprehended as met-

> aphor, were once perceived as immediate realities. As such the poet strives, by his own efforts to see them, and to make others see them again.[39]

This poet poses as a historian,[40] bringing "the memory of the thing" (l. 661) back into the presence of the world. He makes his find of the prized old yellow Book at a rummage stall where discarded "odds and ends of ravage" (l. 53), "picture-frames" (l. 53), "angel-heads" (l. 55), and tattered tapestries were displayed by "re-venders" (l. 52). He, too, deals in second-hand goods. "Time's tooth" (l. 666) had grated against

> The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,
>
> (l. 662)

so that the "plain and pillar-like" fact of the existence of the husband, wife, and their accomplices "dwindled into no bigger than a book" (l. 671). The "indisputably fact" (l. 665) which he restores is that these people did live and that the column which testifies to their existence was whittled away by time to leave only rubbish "By the roadside 'mid the ordure, shards and weeds" (l. 673).

The poet mocks the "facts" that stood so tall yet fell away.[41] The "facts" are the truth of what took place as written in his source. As historian, he reconstructs the events in order to resurrect the dead whose very lives were more signi-

ficant than their guilt or innocence.[42] He finds the book and uses it as his means to bring their lives into memory. He

> Kicked it up, turned it over, and recognized,
> For all the crumblement, this abacus,
> This square old yellow book,--could calculate
> By this the lost proportions of the style.
>
> (ll. 675-78)

He is concerned with this "lost proportion" and not with who was wolf and who was sheep.

The poet attempts to combat time's ravaging energy,

> The passage of a century or so,
> Decads thrice five, and here's time paid his tax,
> Oblivion gone home with her harvesting,
> And all left smooth again as scythe could shave,
>
> (ll. 418-21)

by making a ring as substantial and lasting as "Etrurian circlets" (l. 4). His ring is "made to match" those crafted by Etruscan artists centuries before. His desire to give performance to the lives of Guido and Pompilia is his way of giving ever-lasting life to himself:

> So write a book shall mean, beyond the facts,
> Suffice the eye and save the soul beside.
>
> (Book XII, ll. 862-63)

His "rare gold ring of verse" (Book XII, l. 869) confirms the significance of his own existence. More than the historian, this poet gives life to himself.

Nonetheless, the poet is aware that his square book and round ring are conflicting forms. The transformation from Book to Ring requires that he break down the shape of the one to effect the other. The features of the book cannot survive the manipulation of their form. His effort to match one with the other, the process of transformation, loses some features and gains others. Likeness effects likeness. The identification of one with another distorts to some degree as well as brings into clearer focus. The artist, as perceiver, renders on the world a perceptual judgment which is his style and which reveals the style as much as it outlines the features of the world.[43]

The poet articulates this quandary in his comments on the ironic nature of legal justice. One lawyer states that the facts went one way and the other states, equally forcibly, that the facts were generated in an opposite direction. Neither interprets the facts at this point--they see them differently. The poet reads their testimony as a series of matched (l. 208) and "coupled" (l. 212) exclamations where both "echo" (l. 214) their alternate positions. Their defences are entirely rhetorical with no relation to "absolutely truth." They represent opposite ends of the points of view first articulated by "Half-Rome" and "The Other Half-Rome." They perpetuate the system of coupling, matching, pairing, and doubling which characterizes each book of The Ring and the Book.

The systems of contraries which are repeated throughout the poem define its movement and dramatize the ironic nature of our existence as entities driven from birth to death, through dark and bright, and shine and shade. Art uses instances of these separations to represent this overriding facet of human experience. The Ring and the Book illustrates that our distinctions between "right or wrong" (l. 392), heaven and hell (l. 545), monster and angel (l. 551), or between wolf and sheep (l. 656), are artificial at best[44] and that any black and white (l. 1374) separation always implies "the something else" (l. 699) beyond our naming.

The poet-narrator reiterates his contention that the fictive voice of the poem attains a reality larger than the facts of the old yellow Book, but he does so in such a playful manner that his meaning is obscured by his methodology. This is in keeping with his dialectical perspective.[45]

> Well, now; there's nothing in nor out o' the world
> Good except truth: yet this, the something else,
> What's this then, which proves good yet seems untrue?
> This that I mixed with truth, motions of mine
> That quickened, made the inertness malleable
> O' the gold was not mine,--what's your name for this?
> Are means to the end, themselves in part the end?
> Is fiction which makes fact alive, fact too?
> This somehow may be thishow.
>
> (ll. 698-706)

The significant indicator in this description is "motions." The poet refers to the sweep of his imagination as the ability to

perceive in couples. For each this, there is that. From his book he reads "pages of proof this way, and that way proof" (l. 239), "part God's way, part the other way than God's" (l. 530). The action of his poem is the transformation of fact to fancy, of perception to conception to articulation. This is necessarily an ironic method and presentation because what is said is balanced against each speaker and his prose. The speakers

> discoursed the right and wrong
> Turned wrong to right, proved wolves sheep and sheep wolves
> So that you scarce distinguished fell from fleece.
>
> (ll. 645-47)

The "truth" of the original event refers to the repercussions of the event. Truth stands for meaning; the detection of meaning implies the use of judgment. The speakers of The Ring and the Book prove that truth cannot be perceived in its own form but that it must be approached through the features which surround its supposed centre. The means to the end are the only actions which can be known. The end is only in sight, not in substance which is "self-sustaining." Fancy is the means to make known "the thing" beyond the facts. The whole is available only in terms of its parts; the parts, ironically, are more significant than the whole.[46] Truth is a feature of the signifier; its ring represents the process of signifying. Truth does not exist except through this representation.[47]

This relationship describes the connection between the real and the ideal and between the features of history and those engendered by the imagination. The poem's ironic method relates the seen to the unseen, and the finite to the infinite world.[48] The method is irreverent in its deification of the God who "made heaven and earth" (l. 709). His chief representative is the Pope, "a great guardian of the fold" (l. 648) whose office is to offer "the ultimate/Judgment save yours" (ll. 1220-21). This Pope "is wont to do God's work on earth" (l. 1234). The poet's first description of Innocent XII is satiric:

> Suddenly starting from a nap, as it were,
> A dog-sleep with one shut, one open orb,
> Cried the Pope's great self,--Innocent by name
> And nature too, and eighty-six years old.
>
> (ll. 298-301)

The dog, an obvious play on "god," is an analogy which suggests the Pope's relative senility and which questions the value of his judgment.[49] He is no closer to the truth than any other speaker in Books II to XI because he sees with only one eye. This speaker argues like the poet,

> I have mastered the whole matter: I nothing doubt,
>
> (l. 328)

but his decision is urged by his own coming death and represents a last effort to make his own name known.

> Am I not the Pope, and presently to die,
> And busied how to render my account,
> And shall I wait a day ere I decide
> On doing or not doing justice here?
> Cut off his head tomorrow by this time,
> Hang up his four mates, two on either hand,
> And end one business more!
>
> (ll. 337-43)

The Pope comes to this conclusion by positing that even if Guido were his "son and Christ's" (l. 332), he and Christ "would renounce all right in him" (l. 336). He then proceeds to copy the style of Christ's crucifixion. The irony explicit in the poet's treatment becomes a comment on the Pope's innocence. Neither he nor Christ may have a son according to their betrothal to God. By renouncing Guido, the Pope assumes God's role in forsaking Christ at the hands of the Romans. That he is unaware of the implications of his gesture is a further comment on his competence.

The poet uses these exchanges of masks to indicate the lack of wrong or right in any aspect of the Roman murder story.[50] Guido uses Caponsacchi's name to gain entry to Pompilia's sanctuary. ("'Gabriel!' cried Lucifer at Eden-gate," l. 623). He is welcomed as if he "were an angel-guest/Come in Christ's name" (ll. 396-97) on a Christmas night. Caponsacchi, who "swelled to the full for God's will done on earth" (l. 592) had initiated Guido's reaction by playing in the "armour like Saint George" (l. 585). The implication is that God's will is

ultimately fulfilled by Guido's murder of the "innocents." Guido is "the angel of this life,/Whose care is lest men see too much at once" (ll. 594-95), a "dusk misfeatured messenger" (l. 593). The poet asks "what of God?" (l. 582) and is forced to conclude that his will was done.[51]

Religion and her officials perpetuate the chain of crime and abuse.

> While, prim in place, Religion overlooked;
> And so had done till doomsday, never a sign
> Nor sound of interference from her mouth.
>
> (ll. 993-95)

The proponents of organized religions "were wont to tease the truth" (l. 981) from Guido by "pinching flesh and pulling bone from bone" (l. 988), but they are "blind" (l. 1007). Their justice is an eye for an eye and the poet-narrator's question seems to be is Guido more sinned against than sinning? Are his crimes any different from those committed against him in the name of justice? The narrator decides that this is another instance of the either/or nature of existence, that the effort to "unhusk truth a-hiding in its hulls" (l. 989) is another means to "vex truth a little longer" (l. 658). Guido continues the charade and responds in kind:

> He, in their joint behalf, the burly slave,
> Bestirred him, mauled and maimed all recusants.
>
> (ll. 991-92)

Deception is the ruling order.[52] Guido, "cloaked and caped" (l. 551), wears the garb of priests "to mock God more" (l. 552) and the priests continue the mockery--"affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom" (l. 823). The poet's statement to the Roman public that his tale is

> Clean for the church and dead against the world,
> The flesh and the devil, does it tell for once [53]
>
> (ll. 437-38)

is further mockery.[54] His tale is not against the world

> for the world's the world,
> And, what it errs in, judges rectify.
>
> (ll. 971-72)

The attack is against judgment, whether made as

> a reasoned statement of the case,
> Eventual verdict of the curious few
> Who care to sift a business to the bran
> Nor coarsely bolt it like the simpler sort,
>
> (l. 920-23)

or by the Pope himself when he uses for his final authority

> a huge tome in an antique guise,
> Primitive print and tongue half-obsolete,
> That stands him in diurnal need.
>
> (ll. 1250-52)

The poet finds his own perspective when he leaves

his reading of the book--"the book was shut and done with and laid by" (l. 472)--and moves outside its explicit concerns.

> I turned, to free myself and find the world,
> And stepped out on the narrow terrace, built
> Over the street and opposite the church.
>
> (ll. 478-80)

His position is significant in that he is physically "opposite the church"[55] and above the action in the street when he first puts his imagination to play.

> Over the roof o' the lighted church I looked
> A bowshot to the street's end, north away
> Out of the Roman gate to the Roman road
> By the river, till I felt the Apennine.
>
> (ll. 497-500)

His eye goes beyond the church and beyond the facts to the "stage" (l. 503) where "the tragic piece" (l. 523) would have occurred. He emphasizes that he was firmly fixed while his eyes relit the spectacle:[56]

> I saw with my own eyes
> In Florence as I trod the terrace, breathed
> The beauty and the fearfulness of night,
> How it had run, this round from Rome to Rome.
>
> (ll. 523-26)

This ring image is the first of several which reflect ironically on the nature of the ring the poet first exposes. The second usage refers to the ring as a means of imprisoning,

when Guido and the "Prince o' the Power of the Air" (l. 567) kept Pompilia ensnared: "all took hands/And danced about the captives in a ring," (ll. 573-74). The poet calls this action "the obscene ring traced" (l. 581), but although he intends his metaphor to be a comment against Guido and his accomplices, it also works on his description of his own methodology. His "arc" (l. 1387) is based on "the obscene ring" but reshaped by his fancy which in turn is removed from the surface of Books II through XI.

> Such labour had such issue, so I wrought
> This arc, by furtherance of such alloy,
> And so, by one spirt, take away its trace
> Till, justifiably golden, rounds my ring.
>
> (ll. 1386-89)

The irony is perpetuated by the poet's statement that the spirt which removes his fancy is a bath of water, (ll. 685-86). The "spirt/O' the proper fiery acid" (ll. 23-24) which the jeweler used to make the Castellani ring is effective in leaving a golden face, but the water bath does not contain the same power. The obscene ring the poet first perceived when he "trod the terrace" and saw the "round from Rome to Rome" permeates through the surface of his arc. The God he reaches is Jack's beanstalk giant, whose fe-fie-fo-fum speaks for "the flesh and the devil" (l. 438).[57]

The poet's statement that he removes himself from the play which is to follow is part of his game of charades with the British Public which he persuades to offer judgment

and then disparages for doing so. His resuscitation of the voices and "the actors, no mere rumours of the act" (l. 948), is his method to reveal the public's inability to know or to perceive a design which is only mirrored in events and action.

> Let this old woe step on the stage again!
> Act itself o'er anew for men to judge,
> Not by the very sense and sight indeed--
> (Which, take at best imperfect cognizance,
> Since, how heart moves brain, and how both move hand,
> What mortal ever in entirety saw?)
>
> (ll. 824-29)

The clues are there for the treasure hunt to follow. The reader can hardly know best when all he sees and hears is obscured by human testimony.[58]

> --No dose of purer truth than man digests,
> But truth with falsehood, milk that feeds him now,
> Nor strong meat he may get to bear some day--
> To-wit, by voices we call evidence,
> Uproar in the echo, live fact deadened down,
> Talked over, bruited abroad, whispered away,
> Yet helping us to all we seem to hear:
> For how else know we save by worth of word?
>
> (ll. 830-37)

The poet attempts to lend his eyes and so give his public a larger vision,

> wishful one could lend that crowd one's eyes,
> (So universal is its plague of squint);
>
> (ll. 878-79)

but this he can do only through the activated voices. Ironically, the most persuasive of his voices are those of Bottini, Fisc, and his adversary, the Arcangeli,[59] both of whom have

> the gift of eloquence!
> Language that goes as easy as a glove
> O'er good and evil, smoothens both to one.
>
> (ll. 1179-81)

These are the characters who reconstruct events so metaphorically that the relation of truth to fact is forever obscured. They take the eagle's perspective and

> Give you, if we dare to wing to such a height
> The absolute glory in some full-grown speech
> On the other side, some finished butterfly,
> Some breathing diamond-flake with leaf-gold fans,
> That takes the air, no trace of worm it was,
> Or cabbage-bed it had production from.
>
> (ll. 1166-71)

The law is as dumb as religion, an

> Elaborate display of pipe and wheel
> Framed to unchoak, pump up and pour apace
> Truth in a flowery foam shall wash the world?
> The patent truth-exacting process,--ha?
>
> (ll. 1111-14)

Informed by caution, "rapt with heavenward eye" (l. 1187), the lawyers temper "Rashness" (l. 1182) with their rhetoric, but because their pleas are written they cannot "teach us the puissance of the tongue" (l. 1118). They deal in its simulation

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(l. 1119). The transformation from thought to speech is the poet's function. Without him, they have no audience and no show.

> Ah, but you miss the very tones o' the voice,
> The scrannel pipe that screams in heights of head,
> As, in his modest studio, all alone,
> The tall wight stands a-tiptoe, strives and strains,
> Both eyes shut, like the cockerel that would crow,
> Tries to his own self amorously o'er
> What never will be uttered else than so--
> To the four walls, for Forum and Mars' Hill,
> Speaks out the poesy which, penned, turns prose.
>
> (ll. 1200-08)

The poet of "The Ring and the Book" writes his "song" (l. 1403) to activate the consciousness of his British public, to wake his neighbours up. He gives form to things unknown. He combines his subjective faculties with all that could be termed objective within his vision. He is both subjective and objective maker.

> There is a time when the general eye has, so to speak, absorbed its fill of the phenomena around it, whether spiritual or material, and desires rather to learn the exacter significance of what it possesses than to receive any augmentation of what is possessed. Then is the opportunity for the poet of loftier vision to lift his fellows, with their half-apprehensions, up to his own sphere, by intensifying the import of details and rounding the universal meaning.[60]

## NOTES

1. This paper takes the position that Browning is not the speaker in any of the twelve dramatic monologues which shape The Ring and the Book. His performance in each of the monologues is sufficiently masked to be indiscernible unless we assume that patterns which recur here and in other of his poems define his poetic.
Charles Rivers, "Subjective-Objective Polarity in the Poetry of Robert Browning," and Roma A. King Jr., "The Necessary Surmise: The Shaping Spirit of Robert Browning's Poetry" (in) Romantic and Victorian: Studies in Memory of William H. Marsnall, eds. W. Paul Elledge and Richard L. Hoffman (Cranbury, New Jersey: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1971), offer two of the more interesting considerations of Browning's poetic. Both argue that Browning "becomes intensely subjective, fixing upon his consciousness as the only source of certain knowledge," King, p. 354.
E.D.H. Johnson, "Robert Browning's Pluralistic Universe: A Reading of The Ring and the Book, University of Toronto Quarterly, 31 (1961), 20-41, also outlines subjective/objective relationships in the poem; he connects Browning's philosophy with that of William James: "the artist's approach to his subject must be that of the Jamesian pluralistic for whom the given facts of existence are not intractable, but malleable, awaiting the act of human violence which will engender truth on them. 'I fused my live soul with that inert stuff,' writes the poet; 'The life in me abolished the death of things.' This does not mean that the artist in the process of creation has any disposition to relax his grasp on the actual. On the contrary, his effort is by intuitive means to identify himself even more intimately with factual reality," p. 39.
Each of these critics relates Browning's interest in the unseen to his Christian faith. This marks their separation from the approach of this paper.

2. All line references are to the poem as reprinted in Robert Browning: The Ring and the Book, ed. Richard D. Altick (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1971), pp. 23-61.

3. Ruskin's influence on criticism of literature in the "Victorian" period has perpetuated a view of the major poetic works as moral treatises. See Jerome H. Buckley,

The Victorian Temper, A Study in Literary Culture (New York: Vintage Books, 1951), "like their Eighteenth-century predecessors, most early Victorian aestheticians strove to relate the beautiful to some fixed pattern in the harmony of nature, to an unchanging truth beyond the immediate object of contemplation. If art was to mirror a larger totality, its function, they thought, must be at least implicitly 'moral'; the picture or the poem, the play or the statue was to edify as well as to delight by its reflection of an immutable design," p. 143. I do not suggest that the poet of "The Ring and the Book" does not attempt to teach and to delight, but that his efforts must be taken in their dramatic context.

4. For arguments on the poem as a testimony to the validity of various points of view, see J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God, pp. 148-49; Robert Langbaum, "'The Ring and the Book': A Relativist Poem" (in) The Poetry of Experience, p. 109; Ian Jack, Browning's Major Poetry, p. 294; W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, pp. 237-38; and Johnson, "Robert Browning's Pluralistic Universe," p. 23.

5. See E. Leroy Lawson, Very Sure of God: Religious Language in the Poetry of Robert Browning (Nashville, Tennessee: Vanderbilt University Press, 1974), who argues that the poem "symbolizes men's limited ability to ascertain complete empirical truth and [Browning's] nearly unlimited capacity for blending fact and fancy into a higher form of truth," p. 121. Like King, "The Necessary Surmise," Lawson relates this to what he regards as Browning's movement from fact into faith and "the higher truth," p. 127. King states that Browning commits himself to a necessary "surmise," a "hypothetical projection. . . not because it is necessarily true objectively but because it enables him to act and to achieve a subjective being that becomes true. Browning's awareness of man's situation, his alienation, his impotency, his unfulfilled and frustrated desires, and his transformation of external structure from sources of values into hypothetical constructs which enable man to create values provide the basic reality that underlies his creative efforts," p. 351.

6. I am indebted to Murray Krieger, "Mediation, Language, and Vision in the Reading of Literature" (in) Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, pp. 585-613, for the approach of this thesis. Krieger encourages the critic to "see the work not as a projection of a pre-existing vision, formed in the self behind it, but as a dialogistic entity that comes into being out of the dramatic conflict of forces and language which constitutes its finished form," p. 599.

7. This image of the eagle is usually read as an allusion to Tennyson's "The Eagle."

> He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
> Close to the sun in lonely lands,
> Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.
>
> The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
> He watches from his mountain walls,
> And like a thunderbolt he falls.

See A.K. Cook, A Commentary Upon Browning's "The Ring and the Book" (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966), p. 26. Another interesting possibility is found in Keats' "The Fall of Hyperion."

> there grew
> A power within me of enormous ken
> To see as a god sees, and take the depth
> Of things as nimbly as the outward eye
> Can size and shade pervade. . .
> . . . I set myself
> Upon an eagle's watch, that I might see,
> And seeing ne'er forget.

8. Plato, The Republic and Other Works, p. 291.

9. Plato, p. 289.

10. For a useful discussion of the nature and function of metaphor and of an analogy to a concept, see M.H. Abrams, "Imitation and the Mirror" (in) The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 30-46.

11. Leonardo Da Vinci's Notebooks, ed. Edward McCurdy, p. 163, quoted in Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 32.

12. For discussions of the function of this ring metaphor, see William O. Raymond, "Truth in The Ring and the Book," Victorian Newsletter, No. 10 (Autumn, 1956), 12-13; Norton B. Crowell, "The Ring and the Book: Browning's Concept of Truth" (in) The Convex Glass: The Mind of Robert Browning (The University of New Mexico Press, 1968), 183-224; Paul A. Cundiff, "The Clarity of Browning's Ring Metaphor," PMLA, 63 (1948), 1276-82; George R. Wasserman, "The Meaning of Browning's Ring-Figure," Modern Language Notes, 76 (1961), 420-26; and Mary Rose Sullivan, "The Function of Book I in The Ring and the Book, Victorian Poetry, 6 (Autumn-Winter, 1968), 231-241.

13. For studies which emphasize Browning's interest in judgment, see Allen R. Penner, "Judgment in The Ring and the Book," Xavier University Studies, 5 (1966), 61-82; Gordon W. Thompson, "A Spirit Birth Conceived of Flesh: Browning's Concept of Art in The Ring and the Book," Tennessee Studies in Literature, 14, 1969, 75-86, "for Browning, all Art, like everything in life, requires a judgment from mankind. The need to judge, not only for the speaker but, even more importantly, also for the readers, is stressed throughout The Ring and the Book," p. 81; Roma King, The Focusing Artifice, "Judgment is central in The Ring and the Book, not because Browning hopes to communicate a final truth but because the act of judging may force a character into self-defining confrontation and saving action," pp. 132-33; Crowell, "Browning's Concept of Truth," "God does not demand uniformity of judgment from man 'i' the tricking lying world,' for the world is made this way to test man's courage and virtue in bringing to bear the 'judging faculty' God gave him. . . what one's judging faculty sees as true is indeed 'truth'," p. 185; Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, p. 252; Langbaum, "'The Ring and the Book': A Relativist Poem," and throughout The Poetry of Experience; and Mary Rose Sullivan, Browning's Voices in 'The Ring and the Book': A Study of Method and Meaning (University of Toronto Press, 1969), "we actually participate in the process of judgment and end by reaching finally the same verdict the poet had come to instantly," p. 18.

14. T.S. Eliot made his definition of an "objective correlative" in his essay on "Hamlet and his Problems." He contends that the artist holds a mirror up to nature by finding "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." This is only one feature of "truth" appealed to by the poet of Book I.

15. In "The Clarity of Browning's Ring Metaphor," Cundiff notes that Browning uses the word "truth" "in at least two different ways." He reads this as a "pattern of indiscriminate exchange of the words 'fact' and 'truth'," p. 1278. In "Our Human Speech," Victorian Newsletter, No. 15 (Spring, 1959), 1-9, Cundiff separates these usages into the facts that man perceives and God's truth, p. 6. Donald Smalley, "Browning's View of Fact in The Ring and the Book," Victorian Newsletter, No. 16 (Fall, 1959), 1-9, takes up Cundiff on his limited interpretation only to conclude that Browning intended to "assert that 'he has not misinterpreted the facts' at the same time that he provides us with a 'glorious misinterpre-

tation'," p. 8. It is precisely this muddle of critical commentary which argues for the relativity of 'truth' as a perceived object.

16. See Shaw, p. 256; and Crowell, "Browning's Concept of Truth," "the theme of the work is that man, from peon to Pope, is tested by his efforts, however unavailing, to discover absolute truth," p. 203. See also Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. xiv.

17. See Cundiff, "Our Human Speech," pp. 5, 6, and 8; William O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment and Other Essays in Robert Browning, 2nd ed. (1950; University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 45 and 204; and Richard D. Altick and James F. Loucks, II, Browning's Roman Murder Story: A Reading of 'The Ring and the Book' (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), p. 21.

18. See above, footnote number 4, esp. Shaw, who argues that the invitation of The Ring and the Book is "to examine many points of view. . . to perform a dialectical experiment, requiring alternation between sympathy and judgment, and between appreciative insight and critical vigilance," p. 256.

19. A hundred years of criticism have debated whether or not Browning meant what he said and whether or not he was "guilty" of some inconsistency in his use of "truth" and "fact." See George W. Thompson, p. 76; Cundiff, "The Clarity of Browning's Ring Metaphor," and "Our Human Speech,"; Smalley, "Browning's View of Fact,"; Cook, A Commentary on "The Ring and the Book," pp. 2-3; Frances Russel, One Word More on Browning (Stanford University Press, 1927), pp. 111-12; Cundiff, "Robert Browning: 'Indisputably Fact'," Victorian Newsletter, No. 17 (Spring, 1960), 7-17; and Langbaum, "The Importance of Fact in 'The Ring and the Book'," Victorian Newsletter, No. 17 (Spring, 1960), 11-17.

20. Several critics have felt that The Ring and the Book "would profit by pruning," Henry Charles Duffin, Amphibian, p. 146, or that "it is difficult to see it as other than a dead end in the history of English poetry," Ian Jack, Browning's Major Poetry, p. 299. Carlyle stated that the poem is "all made out of an Old Bailey story that might have been told in ten lines and only wants forgetting," Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Allingham, pp. 284-85, quoted in Cook, A Commentary, p. 4.

21. Sullivan, Browning's Voices in 'The Ring and the Book' and "The Function of Book I in The Ring and the Book," argues

that we are "instructed to read Book I as a dramatic monologue with the poet as actor, not omniscient narrator," "The Function of Book I," p. 234. She stresses the significance of the relationship between audience and speaker, noting the "repeated use of the 'I' subject in juxtaposition with second person references," Browning's Voices, pp. 4-6. See also, Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, pp. 10-11.

22. Cf. Sullivan, Browning's Voices, who refers to the speaker's role as "one of guide or master of ceremonies, leading and directing the audience," p. 12.

23. Cf. William E. Harrold, The Variance and the Unity, p. 189.

24. This is Harrold's terminology; he reads the poet of Book I as "a commentator who sounds very much like a host for a diorama, pointing-pole in hand, ready to guide his audience through the exciting scenes and action," p. 118.

25. Again, this is Harrold's description, p. 154. His reading of The Ring and the Book is consistently sensitive to the separation between Browning the poet and the poet-speaker of Book I. "As Harlequin, the speaker is catering to the audience with the rollicking comic effect, but as poet he is making a serious point," p. 158.

26. Because Cundiff, Smalley and Langbaum read Browning as the speaker of Book I (see above, footnote number 19), they describe this playfulness as some curious kind of irony. See especially, Langbaum, "The Importance of Fact," p. 12.

27. G.K. Chesterton, Robert Browning (London: Macmillan & Co., 1903), parallels The Ring and the Book with The Iliad, The Odyssey, The Book of Job, The Aeneid, and Paradise Lost, distinguishing Browning's work "because it is the great epic of the enormous importance of small things," p. 163. "Browning says, 'I will show you the relations of man to heaven by telling you a story out of a dirty Italian book of criminal trials from which I select one of the meanest and most completely forgotten'," p. 164.

28. This aspect of the poem's intent is emphasized by the repetition of this statement in lines 86-88.

29. Leslie Thompson, "A Ring of Criticism: The Search for Truth in The Ring and the Book," Papers on Language and Literature, 5 (Summer, 1969), 322-35, quotes from Langbaum's Poetry of Experience, p. 10, to argue that "Browning, like Eliot and

Joyce, digs 'below the ruins of official tradition to uncover myth in an underground tradition; an inescapable because inherently psychological pattern into which to fit the chaotic present'," p. 327. Harrold, The Variance and the Unity, also argues the psychological nature of Browning's myth, p. 188.

30. Cf. Ernst Cassirer, Language and Myth, who defines metaphor as a "conscious denotation of one thought content by the name of another which resembles the former in some respect, or is somehow analogous to it," p. 86. He argues that "language and myth are diverse shoots from the same parent stem, the same impulse of symbolic formulation, springing from the same basic mental activity," p. 89.

31 For an excellent study of the various uses of the mask in The Ring and the Book, see Claudette Kemper, "The Ring and the Book: A Masque for the Making of Meaning," Philological Quarterly, 53 (Spring, 1974), 237-55. "Word as mask dissolves its own subject matter. The more one is informed about any so-called fact, the more one realizes fact is but a word that operates as a mask, a stage setting through which meanings come and go," p. 254, and "together the frames of reference, in their contradictoriness and complementarity, provide a multidimensional, mobile imitation of her reality, a mask of it," p. 242.

32. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp, p. 32.

33. Cf. Kemper, "because everything in The Ring and the Book is masked, though anything may represent a perceived truth, it is a lie; everything is heterogeneous, many-hued, chimerical; its world is entirely phenomenological," pp. 250-51.

34. Plato, The Republic, p. 296.

35. Cf. Cundiff, "The Clarity of Browning's Ring Metaphor," pp. 1279-80.

36. Wasserman, "The Meaning of Browning's Ring-Figure," parallels the honey image to the "slivers of pure gold," thus making "an analogy between the natural processes which produce gold and honey and the vital relation of fact to experience. Time and the elements have driven gold to the surface of the earth, the ceaseless activities of the bees have caused their combs to overflow with honey: and so the beating hearts and ticking brains of men have produced facts," p. 422.

37. See articles cited above, footnote number 19, for alternate readings of the poet's use of "fact." Again, these critics

read Browning as the poet of Book I without recognizing the play of the mask.

38. The poet of Book I stresses the written aspect of the old yellow Book, "part print, part manuscript" (l. 85), "from written title-page/To written index" (ll. 110-11), "print three-fifths, written supplement the rest" (l. 119), "since he only spoke in print/The printed voice of him lives now as then" (ll. 166-67), "Thus wrangled, bangled, jangled they a month/-Only on paper, pleadings all in print" (ll. 241-42), "where the print ends,-see the pen and ink" (l. 258), "so said, so done-/Rather so writ" (ll. 344-45). Sullivan, Browning's Voices, cites many of these references, stating that the book is "made to serve as a tangible link with the past, a constant and concrete reminder that yesterday's dead drama lies ready for re-creation in the hand of the poet today," p. 5.

39. Owen Barfield, Poetic Diction, A Study in Meaning (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928), pp. 78-79, quoted in Langer, Feeling and Form, p. 239.

40. Kemper, "A Masque for the Making of Meaning," relates the action of the poem to the carnival period in which it is located (Book II, 801-02) and (Book II, 1451-52), and also to the historical aspects of the passage of time, "the masque of carnival time presents an escape from time-that-has-no-escape. Not only is carnival time circular or cyclical, but also. . . carnival time represents two parallel simultaneous phases: the initial and the terminal, birth and death, spring and winter. . . Historical records are turned into a carnival by 'rehearsing the dead' in a new show. And what each reader makes of time past is carnivalesque, since each in reading remakes in a time out of a time a simultaneous mimic time," pp. 244-45.

41. Cundiff, "Our Human Speech," argues that Browning's use of "truth" as "fact" is "based on his distrust of man's splintered and incomplete knowledge," p. 5, and "Truth" (fact), on which Browning lavishes unnecessary derision. . ., seems subjected to belittlement whenever it appears in the poem," p. 6.

42. Altick and Loucks, Browning's Roman Murder Story, include a pertinent section of Carlyle's essay, "On History" (1830), to suggest a parallel between Browning's interest in "art based on history and directed toward high philosophical ends," p. 26, and Carlyle's historical consciousness. One section of the excerpt is particularly apt in commending

Browning's method of using various interpretations and perspectives to approach the whole; "it is, in no case, the real historical Transaction, but only some more or less plausible scheme and theory of the Transaction, or the harmonized result of many such schemes, each varying from truth, that we can ever hope to behold," p. 27.

43. See above, Chapter I, footnote number 58. See also, Gregory T. Polletta, "The Place and Performance of Criticism" (in) Issues in Contemporary Literary Criticism, "without the exclusivity of the 'eye,' we would have no fiction of the 'I,' and it follows that the phenomenological emphasis on the visual is only a product of the Romantic fiction of the 'self'," p. 18.

44. A system of doubling, opposites, and matched pairs recurs throughout "The Ring and the Book." This methodology is part of the poet's use of metaphor: "Etruian circlets"/ "spark-like" (4/6), "soft, you see,/Yet crisp as jewel cutting" (7/8), "slivers of pure gold"/"such mere oozing from the mine" (10/11), "virgin as oval tawny pendant tear" (12), "wax"/"honey" (18/19), "gold"/"gold's alloy" (19/20), "duly tempering both" (20), "word for word" (132), "murder, or else"/"Legitimate punishment of the other crime" (133/134), "just that"/"no more" (135/136), "that, was this" (140), "ingot"/"gold" (141/142), "absolutely truth"/"Fanciless fact" (143/144),"pleadings for, against" (145), "real summed-up circumstance/Adduced in proof of these on either side" (146/47), "accuser and accused alike" (162), "of each" (163), "punish"/"reward" (184/186), "the two join issue" (199), "each pleader having an adjunct" (200), "King Solomon confirmed Apostle Paul" (229), "share alike/In guilt and guilt's reward" (251-52), "had his say/To say" (285-86), real/ideal--"human promise, oh, how short of shine!" (295), "other light than we perceive" (316), "turned his night to day" (407), "richer than the gold snow Jove rained on Rhodes" (490), "drinking in the blackness in default of air" (492), "life in me abolished the death of things" (520), "deep calling unto deep" (521), "as then and there" (521), "acted itself over again once more" (522), "beauty"/ "fearfulness" (525), "star supposed, but fog o' the fen" (544), "loved one left with haters" (577), "earth's roof"/"heaven's floor" (599), "now grate o' the trap, then outlet of the cage" (600), "so took the lady, left the priest alone" (601), "should fall--should stand" (639), "granting grace"/"Or dealing doom" (640/641), "less and less"/"more and more" (658/659), "came and went" (659), "Brought new lies with them to be loved in turn" (660), "doubled in two" (689), "dead truth"/"live truth" (696/697), "in nor out o' the

world" (698), "proves good yet seems untrue" (700), "means"/"end" (704), "fiction"/"fact" (705), "somehow"/"thishow" (706), "heaven and earth" (709), "spell/And Speak" (710/711), "God"/"man" (709/711), "Man"/"the inferior thing" (712), "since made"/"not make in turn" (713), "Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow" (714), "Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain" (715), "God's"/"man's" (717), "creates"/"resuscitates" (719), "conceives, expresses too!" (721), "bounded"/"yearning to be free" (722), "soul"/"body" (723/"so add self to self" (724), "owning what lay ownerless" (725), "so find, so fill full" (726), "dead"/"live" (729), "too much life or not enough" (730), "either way" (731), "completes the incomplete" (734), "truth"/"lie" (743/744), "man makes not man" (745), "an art of arts" (746), "more insight and more outsight" (747), "half of my soul" (750), "fragment of a whole" (752), "smoking flax that fed fire once" (754), "Faust"/"Elisha" (760), "mouth upon his mouth" (766), "his eyes/Upon its eyes" (766/767), "his hands upon its hands" (767), "London now"/"Florence erst" (775), "truth"/"falsehood" (831), "milk"/"meat" (831/832), "now"/"someday" (831/832), "live fact deadened down" (834), "from Rome's other half, the opposite feel" (883), "truth with a like swerve, like unsuccess" (884), "coupled runners like as egg and egg" (890), "another sample-speech" (896), "neither this nor that" (912), "one and one" (914), "pure or impure" (947), "calls black white" (968), "to slay him or to save" (976), "what is not now"/"Was then" (1113/1114), "when that was rife which now is rare" (1020), "plain heaven's celibate"/"earth's clear-accepted servitor" (1023/1024), "retell his tale" (1043), "the same man, another voice" (1285), "Spring and Autumn both" (1358), "the land dwarfed to one likeness of the land" (1359), "the variance now, the eventual unity" (1363).

45. W. David Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, reads The Ring and the Book as a "representation of the final union of subject and the world," as "the culmination of Browning's Christian dialectic," p. 235. This paper argues that the poem is not a celebration of Christian values and that the "central truth" is not "the power of God and the mystery of his Incarnation," Shaw, p. 238.

46. Altick and Loucks argue the opposite, pp. 34-35.

47. Cf. Cassirer, Language and Myth, the office of non-discursive form in art is "to articulate knowledge that cannot be rendered discursively because it concerns experiences that are not formally amenable to the discursive projection. Such experiences are the rhythms of life, organic, emotional and

mental. . . which are not simply periodic, but endlessly complex, and sensitive to every sort of influence," p. 89 and pp. 98-99. This aspect of apprehension is part of what Henry James referred to as "the power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implications of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it," "The Art of Fiction" (in) The Future of the Novel (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 13.

48. For discussions on the relationship of the finite to the infinite in The Ring and the Book, see King, The Focusing Artifice, "man's approach to the infinite is an emanation from within rather than an imposition from without; it is the apprehension of the infinite within man through his finite choice and commitment," p. 165; Miller, The Disappearance of God, p. 152; and Harrold, The Variance and the Unity, "the mythic overpoem of The Ring and the Book is the higher moment of art existing above the temporal tension of the comic and the serious, the dramatic and the lyric, the dark and the light, the energy and the stasis," p. 191.

49. Many critics read the Pope as Browning's spokesman in The Ring and the Book. See Tracy, "Browning Speaks Out" (in) Browning's Mind and Art, pp. 16-17; Crowell, "Browning's Concept of Truth," p. 218; Ian Jack, Browning's Major Poetry, p. 297; Shaw, The Dialectical Temper, p. 238. I agree with Johnson, The Alien Vision, that "interest in the Pope's monologue as a lofty exposition of Browning's own philosophical optimism has tended to obscure the dramatic relevance of the grounds on which the old man finally judges Guido," p. 129.

50. Cf. Chesterton, who emphasizes that Browning held the doctrine that "in a dispute everyone was to a certain extent right," p. 175.

51. An interesting parallel is found in Browning's "Porphyria's Lover," when after the murder the speaker sits with his dead lover

> And all night long we have not stirred,
> And yet God has not said a word!
>
> (ll. 59-60)

52. Another instance of deception in the presentation of the drama is found in the star image the poet-narrator uses to

describe the captivity of Pompilia by Guido:

> I saw the star supposed, but fog o' the fen,
> Guilded star-fashion by a glint from hell.
>
> (ll. 544-45)

This is part of the process of guilding the lily.

53. Cook, A Commentary Upon Browning's "The Ring and the Book", finds these lines in conflict with Browning's "intention," "much of the poem which he was to write. . . was to prove by no means 'clean for the church'," p. 15.

54. Each allusion to a biblical passage in Book I is to some degree ironic. See l. 195 (2 Samuel, vi, 6-7), l. 215 (Judges, xv, 4-5), l. 230 (Book VIII, ll. 912-47), l. 231 (Book VIII, ll. 481-86), l. 396 (Hebrews, xiii, 2, and Revelation, iii, 20), l. 504 (I Corinthians, iv, 9), l. 521 (Psalm xiii, 7), l. 542 (Luke ii, 29), ll. 643-44 (Revelation xxii, 15, and 2 Thessalonians, ii, 11), l. 737 (I Samuel, iii, 3, and Exodus, xxvii, 20-21), l. 760 (2 Kings, 4, 29-35), l. 1190 (Mathew, xxv, 21), l. 1273 (Job, ii, 4), l. 1319 (Psalm, cxxx, 1). Each of these allusions is cited in both Cook, A Commentary, and Altick's edition of The Ring and the Book. Neither writer quotes the biblical passages nor mentions the ironic implications.

55. Contributing to the attack on the church is the "fact" that Guido's execution was committed, physically, "opposite the church," l. 357.

56. Sullivan, "The Function of Book I in The Ring and the Book," notes the movement from the poet's projective to "receptive phrase" where he repeats "I saw" again and again, "but instead of producing the effect of omniscience and detachment which might be expected, the formula merely intensifies our conviction of the speaker's partiality," p. 239. For other instances of "I saw" see lines 537, 544, 563, 569, 575, 577, 603, and 1352.

57. Another ring image occurs in the poet's description of the tertium quid character:

> Eminence This and All-Illustrious That
> Who take snuff softly, range in well-bred ring,
> Card-table-quitters for observance' sake.
>
> (ll. 937-39)

It can be argued that the Harlequin-poet adapts part of this character's mask in his presentation of his own method. He, too, cares "to sift a business to the bran" (l. 922). His is the "critical mind" (l. 926) which "assayed" (l. 460) his material before haranguing "in silvery and selected phrase," (l. 933).

58. See Kemper, "words are charades of substance, masques more to be studied for how words operate than for what they say," p. 241, and "The R&B is a masque on the making of meaning. It is not valid to use portions to re-inforce perspective, therefore, but only to indicate their hold, however appropriate/inappropriate, upon our thought patterns, our judgmental faculties. If we extract one version alone as valid, the price is to miss the show. In the R&B, Credulity plays the part of Buffoon," p. 250.

59. Crowell, "Browning's Concept of Truth," quotes part of the written account of Dr. Bottinius' defence for Pompilia, Book IX, ll. 87-107, to argue the correspondence between the lawyer's attitude toward art and that of Browning, pp. 187-88. Gordon Thompson, "A Spirit Birth Conceived of Flesh," quotes the same section but acknowledges that "the rest of Book IX clearly shows that Bottini has no conception of what he has just said," p. 83.

60. Browning, "Essay on Shelley."

# CONCLUSION

> and yet when all is said
> It was the dream itself enchanted me:
> Character isolated by a deed
> To engross the present and dominate memory.
> Players and painted stage took all my love,
> And not those things that they were emblems of.
>
> William Butler Yeats, "The Circus Animal's Desertion"

The Browning monologue begins as an extended metaphor where the speech represents an aspect of experience that encompasses the speaker's perspective as well as his predicament. It presents both a character portrait and a dramatization of "speaker in the world." The effect of this dual imitation is to reveal the speaker's methods in a general effort to debate both the function of art and the "purpose" of life. The dramatic monologue form is a vehicle that considers the effect of the speaker's methods on the speaker's intent--internally. The monologue provides its own comment on the speaker's content. This may be termed an anti-lyric form[1] in that an "imitation of character" is more significant than the implicit "imitation of attitude."[2]

The speaker is neither a voice for the poet nor the means to present a particular guide to living. Each character, in presenting a specific concern, comments on the value of his

life and on the use he makes of his experience in the world. This, in turn, becomes a comment on the character and his methods and achievements. Character is revealed so that the living dimension of experience is in contrast against the background. Character is larger than the world in which it appears and acts because only character has the capacity to perceive and to perform. Each character represents the potential life-within-life.

The speaker is the foreground; the background is the world and the material he uses to make sense of his experience. The dancer is separate from the dance in the dramatic monologue not because only one-half of a dialogue is presented and not because we can judge the speaker's activities and render them limited in terms of the entire scheme of things which is the world; rather, because character is the texture, the activity of figure on the world's surface. Character lives, and attitudes, ideas, and perspective do not. Each dramatic monologue is 'about' precisely that. Character is life; character must use life; life is all.[3]

Irony is the mode of the dramatic monologue because characterization is both method and subject matter. Irony reveals the disparities and contradictions which are part of the character's activity,[4] and the essential feature of irony is the indirect presentation of an action or expression and the context in which it occurs. The very form of the dramatic

monologue, then, is founded on this principle of irony because the attempted articulation reveals the disparity between its expression and its ability to name. It is not the poet only who dissembles and wears the mask; the players are automatically disguised by the tools they must use. Language is a mask to thought and emotion. Like Browning's Grammarian, each speaker deals with this issue: whether to live or to know. Each is caught in the contradiction: how does one live to the fullest without exciting life's energy in an attempt to determine what that fullness might be.

> Oh, such a life he resolved to live,
> When he had learned it
> When he had gathered all books had to give!
>
> ("A Grammarian's Funeral," ll. 65-67)

Each speaker is driven to "Image the whole, then execute the parts--Fancy the fabric" ("A Grammarian's Funeral," ll. 69-70) before building his explanation. Each monologue describes this drama. Each shows the disparity between the actuality and the attempt for "other." Language offers the most immediate means for the character to interpret and describe experience but at the same time language defines that experience. The speaker becomes entangled in his attempt at self-knowledge. What he purports to describe is lost in the very method he subscribes to.

The characteristic this/that, either/or movement which is evident in the system of doubles and contraries appealed to

by each speaker is also manifest in the over-poem which complements the actual speech. This, too, is a demonstration of the relationship between irony and metaphor. The speaker attempts to cope with his world by choosing forms of description which measure the difference between inner and outer and which sustain the separation. This method is analogical, an attempt to order and restructure, a means of reshaping random experience into a comprehensible pattern. In this way, the Browning dramatic monologue is intensely and ultimately concerned with the creative process.

The whole poem, the speech and its implications, represents a metaphoric fusing of the reach and grasp, the head and heart, perception and expression, by comparing the speaker's statements with the alternative structure rising out of the ironic implications--the ambiguities and the contradictions. The complexity of the dramatic monologue is illustrated by this correlation between ironic presentation and metaphoric realization: the character finds himself in a specific situation where his only method to understand this situation is to spin filaments from it towards another order, usually of heaven and perfection. Then the speaker is propelled to climb towards this other structure. In the process he loses touch with both the earth and the predicament which initiated his concern with the "other." What the speaker gains is not self-knowledge but a lesson on the perpetuation of self-deceit. He

learns to sustain the division between his Now and his concept of tne ideal; he is committed, because of his method, to see his particular situation as a construction emanating from divine will; he does not detect that his method has created the suprastructure cum divine will.

The Browning dramatic monologue holds a form within its form in that the speech is contained within its larger implications. These implications construct the allegorical/metaphorical level of the poem; they are created and sustained by the tension produced by irony.[5] Both irony and metaphor are modes of interpretation extending from the text into the context, and the reader, part of the speaker's audience, is also activated. Both speaker and reader are involved in the separation of sense data from meaning and purpose. In this way, the dramatic monologue form is a metaphor for the relationship of art object to the purpose of art.

The Browning dramatic monologue argues that any aspect of reality is relative[6] and dependent upon a language system for its description. This language system is not encompassing enough to enable the speaker to describe "truth"; it merely shadows the perception and the experience. Only the dramatized portrait of the speaker's effort to achieve an articulation and self-justification, the poem itself, successfully represents an imitation of experience. The speaker's language fails him but it does not fail the poem.

The reading of the speech in terms of its context reveals the ironic qualifications of the speaker's values and intentions. This reading implies an alternate frame through which we see the significance of the character's activity as well as the kind of representation made. This metaphoric process of transference from the initiation to the initiator to the next initiation is the method of the dramatic monologue.

Each monologue contributes to our conclusions about the nature of both reality and perception, and about the limitations of language as a means of accomplishing more than an articulation of an issue. Each dramatic monologue reminds us of the supreme function of the imagination as the means to reorder our impressions and perspectives and to render our experience and the universe comprehensible.

Browning's is an ironic temper.[7] His poetic is without moral or didactic intent,[8] except in the sense that it is social and attempts the fusion of subject with the objective world; it attempts to integrate and to initiate, to provide a model of nature which can be evaluated, tested, "reverted to and relearned."[9] The dramatic monologue returns emphasis to the concrete in such a way that the emblems and the thing signified are finally less significant than the players and their "painted stage." The process of playing, the masked mimesis, is of sustaining interest. Representation gives life to the players and continuity to our fractured

experience. It renders our experience known, yet "makes a strange art of an art familiar."[10]

# NOTES

1. For a discussion of the dramatic monologue as anti-lyric, see William Cadbury, "Lyric and Anti-lyric Forms: A Method for Judging Browning," University of Toronto Quarterly, 34 (October, 1964), 49-67.

2. Cadbury uses "imitation of character" to distinguish the anti-lyric form from Paul Goodman's designation of lyric as "imitation of attitude." He suggests that irony creates the mask or "smoke screen" which allows the reader to recognize the anti-lyric form as other than an "imitation of an attitude," p. 51.

3. For definitions of the dramatic monologue and its functions, see S.S. Curry, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue, who states that the form is "one end of a conversation," p. 7, and is dramatic because "it interprets human experience and character," p. 9; Ina Beth Sessions, "The Dramatic Monologue," PMLA, 62 (1947), 503-516, "a Perfect dramatic monologue is that literary form which has the definite characteristics of speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action, and action which takes place in the present," p. 508; Robert Huntington Fletcher, "Browning's Dramatic Monologs," Modern Language Notes, 23 (April, 1908), 108-111, "the poem presents vividly a scene or action of external crisis or of moral significance, and is generally devoted also with equal or greater directness to the analysis or delineation of one or more characters or moods," p. 108; George Herbert Palmer, "The Monologue of Browning," Harvard Theological Review, 11, No. 2 (April, 1918), 121-144, "his monologue is dramatic, addressed to a listener. It is psychological, disclosing the speaker rather than what is spoken of. It is comprehensive and sums up a complex and habitual character," p. 131; and C.N. Wenger, "The Masquerade in Browning's Dramatic Monologues," College English, 3 (1941), 225-239, who states that the dramatic monologues served as a mask through which Browning "revealed the psychic disruptions of his times. Under its varied disguises he brought the era's inarticulate troubles the mediation of self talk," p. 226.

4. Cadbury stresses that "we read all anti-lyrics in terms of the tension established between the character and our expected responses," p. 59.

5. Cf. Michael Timko, "Ah, Did You Once See Browning Plain," Studies in English Literature, 6 (1966), 731-742, who argues that Browning's best poems are those where "both speaker and listener are sufficiently realized to produce the tension required for dramatic art," p. 741. A.R. Jones, "Robert Browning and the Dramatic Monologue: The Impersonal Art," Critical Quarterly, 9, No. 4 (Winter, 1967), 301-328, also declares tension to be the most significant aspect of the form: "Browning's best work is dialectic, a poetry of immediate but subtle tensions, and is dramatic in so far as the argument hovers precariously on the edge of decision," p. 317. This thesis stresses that such tension is effected principally by the ironic separation between what is revealed and what is potential.

6. Cf. Palmer, "The Monologue of Browning," who argues that Browning is largely concerned with "point of view": "the powers by which we apprehend truth will vary, and what is true for one of us will not be true for another. There is no standard set of powers by reference to which absolute truth may be known. Reality is always relative," p. 142.

7. See Claudette Kemper, "Irony Anew, with Occasional Reference to Byron and Browning," Studies in English Literature, 7 (1967), 705-719, for an excellent discussion of the ironic attitude as "a broad, continuous apprehension of the problems in epistemology generally," p. 707. Kemper defines the ironic predisposition as a kind of perception, where "something is always seen happening, but nothing ever changes. . . the ironic mind. . . sees all sides to the issue, but it sees them always. It sees all evidence. And all the evidence obviates innocence, obviates a judgment; exhibit "A" for the state and exhibit "A" for the defense dissolve each other's value and significance," p. 710.

8. See Kemper, "Irony asks how one man can know reality and the right, given all men's experience of the knowing processes. It does not ask what is the right, nor pretend to know it, except ironically," p. 714, and "Irony questions moral judgments and undermines them," p. 714. See also, Jones, "The Impersonal Art," "the best of Browning's dramatic monologues insist on the relativity of all moral judgments; he emphasizes again and again that all truth is a matter of perspective," p. 318; and Morse Peckham, Beyond the Tragic Vision: The Quest for Identity in the Nineteenth Century

(New York: George Braziller, 1962), "value lies not in intuitively perceiving a truth or embodying and incarnating transcendental truth in reality but in breaking through an illusion," p. 275. This is the function of the dramatic and ironic mask--to reveal and then re-disguise--to "tell a truth obliquely."

9. Browning, "Essay on Shelley." See above, Chapter I, footnote number 66.

10. "One Word More," l. 124.

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