ROBERT BROWNING: A RE-EVALUATION

A Thesis

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Dedicated to

Gayla

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PREFACE

This thesis is the result of several forces. Principal among these is my fascination and admiration for Browning evoked by an undergraduate instructor. Little was I aware of the ramifications this fascination would involve. For several years the fascination lay dormant. Then, I discovered Betty Miller's Robert Browning: A Portrait. Not only was my fascination re-awakened but also my admiration was challenged by the abruptness of the awakening. I was, needless to say, somewhat disturbed. Was my facile, unthinking praise valid? Could I actually admire the Browning whom Miller presented? This paper is the outgrowth of the ruminations set in motion by the first reading and a subsequent rereading of the book. To her, I am indebted for the clearing away of some preconceptions that in verity were misconceptions.

I wish to acknowledge three debts of gratitude. Dr. Charles E. Walton of the English Department, Kansas State Teachers College, Emporia, Kansas, has given oft-appreciated encouragement and advice in the execution of this project. His critical evaluations have been almost indispensable in the final shaping of this work. Dr. June Morgan, also of the English Department, KSTC, Emporia, has given welcome assistance in proof-reading this manuscript. My wife's

empathetic understanding of her husband's absences commends her fidelity. I wish to thank her for typing this manuscript.

Kansas State Teachers College B. R. G.
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August, 1960

CHAPTER I

RB: RENAISSANCE SCHOLAR?

It is often believed today that Browning's popularity in the 1870's led to the formation of the Browning Societies in 1881. However, it is possible that these clubs were instrumental in achieving one good thing for the poet--selling some of the dust-covered volumes that had been lying unread on the booksellers' shelves. This, and the fact that these societies maintained what were usually affable situations in which friends could meet, is about the only mark of distinction they gave to Browning. Far from making him into a renowned poet in the image of Shakespeare or Milton as they "tried" to do, they probably hastened a decline in Browning's popularity. The enthusiasm of the societies was, perhaps, their weakness. It is rather remarkable that William Lyon Phelps ever became a Browning follower, for, as Greer has pointed out, he was repulsed by the conduct of the Browning Societies in the United States to the point that he prided himself in knowing and circulating all the stuffy anecdotes about Browning's obscurity.[1]

> In my Senior year at college, in a general course in English literature, we had three or four lessons in Browning, which aroused in me a definite aversion. This aversion was increased

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[1] Louise Greer, Browning and America, p. 186.

> by the widespread adoration of the poet, by the notoriety of the Browning societies in London and in Boston, and by other eccentric propaganda. The disciples of Browning whom I met were acutely uninteresting.
>
> I was still sufficiently a Philistine to believe not only that Browning was far from being a great poet; I thought also that his influence on the art of poetry was evil.[2]

Inherent in this adulation were many stereotyped catch-all phrases that were supposed to "explain" the poet. Ironically, the stock clichés probably did as much to obscure Browning as Browning had done to obscure himself. That the labeling of Browning as an optimist, a lyricist, a student of the Italian Renaissance, poet of religion, philosopher, *ad infinitum*, was the attempt to reduce him to the simplest of terms cannot be denied. However, whether these expressions have actually helped Browning students to see the poet objectively is open to question. Generalizations have the knack of becoming the "be-all and end-all." Poets nor data admit to such facile classification. Greer tells, rather delightfully, of Agnes Repplier of the Philadelphia Browning Society.[3] It seems that the meetings of this particular society had become little more than philosophical discussions rather than sessions devoted to the reading of Browning's

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[2]William Lyon Phelps, *Autobiography with Letters*, pp. 207-38.

[3]Greer, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

poetry. Miss Repplier dared to suggest that, since Browning's plays have no action, there was nothing left to discuss but the poet's philosophy. That anyone dared to think there was a deficiency in Browning's poetry was reprehensible! To question the ability or purpose of Browning was an indication of disapprobation, a jarring crack in the hero-cult wall.

Seventy-one years have gone by since the poet's death. One must be aware, however, that toward the close of Browning's life and after, there developed a quasi-Renaissance in the literary arts. It might be more accurate to call this Renaissance a cult of voracious reading. Stopford Brooke explains that during the nineties, anyone who did not admit to being a reader of Browning or who dared to assert that Browning was an obscure poet, ran the risk of being considered uneducated or eccentric.[4] This attitude sold many copies for Victorian writers, all the while making definite, positive literary criticism difficult and almost always substandard. Until the present time, this damage has not been fully repaired. The old literary conventions served to sell books, but they did not serve to stimulate intelligent and honest scholarship. One agrees that it is time to obtain a realistic picture of Browning in the light of recent criticism. It is the purpose of the writer of this

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[4]Rupert Brooke, The Poetry of Robert Browning, p. 65.

study to give the reader an objective glimpse of Browning, the poet. It is neither fair to the reader nor posterity to perpetuate a half-truth.

Within the last decade, Browning scholarship and criticism has taken an interesting, though not easily explicable, turn. The previous half century had its ardent exponents and defenders of Browning's poetry and philosophy. Most notable was William Lyon Phelps, whose lofty rhetoric and oratory seemed to compete with the poet's. Not all of the efforts of Phelps or G. K. Chesterton could keep alive Browning's poetry. H. B. Charlton noticed that in 1938 no one had checked out volumes of Robert Browning's poetry from the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England; however, The Barretts of Wimpole Street, on the other hand, was very popular.[5] The steady decrease in the reading of Browning's poetry was paralleled by a decline in the number and activity of Browning Societies.[6] Landis, in a recent compilation of Browning letters, states that the poets, Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, have survived their poetry.[7] This is the conclusion to which one comes when he has

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[5]H. B. Charlton, "Browning: the Poet's Aim," John Rylands Library Bulletin, XXII (April, 1938), p. 98.

[6]F. R. G. Duckworth, Browning: Background and Conflict, p. 91.

[7]Paul Landis, Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett, p. 2.

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The published material about Browning and his poetry, were it set in tabular form according to publication date and subject discussed, would reveal an increase in the number of treatises dealing with the poet's life compared to those concerned with interpretation, analogies, and sources of the poetry. This present decade, alone, has seen the appearance of three volumes of Browning correspondence, one psychological biography, one on the subject of his poetic inspiration, a revised handbook, and a comprehensive bibliography.[8] An examination of recent periodical literature reveals a similar trend. As much has been done in the last decade in the editing and publishing of Browning's correspondence as was accomplished between 1889 and 1950. The letters published in Mrs. Orr's biography and the love letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, published in 1898, were the only volumes of correspondence extant until the appearance of the Thomas J. Wise collection in 1933. Editorship is almost entirely lacking in Mrs. Orr's

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[8]William Clyde DeVane and Kenneth Leslie Knickerbocker, New Letters of Robert Browning (1950); Edward C. McAleer, Dearest Isa; Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden (1951); Paul Landis, Letters of the Brownings to George Barrett (1958); Betty Miller, Robert Browning: A Portrait (1953); Edward Dudley Hume Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry; Sources of the Poetic Inspiration in Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold (1952); William Clyde DeVane, A Browning Handbook (1955); Leslie Nathan Broughton, Robert Browning: A Bibliography (1953).

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publication. The love letters admit no editorship, whatsoever. The Wise collection, supervised by T. L. Hood, is certainly an editorial advancement, but, even so, much is to be desired. DeVane and Knickerbocker pointed out in 1950 that editing of Browning correspondence had not been conducted on a consistently high level.[9] The three volumes which have appeared in this decade have apparently met the challenge of high scholarship.

The psychological approach to Browning's biography has been accorded a similar level of scholarly treatment. Miller has written a creditable biography, making use of many of the letters of the poet and those of his acquaintances. One must, however, be aware that all criticism is a matter of emphasis and that it becomes quite easy to "prove" one's point with an intuition. This biography is no exception. Miller has presented Browning in such a logically consistent way that one might conclude that her work is the ultimate truth about Browning. She depicts Browning as a coddled son, mother-fixed semi-adult, ardent and non-resolute lover, utterly devoted husband, doting father, temperamental and sometimes irascible lion of the social set in London, and as the idol of the Browning Societies. After reading this biography, one finds it difficult to maintain much respect for

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[9] William Clyde DeVane and Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, _New Letters of Robert Browning_, p. 7.

the virility of the poet. Doubtless, this work has had, and will continue to have, an influence on Browning criticism.[10]

Johnson makes no attempt at psychological interpretation, but instead makes a sociological one. The enigmatic Victorian period was perhaps as puzzling to the Victorians as to us. Browning's popularity can be accounted for in his speaking against the prevailing mores. He did not appeal to them.[11] Johnson sees in Browning's aesthetic and intuitive transcendancy some dangerous unsocial, if not anti-social, tendencies.[12] If man's highest achievement is self-realization at any cost, Browning would not care about the rest of the world. If Browning's interest is in the fulfillment of passion rather than in the preservation of domestic proprieties, he is a man to be watched with utmost scrutiny. In spite of his reluctance to "admire" Browning, Johnson considers him to be a more original poet than Tennyson. He feels that Browning used more recondite subject matter and experimented rather capriciously with various methods.[13] In contrast to Tennyson, Browning was unwilling to make concessions to his readers.[14]

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[10]One could wish a preview of two biographies of the poet now in progress, one from Stanford University and another by W. C. DeVane of Yale. How do these show the poet in the "light" of recent trends? See Donna Walsh, "Research in Progress," PMLA, LXXV (May, 1960), p. 103.

[11]Johnson, op. cit., p. ix.

[12]Ibid., pp. 94-95.

[13]Ibid., p. 71.

[14]Loc. cit.

These two publications of the early fifties, perhaps, have set off a barrage of "adverse" criticism. The editors of the letters doubt that much new data about Browning's life are available with the publications of the correspondence. Browning is still revealed as the caustic critic of his own critics. For example, Landis senses that these letters verify the utter selfishness of the poet.[15] The delight Browning had in verbal vilification of his critics indicates the frustrations of a man who was much concerned with action but did little more than push a pencil.[16] One notable exception is the occasion of his attempting to throw a decanter at the head of John Forster.[17]

Periodical publications for the same decade continue in this trend. Tracy, in an article antedating the fifties, by fourteen years, might be seen as a precursor of the recent criticism.[18] He observes that the poet, through repeated connection with Rev. Mr. Fox of South Place, had been associated with the radical ideas of Unitarianism.[19]

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[15]Landis, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

[16]Loc. cit.

[17]W. C. DeVane, New Letters of Robert Browning, p. 230.

[18]C. R. Tracy, "Browning Heresies," Studies in Philology, XXXIII (October, 1936), pp. 610-25.

[19]Ibid., pp. 624-25.

As a result, much of Browning's religious poetry is a reflection of the struggle between his heart and his head, for Browning's early environment was conservative Non-Conformist.[20] Baker reads into Browming's poetry much more than Tracy.[21] Baker would almost deny that Browning was a Christian.[22] Browning's love was not _agape_ but _eros_.[23] Baker is satisfied to call Browning a humorist.[24]

Where does this trend leave one--or lead one? The swing of the pendulum from adulation, in spite of the facts of Browning's life and conduct, to avid psychological and philosophical skeleton-digging reminds one of the obvious trends in American biography. Mr. Weem's life of George Washington is a eulogistic, fictional construction to make a great man into a superhuman being with divine attributes. Readers of such biographies, in time, became disturbed with the excessively romantic depiction. Then, followed a type of biography at the other extreme. The "garbage can" portrait soon made queasy the sensibilities of its readers. Biography

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[20] _Loc. cit._

[21] J. E. Baker, "Religious Implications in Browning's Poetry," _Philological Quarterly_, XXXVI (October, 1957), pp. 436-52.

[22] _Ibid._, p. 440.

[23] _Ibid._, p. 439.

[24] _Ibid._, p. 437.

today tends to lie between the extremes. It is hoped that Browning criticism and scholarship is attaining this desired position.

The old conventions should be reëxamined and re-appraised for their validity. To accomplish this, one should consider the following subjects: (1) Browning as lyricist, (2) Browning's doctrines of successful failure, imperfectibility, soul growth, and the rapturous moment, and (3) Browning as a Renaissance scholar.

The first convention for consideration is that Browning was a lyric poet. Lyricism, in the Platonic sense, is the process of making the real (idea) a concrete communication. The concrete must have the qualities of melody, intensity, and brevity. The insight comes in flashes, not in sustained periods of ecstacy. Phelps gives this definition:

> To him [Browning] the bard is a Reporter of Life, an accurate Historian of the Soul, one who observes human nature in its various manifestations, and gives a faithful record. Sound, rhythm, beauty are important, because they are part of life; . . . Exactly in proportion to the poet's power of portraying life, is the poet great;--and the Perfect Bard would be the one who had chronicled the stages of all of life.[25]

The poet knows that his own soul and emotions are the medium of transcendance, and that the expression of the idea is

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[25]William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning, pp. 43-44.

also the expression of himself. That Browning is lyrical at times, and, particularly in his best work, Men and Women (1855), cannot be denied. Yet, to call Browning a lyricist is to overlook much contrary evidence.[26]

A catalog of Browning's truly lyric poetry would not fill many pages. Some of the longer poems occasionally lapse into lyric melody and verse, but this is the exception rather than the rule in Browning. For example, Paracelsus (1835), has some intriguing and beautiful poetry, but the reader must, as it were, destroy the haystack to find the needle. There are, however, a few lyrical poems of merit in Browning. The short poem, "My Star," is the nearest the poet ever comes to what may be called the true lyric quality. It enables the reader to observe Browning without having to penetrate his usual dramatic disguise behind which the poet almost always chose to hide. Essentially, Browning is a narrative rather than a lyrical poet. By simple force of repetition and the sheer mass of dramatic monologues, he cannot with any kind of accuracy be called a lyric poet. Is not Browning more famous for "My Last Duchess" than "My Star"? For Sordello than the "Guardian Angel"?

Nevertheless, Browning at one time had hopes of becoming a lyric poet. On February 11, 1845, he wrote to

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[26] Ibid., p. 72.

Elizabeth Barrett that he hoped that he would be able to put himself into his poetry as she had done. "Someday," he said, "I'll write 'RB a poem.'"[27] This poem, one suggests, was never to be written. Browning was excessively disturbed by inhibitions. His letters invariably have a cautiousness about them, except when he is expressing love, or when he is attacking a critic. He becomes most "lyric" when, in the heat of defending himself, he reveals himself very picturesquely, even grotesquely. The poem, "House," for example, couched in his usual dramatic disguise, is revelatory of such inhibitions:

> Outside should suffice for evidence:
> And whoso desires to penetrate
> Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense--
> No optics like yours, at any rate!

The second convention for re-evaluation is a series of four concepts that are evident in much of Browning's poetry. William Lyon Phelps, one of the most ardent and sensible of the many Browningites, advanced the doctrines of successful failure, imperfectibility, soul growth, and the rapturous moment as being the fundamental themes in Browning.[28] One of Browning's most frequently reiterated ideas, that of success in failure, is clearest in Men and Women, a concept

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[27] Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, I, p. 17.

[28] William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning, pp. 116; 120; 122; 125; 321 ff.

which is essentially that one should have noble ambitions and pursue them relentlessly. However, the higher the aim, the more obstacles one will have to overcome before the goal is attained. If the goal be lofty, so will be the tests or obstacles. Browning, as Milton pointed out, says that the test of faith is doubt. If credence can withstand the subtleties of doubt and incredulity, faith is proven and, hence, valid. Bishop Blougram states very succinctly that:

> . . . faith means perpetual unbelief
> Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
> Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.
>
> Let doubt occasion still more faith!
>
> No, when the fight begins within himself,
> A man's worth something.
> ("Bishop Blougrams Apology")

In a like manner, Browning shows that love is to be validated by its endurance to separation and frustration:

> But what if I fail of my purpose here?
> It is but to keep the nerves at strain,
> To dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall,
> And baffled, get up and begin again,--
> So the chase takes up one's life, that's all.
> ("Life in a Love")

The test of an artist is his artistry. In all of the various goals and their proofs, lies the inherent philosophy that one will not achieve an excellence without first having sought an excellence. The actual achievement of the goal, then, is secondary to the high pursuit.

Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?
("Andrea del Sarto")

Rabbi Ben Ezra indicates the value of an apparently unattainable goal:

The high that proved too high, the heroic
for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose
itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and
the bard;
Enough that He heard it once; we shall
hear it by and by.

For the most part, Browning's characters are static, that is, full-grown.[29] The counterplay of faith and doubt, love and frustration, has left the protagonist somewhat anesthetized. He has not seen that the rebuff was meant to test and prove his love or faith. He has seen it as a disapprobation. One can see in the Duke of Ferrara, ("My Last Duchess") that the Duke has arrived at a point of insensibility; he has accustomed himself to his milieu; he feels no compulsion to change his order of thinking; he is interested in rationalizing his conduct. It is somewhat obvious that this concept of success and failure has some dangerous social implications. The pursuit of a goal that is not always lofty in terms of human ideals of conduct and morals can lead one to be unsocial, if not anti-social.

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[29]A. E. DuBois, "Robert Browning Dramatist," Studies in Philology, XXXVI (October, 1936), p. 652.

The jealous Duke "gave commands." He thought his goal of self-realization released him from the civil law. The wry twist at the close of the monologue reveals the Duke, immune to remorse and conscience.

> Notice Neptune, though,
> Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
> Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.

He is more interested in fulfilling passion than in the maintenance of civil and domestic proprieties.[30]

One can see in the doctrine of successful failure the overtones of the next doctrine, that of imperfectibility. If one can not attain to the goal, whatever the aim, there is, nevertheless, a solace to be found in the attempt. The aim is perfection, but few can realize it. Therefore, one must be content with imperfection, knowing it as a symbol of the perfection that lies, not here on earth, but in the life to follow. Bishop Blougram sees the relationship between body and soul, time and eternity in this light:

> Let us concede (gratuitously though)
> Next life relieves the soul of body, yields,
> Pure spiritual enjoyments: Well, my friend,
> Why lose this life in the meantime, since its use
> May be to make the next life more intense?

Actually, all that is left for attainment is the growth of the soul, making the soul fit for the perfection that lies beyond. Again, this is ostensibly Platonic thinking: the imperfection is a shadow of the perfect or real. Yet, one

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[30]Johnson, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

must achieve a growth on two levels. Cleon, beset by intellectual doubts, grasps at the certainty that man's life on earth is only one facet of the whole of existence:

> For what we call this life of men on earth,
> This sequence of the soul's achievements here,
> Being, as I find much reason to conceive,
> Intended to be viewed eventually
> As a great whole, not analysed to parts,
> But each part having reference to all, . . .

Life is only one segment of the whole of man's being--"Perfection means imperfection hid."

Third in the series of conventions is the repeated concept of the soul of man. One is equipped with a dual capacity. On the level of the concrete there is the body with all its sensibilities and capacities. On the abstract level there is the soul, fundamentally, the real man. Man's ultimate concern is to develop the real, transcend the temporal, physical, and material to reach the spiritual, ethereal, and timeless. To realize the fulfillment of the abstract, one must engage the physical senses in the development of the real, for the senses are a symbol of the higher "senses." By indirection, the higher faculties are trained by the lower. The soul and body, ideally, have a reciprocal benefit. In "Rabbi Ben Ezra," Browning states: "all good things/Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul." The soul, as Browning sees it, is no more than the total personality of a man. The idea that flesh can aid

the soul does not coincide with the idea that the soul is only spiritual, and that access to the soul is by way of a spiritual means. The soul, being the human personality, is composed of flesh, reputation, cognition, and transcendance. "Saul," begun in 1845 and completed in 1853, is, perhaps, Browning's most lucid interpretation of the soul. The poem, obviously, is more concerned with David than melancholic Saul. Stanzas I-IX, written in 1845, deal with the biblical narrative itself. David is summoned to dispell Saul's depression with harp and song. His performance ranges from a funeral dirge to a dance rhythm. Stanza IX, the transition, is a recount of Saul's rise to the monarchy. From this point on, David is the protagonist, who is possessed with one concern: "What spell or what charm,/ . . . what next should I urge/To sustain him where song had restored him?" He finds it necessary to explore his own soul to discover the reason for Saul's melancholia. David loved Saul as a son, but that love is powerless to effect in Saul a transformation until David perceives, logically, that "'tis Thou, God, that givest, 'tis I who receive:/In the first is the last, in Thy will is my power to believe." Only by prophetic understanding does David recognize the help for Saul:

> '. . . O Saul, it shall be
> A Face like my face that receives thee; A Man like to
> me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by, for ever: A Hand
like this hand
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee!
See the Christ stand!'

Hilton asserted, in reference to Sordello, that man cannot be psychically sound unless he believes that God is truth.[31] This appears equally appropos to David's dilemna. Duffin outlined Saul's problem as being one of an intellectual understanding of God rather than a mystical concept.[32] Charlton, on the other hand, observed that the psycho-therapeutics of the first section were ineffective.[33] Baker, furthermore, charged that David's experience is an over-whelming "multitudinousness" of pantheism:[34] "God is seen God/In the star, in the stone, in the field, in the soul, in the clod." This philosophy permitted Browning to "preach" some precepts that approach un-Christian dogma. Part of the training of the soul is to enable man to live life fully. All physical pleasures and gratifications could, in this light, be soul-building. The Christian ethic, as outlined by Jesus and St. Paul, advocated a life of frugality, sacrifice, and abstention from fleshly appetites. Baker sees this concept

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[31]Earl Hilton, "Browning's Sordello as a Study of the Will," PMLA, LXIX (December, 1954), p. 1134.

[32]H. C. Duffin, "Mysticism in Browning," Hibbert Journal, LIII (July, 1955), p. 373.

[33]H. B. Charlton, "Browning as a Poet of Religion," John Rylands Library Bulletin, XXVII (June, 1943), p. 274.

[34]Baker, op. cit., p. 440.

of flesh helping soul to be a deliberate rationalization for Browning's own inordinate propensities.[35] Externally, he could have the appearance of orthodox Christianity, but at heart he could do as he pleased. The sensate amenities were sanctified by their use for a "noble" purpose. Browning, perhaps, would not deny that the gratification of the senses was an ulterior end, yet, he admitted that self-abnegation was incompatible to self-realization. This antinomianism was not objectionable to many Browningites. Even "The Statue and the Bust," with its apparent advocacy for crime, perhaps, offended some readers.[36] "Rabbi Ben Ezra" gives further evidence on the idea of growth and successful failure. Browning has the Rabbi say:

> Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
> Be our joys three-parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe;

The interaction of the body and soul are described thus:

> For pleasant is this flesh;
> Our soul, in its rose-mesh
> Pulled over to the earth, still yearns for rest . . .
>
> Let us not always say
> 'Spite of this flesh today

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[35] Ibid., p. 452.

[36] William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning, p. 272.

> I strove, made head, gained ground upon the whole!'
> As the bird wings and sings,
> Let us cry 'All good Things
> Are ours, nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh
> helps soul!'

There is, however, another aspect to the development of the soul. Not only should one indulge himself in the pleasures of life, but he should also welcome the concomitant exigencies of life. Browning, in the poem, "James Lee," gives a terse comment:

> . . . Rejoice that man is hurled
> From change to change unceasingly,
> His soul's wings never furled.
>
> That's a new question; still replies the fact,
> Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying so;
> We moan in acquiescence: there's life's pact,
> Perhaps probation--do I know?
> God does: endure His act!

Each frustration, each rebuff, each delaying of the goal should serve to develop one's soul.

The final doctrine in the quartet of stock concepts is, perhaps, the culmination of the previous three in that it draws for its emphasis the mutual interaction of success and failure, soul growth, and imperfection. The core is that all of life's ramifications direct one to a time, often brief, when the hitherto unrelated aspects of life come sharply into focus. The intensity of this focus produces a glow within the individual, purges baseness and releases light into all existence. In the brilliance of this moment, one sees clearly

that such and such a reversal has set the stage for the full fruition of the goal. The goal before had seemed remote, the possibility of attainment even remoter. The poem, "Christina," illustrates the moment of rapture:

> There are flashes struck from midnights,
> There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
> Whereby piled-up honours perish,
> Whereby swoln ambitions dwindle,
> While just this or that poor impulse
> Which for once had play unstifled
> Seems the sole work of a lifetime
> That away the rest have trifled.

Man reaches his zenith in the moment of rapture. Self-realization is achieved. Man has transcended the temporal and is in contact with the timeless. It is at this moment that two souls unite in spiritual affinity, even though the circumstances of life should keep the lovers apart physically. The emotion of love is particularly susceptible to this reasoning. Baker doubts, though, that what Browning had in mind is _agape_, or Christian love, but rather _eros_, or sexual love, because _eros_ is essentially a selfish manifestation, whereas _agape_ is essentially altruistic.[37] Many of Browning's monologuists exhibit frustration at failing to achieve self-gratification in their pursuits. The unrequited lovers, the bride and Duke Ferdinand in "The Statue and the Bust," the jealous husband, Andrea del Sarto, the frustrated artist, Fra Lippo Lippi, are all the objects of speculation.

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[37]Baker, _op. cit._, p. 437.

Finally, Robert Browning has been cited as a Renaissance student and fancier.[38] One must consider the evidence that has prompted this evaluation. In Modern Painters, John Ruskin comments about "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" to the effect that Browning's lines have much of the Renaissance spirit in them:[39]

> I know no other piece of modern English, prose or poetry, in which there is so much told, as . . . these lines of the Renaissance spirit,--its worldliness, inconsistency, pride, hypocrisy, ignorance of itself, love of art, of luxury, and of good Latin. It is nearly all that I said of the central Renaissance in thirty pages of the Stones of Venice, put into as many lines, Browning's being the antecedent work.

Clarke, writing at the turn of the last century, states that Browning was steeped in Renaissance lore and learning.[40] He, furthermore, was a scholar, for, she says, he wrote so knowingly about objects d'art.[41] By indirection, Stopford Brooke advances the same idea that Browning must have been a Renaissance scholar since he wrote so much about it.[42] Obviously, Browning was conversant with the lore of ancient Italy. He could recite quite easily the names of the

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[38]Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

[39]Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, IV, p. 449.

[40]Clarke, *op. cit.*, p. x.

[41]*Loc. cit.*

[42]Brooke, *op. cit.*, p. 301ff.

prominent artists. Many of his protagonists are distinctly Italian and Renaissance. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is Renaissance in the sense that it takes for its principal subject a Renaissance figure. He must be seen against the background of his time, and so Browning uses contemporary allusions to show that Fra Lippo was a man of his times. Brooke says that this poem is Browning's interpretation of the great social and literary change brought on by the Renaissance.[43] "Andrea del Sarto," likewise, is painted against the same kind of background. Helen Clarke sees Sordello as a symbol of the Renaissance idea of democracy.[44] She also sees that Luria represents fifteenth century Florentine civilization.[45] Brooke also states that "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" reveals the decadence of the Renaissance.[46] The catalog of Browning's Renaissance subjects includes painters, architects, sculptors, and members of the clergy. There must be some reason for Browning's attraction to these ideas. One may consider four in analysis. First, Browning had read with great delight the work of Vasari, Le Vite de' Pittori, a popular biography of the famous painters of the Italian Renaissance.[47] This

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[43] Ibid., p. 304.

[44] Clarke, op. cit., p. 56.

[45] Ibid., p. 59.

[46] Brooke, op. cit., p. 300.

[47] Merle Bevington, "Three Letters to the Editor of Pall Mall Gazette," MLN, LXXIV (April, 1960), p. 308.

work was a highly colorful, not always trustworthy, account of the painters.[48] Browning wrote two letters to the Pall Mall Gazette defending his use of the Vasari Lives as his authority.[49] At least, he had read Vasari's art history correctly, all the while the source being faulty.[50] The chronology was often confused and contradictory. Browning had, also, read the work of Baldinucci about the Renaissance painters and artists.[51] The assimilation of these two works had taken the poet some time. However, he was probably more intrigued with Italy for another obvious reason, since he had visited the country in 1838 as a young man of twenty-six years,[51] again in 1844,[52] making Florence one of the principal cities of his visits.[54] There is no more Renaissance city in Italy. How could he escape the impact of the lingering influence of the centuries? Browning was, furthermore, delighted by the art and sculpture of the city.[55] Florence

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[48]Loc. cit.

[49]Ibid., p. 304.

[50]Loc. cit.

[51]W. C. DeVane, Handbook of Robert Browning, pp. 217-18.

[52]Alexandra Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning, p. 135.

[53]Ibid., p. 196.

[54]Loc. cit.

[55]Ibid., p. 162.

presented some aspects to the poet that he did not see in his own England. There was, perhaps, something about the easy, tranquil pace that captured him. This might account for the fact that he took his bride to Florence in 1846. For fifteen years, with only short periods away, they continued to live in this most Renaissance of all Italian cities. Another phase ought not to be overlooked. The poet expressed in a letter to Elizabeth Barrett, March 12, 1845, his own predilection for painting and music in deference to writing.

> I have no pleasure in writing myself--none, in the mere act--though all pleasure in the sense of fulfilling a duty, whence, if I have done my real best. . . But I think you like the operation of writing as I should like that of painting or making music, do you not?[56]

At one time during the Brownings' residence in Florence, the poet took up the practice of painting. It must have been some satisfaction for him to see his son take up art as a study, too. One ought not to overlook this predisposition to art in considering Browning as a Renaissance student.

One concludes that Browning is not a Renaissance scholar, _per se_. In respect to the chronology alone, the poet is more Italian than Renaissance, unless one conceives of the Renaissance as lasting until the seventeenth century.

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[56] _Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett_, I, p. 41.

Certainly, Browning made frequent use of the art objects from the Renaissance, but these objects serve merely as background, or extrinsic props before which the characters are seen to move and live. He could have taken any of his actors and have placed them in contemporary milieu, and the effect would have remained the same. Had Browning shown the frustration of an artist of his own time rather than Andrea's time, the effect would be identical. Andrea's wife, more interested in social proprieties than her husband's artistic achievements, is not peculiar to the Renaissance. A worldly-wise, unfaithful bishop is not limited to ancient Italy. The Ring and the Book could, with a change in names, be transferred to the twentieth century, or the fiftieth century. The human motives are as timeless as the pictures in Florence.

Robert Browning has been considered in this chapter in reference to lyricism, a group of doctrines that seem to permeate most of his works, and finally to his relationship to the Italian Renaissance. It has been shown that he is not predominantly a lyricist, for, the number of so-called lyric poems is out-numbered by the voluminous dramatic monologues. There are occasional lyric interludes and poems, but they are not characteristic. The four Phelpsian doctrines have been reëxamined. Their validity is attested only as they are

considered as constituting a synthesis. These are four ideas that are common to much of Browning's poetry; they are not a concentrated capsule of the poet. Browning frequently mentioned the evidences of the Italian Renaissance. "Old Pictures in Florence" is a veritable catalog of the famous, and not so famous, Renaissance painters. Yet, many of the poems mention Florentine and Italian culture rather than the Renaissance. _The Ring and the Book_ is Italian, not Renaissance. The background is seventeenth century. The conflict between the protagonist and antagonist of the poems are not limited to a definite time and to a definite place. The conflicts are rather those that are timeless and cosmic. An Italian, because he is an Italian, is not more susceptible to frustration, doubt, and disease than is an American. Browning is an undated poet. The Renaissance man because of his awareness, might, perhaps, be easier to use in a dramatic monologue. History is a clearer picture than the present; there is no change.

CHAPTER II

RB: THE MAN

Robert Browning has been the recipient of high praises on the one hand, and ridicule on the other. The former, however, has out-weighed the latter. A considerable amount of injustice has been done, perhaps, to the reputation of Browning in the very popular play, The Barretts of Wimpole Street. The dashing young hero, who elopes with a fragile captive maid, makes adequate material for a play, it is true, but the facts in Robert Browning's life do not, always, corroborate with those "facts" in the play. Orr's highly selective biography, one that omits more than it should, has aided in the popularization of Browning. For this reason, it seems necessary to review Browning's life, so that his real merits may be considered objectively. Recent criticism, one suggests, is correcting many of the misconceived notions about Browning's reputation and stature as poet. Browning, no matter how great an artist, cannot be an artist, only.[57] He was a social being, gregarious, inhibited, active, and responsible for his actions. His poetry and his life cannot be two distinct entities, for, it seems that there must be a merging of these two at some place.

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[57]Duckworth, op. cit., p. 139.

Landis states that there is a distinct divergence between Robert Browning, the poet, and Robert Browning, the man, and this cleavage is so sharp that one is tempted to view the disparity as a contradiction.[58] The contradiction might well take the form of this question: how is it that Browning could advocate self-realization regardless of its consequences, and at the same time, never know self-realization for himself? There are four ideas which will be considered, which, one suggests, will serve to answer this question: (1) Browning was a man of great personal conceit; (2) Browning's religious concepts are somewhat misleading; (3) Browning's methodology in presenting the poetic characters is ambiguous; and (4) Browning's poetic ability decreased in direct ratio to his increasing popularity.

First, Browning's egocentricity accounts for some of the cleavage between the poet and his artistry. His disparaging comments about his critics is one obvious outworking of his conceit. Pacchiarotto (1876) represents, perhaps, what is his most vitriolic complaint:

> You Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle-us!
> Troop, all of you--man or homunculus,
> Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
> If once on your pates she a souse made
> With what, pan or pot, bowl or skoramis,

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[58]Landis, op. cit., p. 8.

First comes to her hand--things were more amiss!
I would not for the worlds be your place in--
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-O'-my thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there--
He'll think as the pickle he curses,
I've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens; so, sauced in
Your own sauce. . .

Haines specifically cites Browning's retaliation against John S. Mill for Mill's unfavorable review of Pauline.[59] None of Browning's interpretation of the review, says Haines, is justified, for Browning had apparently taken personal offense to Mill instead of the review. Landis states, also, that Browning delighted in the verbal abuse of his critics.[60] Little did Browning realize when he wrote Pauline (1833) that he would move men to the "wind" of protest and ridicule:

'Tis a fine thing that one, weak as myself,
Should sit in his lone room, knowing the words
He utters in his solitude shall move
Men like a swift wind. . .

Browning's stubbornness, apparently, prevented his making any concessions to his readers,[61] Furthermore, Landis,

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59L. F. Haines, "Mill and Pauline: The Review that Retarded Browning's Fame," MLN, LIX (June, 1941), pp. 410-12.

60Landis, op. cit., p. 14.

61Johnson, op. cit., pp. 71; 180.

in generalizations about the letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, says that Browning "cultivated" indignation as an exhibition of his "sense of honor."[62] The occasion for the indignation, says Landis, was always personal, and Browning was never moved by injustice and oppression except when he himself was personally affected by it.[63] All of the poet's published correspondence, Landis continues, augments the impression that Browning ". . . had no real interest in anything that went on in the world except as it touched Robert Browning."[64] Duckworth endorses the same idea: ". . . he is too proud for anything."[65] This egoism, with its attack on those who opposed him in any way, is, as Miller has pointed out, a trait which continued in Browning from early childhood.[66]

Browning's egoism has further evidence. He had few lasting friends. One finds it difficult to imagine that he had any friends at all. However, most notable of the close friends was Thomas Cralyle.[67] In a letter to Madame Bessie

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[62]Landis, _op_. _cit_., pp. 14-15.

[63]_Loc_. _cit_.

[64]_Loc_. _cit_.

[65]Duckworth, _op_. _cit_., p. 27.

[66]Miller, _op_. _cit_., p. 3.

[67]Charles F. Harrold and William D. Templeman, _English Prose of the Victorian Era_, p. 19n.

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Belloc, March 18, 1881, Browning wrote that there had never been tension between Carlyle and himself: "I am his devotedly."[68] On October 21 of the same year, Browning wrote to Dr. F. J. Furnivall that there had never been the "slightest 'falling out' between Carlyle and myself."[69] The same amiability existing between Browning and Carlyle was almost unknown in Browning's experiences with other people. Duckworth states that Browning had few admirers during the fifties.[70] Some of the difficulty in keeping friends lay, perhaps, in Browning's idiosyncrasies. He dressed fastidiously. He was particularly concerned not to be out of doors or in the presence of others without his lemon-colored gloves.[71] He was often accused of being an excessively loud talker.[72] These idiosyncrasies, alone, would not make him unamiable. Again, one suggests there was the more basic pride and stubborn selfishness.[73]

It seems almost contradictory that Browning, a man of such personal estimation, would allow himself to

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[68]William C. DeVane, New Letters of Robert Browning, p. 263.

[69]T. L. Hood, Letters of Robert Browning, p. 201.

[70]Duckworth, op. cit., p. 33.

[71]Orr, op. cit., p. 145.

[72]Miller, op. cit., p. 277.

[73]Ibid., p. 290; Orr, II, 538.

be thrall to another. Yet, this is probably what happened in his marriage to Elizabeth, or at least Miller would have one think that this was the case.[74] She feels that Elizabeth was not the dainty little captive of Wimpole Street, but rather an impediment to the poetic genius of her husband.[75] At her insistence, perhaps, Robert wrote the last half of "Saul," for Miller sees the conclusion of the poem as Elizabeth's philosophy, not her husband's.[76] Miller also sees a parallel between Andrea del Sarto and Browning, in that both were timid and both were inhibited by their wives from exercising their deepest creative forces.[77] Elizabeth's persuasiveness is hinted in one of her letters to Mrs. Jameson, written May 4, 1850:

> I have complained of the asceticism of the second part of "Christmas Eve and Easter Day"; he said it was 'one side of the question'. Don't think he has taken to the cilix--indeed he has not--but it is his way to see things as passionately as others feel them.[78]

Browning's hypercritical comments about his critics, his apparent lack of concern except for himself, the fact that he had few friends and his voluntary acquiescence to Elizabeth

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[74]Miller, op. cit., pp. 176-77; 179; 194.

[75]Ibid., pp. 21; 187.

[76]William C. DeVane, Handbook of Robert Browning, p. 226.

[77]Miller, op. cit., p. 187.

[78]Orr, op. cit., pp. 162-63.

are indications of Browning's excessive conceit.

One must turn from the egoistic Browning to the religious Browning, for there appears to be a parallel between them. Browning has been cited as a poet of religion.[79] One must determine exactly what kind of religion he advocated as presented in his poems and his own life. The understanding of this level is the crux. Browning was reared in a Non-Conformist home, his mother being a Congregationalist.[80] His father, somewhat later, joined the Congregational group with his wife.[81] Mrs. Browning was the religious center and control of the Browning home.[82] After Robert had shown an interest in poetry, his mother helped him secure books of poetry.[83] Among them was the poetry of Shelley, which young Robert read avidly.[84] There was fired in his heart a desire for the spiritual freedom that Shelley was advocating. The fire was not easily, if ever fully, quenched.[85] Browning later came into contact with the Rev. Mr. Fox of South Place. The theologically liberal Mr. Fox, prompted

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[79]H. B. Charlton, "Browning as a Poet of Religion," _John Ryland's Library Bulletin_, XXVII (June, 1943), pp. 271-72.

[80]Miller, _op. cit._, p. 8.

[81]_Loc. cit._

[82]Miller, _op. cit._, p. 60.

[83]_Ibid._, pp. 9-10.

[84]_Loc. cit._

[85]_Ibid._, p. 10.

the poet to question further the beliefs of his childhood.[86] The ensuing conflict between head and heart was to remain, in part, with him throughout his life. The poet, perhaps, was in the same state as was Karshish ("Epistle of Karshish"):

> I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
> What set me off a-writing first of all.
> An itch I had, a sting to write, a tang
> For, be it this town's barrenness--or else
> The Man had something in the look of him--
> *His case has struck me far more than 'tis worth.*
> [Italics mine]

He was impressed with some experiences more than his reason should have allowed.[87] For example, his mind demanded a rational religion, but in deference to his mother's religion, his heart demanded the "simple" orthodox tenets. That Browning was even a Christian has been debated by various Browning followers. Mrs. Orr tends to show that Browning was not a Christian.[88] Yet, these theories do not seem to hold the solution to what Browning actually believed.

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[86] Tracy, *op. cit.*, pp. 624-25.

[87] H. B. Charlton, "Browning as a Poet of Religion," *John Ryland's Library Bulletin*, XXVII (June, 1943), p. 280.

[88] Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

[89] Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 452.

One feels that Browning was a composite of the three Greek systems of Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism. Probably, all that Browning had done was to change the shibboleths from Greek to Christian terminology, afterwards added Christ. His ideas about imperfectibility are certainly Platonic. He stresses that the perfect can be known only by the imperfect; that man's mortality is a proof of his immortality; that the exigencies of life are a token of the absence of vicissitudes in the next life:

> I, then, in ignorance and weakness,
> Taking God's help, have attained to think
> My heart does best to receive in meekness
> That mode of worship, as most to His mind,
> Where earthly aids being cast behind,
> His All in All appears serene
> With the thinnest human veil between,
> Letting the mystic Lamps, the Seven,
> The many motions of His Spirit,
> Pass, as they list, to earth from Heaven.
> ("Christmas Eve")

His last published group of poems, Asolando (1889), validate the assumption that there are overtones of Epicureanism in Browning's poetry. "Dubiety" suggests that Browning

> . . . will be happy if but for once:
> Only help me, Autumn weather,
> Me and my cares to screen, ensconce
> In luxury's sofa-lap of leather!

The single stanza poem, "Summum Bonum," appears to be facetiously titled. The highest good is ". . . Brightest truth, purest trust in the universe--all were for me/In the kiss of one girl." In a similar vein, is "Now" with this

advocacy: "When ecstasy's utmost we clutch at the core/ While cheeks burn, arms open, eyes shut and lips meet!" Browning's implications that life must be lived to the full are also Epicurean. He says that one must engage all of his senses in the pursuit of pleasure. He holds self-realization at any price to be an adjunct. He believes that man's responsibility is to find the fulfillment of passion. The rapturous moment, to Browning, is the zenith, a time in which all of life culminates. He makes these ideas clear in "Saul":

> How good is man's life, the mere living! how fit to employ
> All the heart and the soul and the senses, for ever in joy!
>
> * * * * * *
>
> . . . Song filled to the verge
> His cup with the wine of this life, pressing all that it yields
> Of mere fruitage, the strength and the beauty! Beyond, on what fields,
> Glean a vintage more potent and perfect to brighten the eye
> And bring blood to the lip, and commend them the cup they put by?

On the other hand, one sees that Browning is also Stoic, for he believes that one should bear all the suffering of the vagaries of chance as experiences to temper his soul. Rabbi Ben Ezra's statement that one should "Welcome each rebuff" is obviously Stoic. The conclusion of "Easter-Day" endorses this:

> . . . And so I live, you see,
> Go through the world, try, prove, reject,

> Prefer, still struggling to effect
> My warfare; happy that I can
> Be crossed and thwarted as a man,
> Not left in God's contempt apart,
> With ghastly smooth life, dead at heart,
> Tame in earth's paddock as her prize.
> Thank God, she still each method tries
> To catch me, who may yet escape,
> She knows, the fiend in angel's shape!
> Thank God, no paradise stands barred
> To entry, and I find it hard
> To be a Christian, as I said!
> Still every now and then my head
> Raised glad, sinks mournful--all grows drear
> Spite of the sunshine, while I fear
> And think, 'How dreadful to be grudged
> No ease henceforth, as one that's judged,
> Condemned to earth for ever, shut
> From Heaven!'
>
> . . . But Easter-Day breaks! But
> Christ rises! Mercy every way
> Is infinite,--and who can say?

Charlton has also suggested that the Pope in _The Ring and the Book_ expresses rather completely Browning's ethical position.[90] Representative statements by the Pope lend further insight into Browning's religious persuasion. For example, the Pope has this to say about Stoic suffering:

> I can believe this dread machinery
> Of sin and sorrow, would confound me else,
> Devised, . . . to evolve,
> By new machinery in counterpart,
> The moral qualities of man. . .
> To make him love in turn and be beloved,
> Creative and self-sacrificing too,
> And thus eventually God-like. . .
> Enable man to wring, from out all pain,

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[90] H. B. Charlton, "Browning's Ethical Poetry," _John Ryland's Library Bulletin_, XXVII (December, 1942), p. 45.

All pleasure for a common heritage
To all eternity. . .

The Pope suggests that "sin and sorrow," if properly reacted to, will change pain to pleasure. The Platonic idea is that:

This life is training and a passage; pass,--
Still, we march over some flat obstacle
We made give way before us; solid truth
In front of it, were motion for the world?

The moral sense grows but by exercise.
'Tis even as man grew probatively
Initiated in Godship, set to make
A fairer moral world than this he finds,
Guess now what shall be known hereafter . . .

Life is probation and this earth no goal
But starting-point of man: compel him strive,
Which means, in man, as good as reach the goal,--
Why institute that race, his life, at all?

The Pope's Platonism is that "life is probation" and that there is a "fairer moral world than this." Since this is so, the Pope concludes, man must "strive" to "reach the goal." The Pope continues with a statement that has Epicurean implications: "Since all flesh is weak,/Bind weaknesses together, we get strength."

This tripartite idea of Platonism, Stoicism, and Epicureanism is at best only partly Christian, for Browning has added a new dimension to orthodoxy. Christianity advocates that man must suffer, and that sometimes Stoically, but it does not advocate that man needs to or ought to indulge the senses in the fulfillment of life. Actually the gospel ethic is self-abnegation, self-crucifixion, and a

prevailing concern for the needs of one's fellows rather than his own. For example, St. Luke quotes Jesus:

> If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethern, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. . . Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.
> (15: 26,27,33, KJV)

The essence of Jesus' teaching, as St. Luke records it, is that all loyalties of a disciple are to his master. There is no provision for loyalty to oneself. St. Mark quotes Jesus:

> And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.
> (12: 30,31, KJV)

St. Mark, in interpreting Jesus' teaching about discipleship, states that the disciple has two loyalties, unadulterated love to God and a concern for one's neighbor that equals the disciple's concern for himself. These gospel writers indicate that self-realization is achieved in a self-abnegation. Browning has involved his religious ideas in the philology of Christianity, thereby using a disguise that has successfully fooled many of his followers. The vocabulary and the pronunciation of the long familiar shibboleths give the appearance of orthodoxy. The companion

poems, "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day," are in a very limited sense biographical. Browning was repulsed by the grossness of the little chapel:

> I very soon had enough of it.
> The hot smell and the human noises,
> And my neighbor's coat, the greasy cuff of it. . .

He left the evangelical "Zion Chapel Meeting" to try rationalism and found it stiflingly barren. "Alone, beside the entrance-door of a sort of temple,--perhaps a college. . ." There the professor gave a Christmas eve discourse on the "Myth of Christ."

> Here the lecturer came to a pausing-place.
> And while his cough, like a drouthy piston,
> Tried to dislodge the husk that grew to him,
> I seized the occasion of bidding adieu to him.

Toward the end of the latter poem, he returned to the little chapel with its smelly congregation and its noisy preacher. The return was, perhaps, symbolic of Browning's preference for the evangelical faith of his mother. Yet, the chapel-goer-Browning had not fully concluded in his own mind that the faith of Zion Chapel was better than the rationalization of Göttingen College. "How very hard it is to be/A Christian," he said. He wanted both "faiths." Browning readily endorsed the idea that man is rational and that man must work out many of his problems by using his rationality. He was concerned with man's rational ability. All men, Browning would say, have the freedom to think for themselves and to regulate

their lives accordingly. At the risk of over-simplification, one can see that Browning was a man who wished to think for himself, yet, he was bound somewhat involuntarily to preconceived traditions and convictions. He was unable to divest himself entirely of traditional Christian phraseology to express his opinions. If a poet is fearful of the consequences of pursuing his sceptic observations to their conclusion, "obscurity or irony" becomes an end in itself. This, DuBois states, happened to Browning.[91]

In addition to the self-centeredness and the religious persuasion of the poet, there is a third facet to be considered in his method of investigating the characters he has revealed in the poems. One cannot deny that Browning was a student of human nature and that he wished to portray that nature in his poetry. He probed the inner being of man. Yet, one suggests, he did not probe very deeply. His method was stereotyped, that is, for the most part, Browning could see the irony of a man's situation, but he did not observe the more profound anxieties of life. For example, in "My Last Duchess," the Duke presents a view of his late Duchess to the guest. The Duchess was "too soon made glad," thought the Duke. She was an amiable person, but

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[91] DuBois, op. cit., p. 645.

the irony is that the Duke was jealous. He chose "never to stoop." His surmise that he will be successful in marrying the Count's daughter heightened the irony, for one senses that the Duke has "destroyed" the one who was more desirable than the lady whom he anticipated. Of course, one recognizes the irony, but one wonders if Browning saw more? Was Browning only aware of the inherent irony? On May 17, 1845, Elizabeth Barrett wrote to Robert Browning:

> . . . you, who know everything, or at least make awful guesses at everything in one's feelings and motives and profess to be able to pin them down in a book of classified inscriptions. . . should have been able to understand, or misunderstand less. . .[92]

Elizabeth, apparently, detected the methodology's limitations. Little Pippa is Browning's only young person; she is not a central character. All the rest of the characters are "mature" people who are quite static. These are the ones he chose to investigate. DuBois suggests that Browning was not a psychologist, for his method of investigation did not allow him to see adequately the more complex problems of his characters.[93] Monodrama became an apt vehicle for the presenting of his actors. Landis feels

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[92]The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, I, p. 71.

[93]DuBois, op. cit., p. 652.

more strongly than DuBois that Browning was not curious about people. He was more interested in speculating, and afterwards he analyzed the result of his speculation.[94] Lathrop says that the poet's deficiencies in form resulted from his lifelong aim to delineate all phases of life just as it "chanced to impress the writer."[95] He wanted his poetry to be a mirror. Often the poetry is "rough, bristling, unexpected, heterogeneous."[96] However, one is certain at this point, that the poet was often a subtle humorist in disguise. Browning did not intentionally try to reveal himself as the subject of his poetry, yet, his repeated use of irony, and, especially the sudden twist at the poem's conclusion, leads one to believe that Browning became the subject of his poems. His methods allow the reader to "read" the poet, as well. One misses the impact of the monologues, if he fails with the poet to laugh at the characters.

The fourth consideration is the obvious decadence in Browning's poetic vision. Charlton and Miller have arrived at the similar conclusion that there is a palpable change in the quality of Browning's work beginning with The Ring and the Book. Charlton says that the poetic vision is

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[94]Landis, op. cit., p. 9.

[95]George Parsons Lathrop, Atlantic Monthly, LI (June, 1882), p. 841.

[96]Loc. cit.

dimmed by the increasing demand of reason.[97] Browning is no longer satisfied with "inbreakings."[98] Intuition gave precedence to "dialectic," and "poetic versification becomes versified argumentation."[99] As the vision dimmed, Browning became less confident of its reality. He felt that he must restore his "convictions by ratiocination."[100] Miller says that, after the publication of The Ring and the Book, Browning's "voice remains good-humoured, but he defends his own position with increasing emphasis."[101] Further, she sees that during the last twenty years of the poet's life, there is "rapid suffocation and extinction of genius."[102] The profuseness of Browning's pen did not make up for the deficiency in quality. One might consider three evidences of progressive deterioration in Browning's poetic vision. First, there are less frequent lyrical passages in the poems after 1864. The Ring and the Book contains an occasionally beautiful section. For instance, Pompilia utters these words:

> . . .--A sudden drawbridge lay,

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[97] H. B. Charlton, "Browning's Ethical Poetry," John Ryland's Library Bulletin, XXVII (December, 1942), pp. 41-42.

[98] Loc. cit.

[99] Loc. cit.

[100] Loc. cit.

[101] Miller, op. cit., pp. 261; 290.

[102] Loc. cit.

> Along which marched a myriad merry motes,
> Marking the flies that crossed them and recrossed
> In rival dance, companions new-born too.

But, following The Ring and the Book, one finds that there are few such passages. The last poem of Browning's career is an exception. The "Epilogue" to Asolando with its four stanzas is a fitting benediction for one's life:

> At the midnight in the silence of the sleep-time,
> When you set your fancies free,
> Will they pass to where--by death, fools think, imprisoned--
> Low he lies who once so loved you, whom you loved so,
> --Pity me?

On the other hand, however, one can cite a passage at random or, read laboriously every line in Browning for a beautiful section, and the result is likely to be that the random choice is as beautiful as the other. For example, here follow random lines from Prince Hohensteil-Schwangau (1871):

> First, how to make the matter plain, of course--
> What was the law by which I lived, Let's see:
> Ay, we must take one instant of my life
> Spent sitting by your side in this neat room:
> Watch well the way I use it, and don't laugh!

One cannot expect to find sections that will appreciably alter this opinion.

A second evidence of this poetic deterioration is Browning's increasingly obscure syntax and punctuation. The opening lines of Cenciaja (1877) illustrate this:

> May I print, Shelley, how it came to pass

That when your Beatrice seemed--by lapse
Of many a long month since her sentence fell--
Assured of pardon for the parricide--
By intercession of stanch friends, or, say,
By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt,--.

The frequent use of the dash, separating the subjects and predicates, adds difficulties to comprehension.

The third indication of Browning's poetic decadence is the profuseness of the later poems. From Pauline (1833) to Men and Women (1855), Browning did not publish poems with much regularity. The plays of 1842-43 are excepted. From the publication of The Ring and the Book (1869) to Browning's death (1889), his poems were published with a surprising regularity.[103] Apparently, Browning felt that he must publish poems in ratio to his popularity, for the more popular he became, the more verse he published. From 1833 to 1855, a period of 22 years, Browning published four long poems: Pauline, Paracelsus (1835), Sordello (1840), and "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day" (1850). In the same length of time, Browning published four groups of poems: Cavalier Tunes (1842), Dramatic Lyrics (1842), Dramatic Romances (1845), and Men and Women (1855). But, in the twenty-five years from Dramatic Personae (1864) to his death, Browning

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[103] See Appendix, p. 64.

published eighteen poems or poetic series. This represents almost a doubling of output. Yet, one suggests, there is not enough essentially poetic material in all his later works to justify his reputed stature as a poet. Modern criticism seems to echo this, for most of Browning scholarship is concerned with the letters, not the poetry.[104] Landis is probably correct in saying that the poet has outlived his poetry.[105] Once Browning is seen as the poet he was, without the trapperies of sentimentalism, he will achieve a place in English literature not to be ridiculed.

The relationship between Browning's poetry and his life ought, perhaps, to be observed with perspective. If the perspective is removed, misconceptions about the poetry and the poet's biography are likely to occur. One suggests that there have been some misconceptions. This review of Browning's egoism, religious tendencies, methodology, and rapid decrease in poetic artistry has been undertaken to provide correct perspective for future Browning criticism. All that remains is for one to consider Browning's relationship to the Victorian era, which, one expects, should give some further insight into Browning's reputation.

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[104]Landis, op. cit., p. 2.

[105]Loc. cit.

CHAPTER III

RB: VICTORIAN

Chesterton has suggested that an artist's "attitude to his age, is his individuality: men are never individual when alone."[106] Browning's attitudes toward his age must obviously be examined to give one perspective concerning his reputation. One needs to be concerned as much with what Browning said to his own society as with what he says to the twentieth-century cosmoplitan society. For this reason Browning's appeal to his society will be discussed. Browning spoke out on a variety of subjects. To include all of these references would be interesting, but far beyond the scope of this study. There are, however, three general areas that are important, important, sometimes, for what Browning did not say about them: (1) Victorian notions about the relationships between the sexes, (2) Victorian industrio-economic milieu, and (3) Victorian aesthetic values. Browning had much to say about the first. Some of the ideas he advocated about love were neither sophisticated nor subtle; some were shocking to Victorian prudery. On the second point, Browning was remarkably silent. His silence, one suggests, was

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[106] Gilbert K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 10.

eloquent. Regarding the third point, Browning's conception of aesthetics was copiously expounded.

First, Browning's attitudes towards the restrictive inhibitions of man-woman relationships of Victorian society were somewhat contradictory. In an age governed inadvertently by Mrs. Grundy, most of the mores of society were repressive. These mores, perhaps, had their inception in Puritanism and evangelicalism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Victorians themselves were contradictory, for, in spite of their notions of prudery, most of them had large families. It probably is an aphorism to state that those things about which one talks the loudest and longest are the "sins" he is attempting to cover. But, this adage is as relevant to a whole society as it is to an individual. The resultant ideas and inhibitions revealed themselves primarily as sham and hypocrisy. Browning was quick to detect the pretense. This sham Browning outlined in many of the poems that treat particularly the heterosexual affinities. In the poem, "Respectability," Browning set a keynote:

> I know! the world proscribes not love;
> Allows my fingers to caress
> Your lip's contour and downiness,
> *Provided it supply a glove.*
> The world's good word! --the Institute!
> [Italics mine]

The poem's title is a word that had significant connotations to the Victorian mind. Oversimplified, respectability was

a means and an end, or the avenue and the destination. Browning chose to depict the ironies of love and lovers in a variety of sequences. Extra-marital affinities, the tired-friendship-love between husband and wife, the sophisticated spiritual attraction, the satisfying reciprocal love, the erotically stimulated infatuation, all appeared for review under Browning's pen. In the "Statue and the Bust," Browning presented, probably, his most daring notion about extra-marital attractions. Duke Ferdinand was amorously attracted to Riccardi's wife, and, ironically, on the day of her marriage to Riccardi. The passion flamed simultaneously in the Duke and the bride:

> He looked at her, as a lover can;
> She looked at him, as one who awakes,--
> The Past was a sleep, and her life began.

Though circumstances kept them apart, they met in their imagination. After repeated postponements of a tryst, the romance began to vitiate:

> So weeks grew months, years--gleam by gleam
> The glory dropped from their youth and love,
> And both perceived they had dreamed a dream. . .

Death came for both before a rendezvous could be effected. The Duke had a statue made of himself and had it placed opposite the bride's window, which contained the bust of the bride. The irony, however, is intensified:

> I hear you reproach, 'But delay was best,
> For their end was a crime,'--Oh, a crime will do

As well, I reply, to serve a test,

As a virtue golden through and through,
Sufficient to vindicate itself
And prove its worth at a moment's view!

Was Browning, as Buckley suggests, saying that denial of passion is a cardinal sin?[107] "Any Wife to Any Husband" presents the tired-friendship relation between man and wife. The husband saw "the fresher faces. . . some eyes. . . beautiful and new." The wife said with courage:

Love so, then, if thou wilt! Give all thou canst
Away to the new faces--disentranced,
(Say it and think it) obdurate no more. . .

Though the husband was faithless, the wife said: "Since mine thou wast, mine thou art and mine shalt be." The relationship between Andrea del Sarto and his wife was, again, the worn-down, dulled love:

. . . Love, come in. . .
Let us but love each other, Must you go?
That cousin here again? he waits outside?
Must see you--you, and not with me? . . .
. . . Only let me sit
The grey remainder of the evening out,
Idle you call it, and muse perfectly
How I could paint. . .

"Numpholeptos" suggests the sophisticated spiritual attraction. The relationship had miscarried in a volley of denunciation:

. . . O you--less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!

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[107] Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The Victorian Temper, p. 80.

You very woman with the pert pretense
To match the male achievement!

But following the bitter derogation, the suitor acquiesced:

. . . Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation. Forth at your behest
I fare.

The satisfying mutual love is best expressed in the poem, "By the Fire-side." The tranquility of a serene couple sitting by the fire, looking out over the landscape in November, is matched only by the inner peace and happiness of the pair. He said to her: "My perfect wife, my Leonor. . . Oh, I must feel your brain prompt mine." He concluded his conversation that evening:

How the world is made for each of us!
How all we perceive and know in it
Tends to some moment's product thus,
When a soul declares itself--to wit,
By its fruit--the thing it does!

The erotic love is illustrated in "A Light Woman." The friend was caught in the light woman's "hunting noose."

When I saw him tangled in her toils,
A shame, said I, if she add just him
To her nine-and-ninety other spoils,
The hundredth, for a whim!

The friend was "rescued" from her grasp, and the rescuer found her "in my hand as tame/As a pear. ; ." The rescuer moralized:

'Tis an awkward thing to play with souls,
And matter enough to save one's own,
Yet think of my friend, and the burning coals
He played with for bits of stone!

In the poem, "Adam, Lilith, and Eve," Browning presented a brief study of two women who loved the same man. The first, who at first scorned Adam, vowed, during the lightning and thunder, that she "would crawl/His slave--soul, body, and all." The other woman, still amid the storm, vowed that, though she was betrothed to him, she would not marry him. After the storm, Adam said, "I saw through your joke!" Lilith, the Judaistic traditional first wife of Adam, provides a provocative connotation. Is she an alter-ego?

Chesterton suggested that Browning's notions about "the sex relation" were that they were "religious in this real sense that even in our sin and despair we take it for granted and expect a sort of virtue in it."[108] The first sentence of the preceding paragraph suggested that Browning's ideas about the relationship between men and women is somewhat contradictory. The contradiction lies in the fact that Browning's ideas about the spiritual affinity, the amorality of passion were only ideas. He wrote in "Summum Bonum" that the highest truth lay in the kiss of one girl. One suggests that the youngest "girl" he kissed in his adult life was a lady thirty-nine years old. She was Elizabeth Barrett.

Browning, as has been pointed out, did not appeal to the existing mores of his society in the matter of love.

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[108]Gilbert Keith Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 173.

There is no doubt that he appealed to the Victorian mind that lay beneath the shams and hypocrisies of Puritan inhibitions. The manner and volume of ideas about the relationships of the sexes was not matched in the next category, industrio-economics of Victorian society.

It has been suggested that Browning was eloquent in his silence about the industrialism, with its concomitant sweatshops, work houses, slums, and poverty. The eloquence is that he seemed to be entirely unaware of these conditions. There is very little evidence in his poetry, at least, to convince one that he felt keenly about Chartism, Trade Unionism, or the Corn Laws. DeVane has suggested quite cogently that Browning's Parleyings with Certain People of Importance is Browning's autobiography.[109] "In a very real way Browning was to be found in his poetry."[110] There is little reason to doubt DeVane's thesis. In the Parleying "With George Bubb Dodington," one can see Browning's ideas about politics.[111] He concluded, after seven stanzas, that politics is a "category of quackery."[112] It is quackery because the politician sees his first duty as self-

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[109] William C. DeVane, Browning's Parleyings; The Autobiography of a Mind, p. xv.

[110] Loc. cit.

[111] William C. DeVane, Browning's Parleyings, p. 147.

[112] Loc. cit.

aggrandisement:

> And yet should prove zeal's outward show agrees
> In all respects--right reason being judge--
> With inward care that, while statesman spends
> Body and soul thus freely for the sake
> Of public good, his private welfare take
> No harm by such devotedness.

In the poem, "Why I am a Liberal," Browning stated his liberalism as being a laissez-faire arrangement with his fellow men:

> Who, then, dares hold, emancipated thus,
> His fellow shall continue bound? Not I,
> Who live, love, labor freely, not discuss
> A brother's right to freedom, That is "Why."

Browning said, you do as you like and let me do as I like. The eloquence is in reality that of silence. Chesterton asserted that Browning "evaded political realities."[113] Browning's awareness of inhumanity and injustice was nearly negative. Miller summarized his blindness to social evils in this statement about Ferishtah's Fancies (1884):

> . . . a work, which, in its complacency, its facile evasion of the problem of evil, its cheerful indifference to human suffering, must have carried dismay into the ranks of the Browning Society itself.[114]

Erdman has stated that "Childe Roland" was Browning's awareness of the industrial revolution.[115] Browning's cognition

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[113]Gilbert Keith Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 17.

[114]Miller, op. cit., p. 289.

[115]D. V. Erdman, "Browning's Industrial Nightmare," Philological Quarterly, XXXVI (October, 1957), p. 420.

of the problem was limited to such expressions as "engine" with "rusty teeth of steel."[116] Browning, in his obsession with the "onward striving" and "self-fulfillment regardless of consequences," Erdman continues, was content to dismiss from his mind the "negative evidence."[117] On the occasion of the <u>coup d'etat</u> (1851) by Louis Napoleon of France, Browning protested with his wife the "domestic tyranny."[118] Miller stated that, for Browning, "domestic tyranny was almost the larger sin" than the <u>coup</u>. Browning's feelings toward tyranny of any sort was, perhaps, owing to his contact with Shelley.[119] That Browning was noticeably silent about the industrio-economics of Victorian England is evident, but his views about the aesthetics were prolifically stated.

Knowing the implicit peril of generalization, one can reservedly suggest that Victorian aesthetics, like those of the eighteenth century:

> . . . 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. . . must be at least implicitly "moral" . . .[120]

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[116] <u>Loc</u>. <u>cit</u>.

[117] <u>Ibid</u>., pp. 434-35.

[118] Miller, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 176.

[119] <u>Ibid</u>., p. 179.

[120] Buckley, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 143.

The awareness of beauty for the Victorian meant that he was also aware of the morality of that beauty. The Victorians required that art should "reshape life."[121] Art, they felt, could not exist independent of life.[122] The artist, therefore, in order to communicate to his age, had

> . . . to ground his work securely in the facts of physical life. He was to be guided consistently by a reverence for the actualities of human experience and a certain knowledge that all art cut off from the affairs of men, existing in its own pattern for its own sake, must be forever sterile and dead.[123]

Buckley stated that Browning's "central aesthetic standard" was a "rigid objectivity of manner and matter."[124] Browning, as was pointed out in Chapter I, was very much interested in painting. This interest spanned his poetic career. "Fra Lippo Lippi," one of his earlier poems, summarized Lippi's and Browning's notion of the motive for the fine arts:

> . . . they are better, painted--. . .
> Art was given us for that--
> God uses us to help each other so,
> Leading our minds out.

"With Francis Furini" of _Parleyings_ (1887), is a late statement of Browning's about painting. Here one detects the

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[121]_Ibid._, p. 159.

[122]_Ibid._, pp. 155-56.

[123]_Loc. cit._

[124]_Ibid._, p. 23.

"rigid objectivity" of art in Browning's defense of painting in the nude:[125] "the seal God set/On woman his supremest work. . . God's best of beauteous and magnificent/Revealed to earth--the naked female form." In a similar manner, "The Lady and the Painter" indicates Browning's defense of nude paintings. The painter felt that portraying the nude was no worse than Lady Blanche's killing of wild birds to obtain feathers for her hat. Browning's attitude toward painting is suggestive of his attitudes toward the other arts, as well. Browning had Fra Lippo Lippi say this about painting:

> . . . paint these
> Just as they are, careless of what comes of it?
> God's works--paint anyone, and count it crime
> To let a truth slip.

The desire for faithfulness to actuality is relevant, not only to painting but to all art. Decker made this clear:

> . . . art reshapes life. The result is true if the artist has not falsified the relationships of man to man, and of man to nature. If he has falsified his interpretation he has created not only an untrue but an immoral work. This is the true meaning of the morality of the profession of letters . . .

Art, then, to be true, must create a successful illusion of life. Browning often thrust an almost overwhelming sense of actuality upon his readers by his colloquial style. The rough verse style gave an illusion that life is often rough.

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[125]William C. DeVane, Browning's Parleyings, p. 185. See also pp. 182-83.

Chesterton suggested that often a Browning student is, in reality, a proof reader, not a disciple.[126] Life, Browning would say, takes inexplicable turns; life is replete with ironies, and for poetry to mirror faithfully that life, poetry must be inexplicable and ironic. This might explain why "Gr-r-r--there go, my heart's abhorrence!" is poetic. It is rough, uncouth, but it faithfully mirrors actuality. Chesterton said that Browning's style was suitable to a nation of eccentrics, and that Browning was not "chaotic," but he was "deliberately grotesque."[127]

It has been pointed out that Browning was alert to detect sham and hypocrisy. Whether the pretense was in love-making, in unrealistic art, or in mere ostentation, Browning had something to say, or, perhaps, he had to say something. Browning pointed out the pretenders of religion with apparent relish. In such poems as "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister," "The Grammarian's Funeral," "The Confessional," "Holy-Cross Days," "The Bishop Orders His Tomb," "Bishop Blougram's Apology," and "Caliban Upon Setebos," Browning exposed the pretense of religion. For example, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" shows a worldly prelate calling his sons

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[126]Gilbert Keith Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 175.

[127]Ibid., pp. 162; 172.

and nephews about his death bed. He ordered his tomb between frequent references to his sons' mother. He wanted the finest tomb, wanted it engraved with "choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word," but he was unconcerned about his ensuing reputation. One is reminded of Carlyle's Pope, who, being plagued with rheumatism, found it difficult to kneel so long on Corpus Christi day celebrations. After consultation, the cardinals constructed a "stuffed cloaked figure" in a kneeling posture.[128]

Browning was quite definitely Victorian. In him were combined many of the enigmas of his age, so much so, that Thomas Hardy remarked that Browning was the "literary puzzle" of Victorian England.[129] There existed simultaneously in Browning an excessive prudery and a desire for uninhibited spiritual affinity between lovers;[130] there existed in him a strong desire to do as he pleased ("Why I am a Liberal") and a sense of restriction: "So free we seem, so fettered fast we are!" (Andrea del Sarto). He wanted religious independence of the kind that Shelley proclaimed, but he was bound by a filial respect for his mother's Non-Conformism.

128Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, III, p. 138, The Works of Thomas Carlyle in XXX Vols., Vol. X.

129Miller, op. cit., p. 175.

130Ibid., pp. 110-12.

After <u>The Ring and the Book</u> (1869), Browning's fame accelerated, reaching its zenith in 1881 with the formation of the Browning Society. One wonders how much of his popularity was owing to the genius of his "message" and how much to his literary energy. The latter probably accounted for most of his fame in his own time, for prophets are usually without acclaim in their own country. Each age tends to bury its living seers only to resurrect them after they have died. Not only was Browning Victorian in his enigmatic person, but he was also Victorian in his aesthetic values. His criterion for beauty was fidelity or successful illusion to the actual. He saw clearly the shams and pretense of his own age, as Carlyle and Arnold were doing. Yet, he seemed somewhat myopic in realizing the impacts of the industrialism and the political economy of his time. However, he had a message of optimism for his age that was as vital as was Arnold's pessimism. That message was one of reaching for higher goals:

> One who never turned his back but marched breast
> forward,
> Never doubted clouds would break,
> Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong
> would triumph,
> Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
> Sleep to wake.
> ("Epilogue" to <u>Asolando</u>)

APPENDIX A

IMPORTANT DATES IN BROWNING'S LIFE

1812 . . . . Birth, Camberwell, London

1833 . . . . Pauline, rev. 1867, 1889

1835 . . . . Paracelsus

1837 . . . . Strafford

1838 . . . . First trip to Italy

1840 . . . . Sordello

1841 . . . . Pippa Passes

1842 . . . . Cavalier Tunes, King Victor and King Charles, Dramatic Lyrics

1843 . . . . Return of the Druses, A Blot in the 'Scutcheon

1844 . . . . Colombe's Birthday
Second trip to Italy

1845 . . . . Dramatic Romances

1846 . . . . Luria, A Soul's Tragedy
Marriage to Elizabeth Barrett--to Italy

1850 . . . . "Christmas Eve" and "Easter Day"

1851 . . . . Browning's returned to England for visit.

1855 . . . . Men and Women, In a Balcony

1861 . . . . Elizabeth Barrett Browning died in Florence, Italy

1864 . . . . Dramatis Personae

1869 . . . . The Ring and the Book

1871 . . . . Balaustion's Adventure, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangua

1872 . . . . Fifine at the Fair

1873 . . . . Red Cotton Night-cap Country

1875 . . . . Aristophane's Apology, Inn Album

1876 . . . . *Pacchiarotto*

1877 . . . . *Agamemnon of Aeschylus*, *La Saisaiz*

1878 . . . . *Two Poets of Croisic*

1879 . . . . *Dramatic Idylls*, first series

1880 . . . . *Dramatic Idylls*, second series

1881 . . . . Browning Societies established

1883 . . . . *Jocoseria*

1884 . . . . *Ferishtah's Fancies*

1887 . . . . *Parleyings with Certain People of Importance in Their Day*

1887 . . . . *Asolando*

1889 . . . . Death at son's home in Venice

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