THE ARTIST AND THE WORLD IN THE EARLY AND MIDDLE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

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JOAN L. TUBRETT, B.A., B.A. (Ed.)

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THE ARTIST AND THE WORLD IN THE EARLY AND MIDDLE WORKS OF ROBERT BROWNING

by

© Joan L. Tubrett, B.A., B.A. (Ed.)

A Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature
Memorial University of Newfoundland
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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of Robert Browning's early and middle works, this thesis studies the function and responsibility of the artist in society and the world. Following a brief introduction which looks at Victorian society's expectations of the artist, this study first examines Browning's early works. These early works reveal Browning's uncertainty and doubt as he struggled to define his purpose and to find form. The study of Sordello, Browning's major early work, shows Browning rejecting the aesthetic approach to art. He emphasizes the social responsibility of the artist, and in a direct comment which is rare for Browning, he articulates what is to be his purpose and his duty to man and God. This comment by Browning indicates deep compassion and sympathy for man, and he dedicates his art to the service of man.

The remainder of this thesis is a study of Browning's artist figures who fail to live up to Browning's ideals of the artist. Chapter four is a study of two artists who work in isolation. The first artist, Jules of Pippa Passes, emphasizes art and beauty; Pictor Ignotus, the second artist, emphasizes that the purity of art is destroyed by contact with the world. The thesis next studies Browning's

artist figures who turn to the world. The artist Andrea del Sarto misuses his talent and the world; the other artist, Fra Lippo Lippi, presents many of Browning's theories regarding life and art. This artist sees the importance of the world and man, and he believes his function as an artist is to reproduce the beauty of the world, so that man can be awakened to its meaning and truth.

Finally, there is a summary of the findings of this study, and the conclusion emphasizes that Browning strongly believed that the artist had a duty and responsibility to the world and man.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Themes of isolation and alienation were prominent in the works of many Victorian poets. The very role of poet precipitates degrees of alienation since the poet has long been considered an outcast; even as early as Plato's The Republic,[1] the poet was differentiated from the rest of men because of the particular nature of his special office. As teacher or preacher, he maintained an elevated position above the masses he addressed. As a maker, he was accused of being thrice removed from the reality he attempted to present. Furthermore, in the Victorian period, the poet found himself in what E.D.H. Johnson describes as a situation of conflict "between the public consciences of the man of letters who comes forward as the accredited literary spokesman of his world and the private conscience of the artist who conceives that his highest allegiances must be to his own aesthetic sensibilities."[2] The artist who chose the latter side might find himself further alienated from his Victorian audience.

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[1]Plato, The Republic, in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1971), pp. 19-31.

[2]E.D.H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), pp. ix-x.

Not all Victorians accepted art as valuable to their society. The no-nonsense climate of middle-class commercial society had little time for the mere artist. The Benthamite had little time for the arts that were neither useful nor contributing to the sum of human happiness. The typical Utilitarian attitude was revealed in a comment made in the Westminster Review in 1825:

> I would be glad to be informed how the universal pursuit of literature and poetry, poetry and literature is to conduce towards cotton spinning.[3]

By the Victorian of Puritanical persuasion, art was seen as an indulgence of the non-religious imagination and aesthetic tendencies which distracted one from the "Pruning of one's soul."[4] Therefore, all the arts were frowned upon and the artist was often viewed as "a wastrel and suspected of probable immorality."[5]

Although not all Victorians shared these extreme views, the influence of these Utilitarian and Puritanical persuasions was so pervasive that those who felt free to indulge their sense of beauty hedged it with restrictions. Theme, rather than expression, intention and substance, rather than technique, lucid expression of socially desir-

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[3]Quoted in Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 115.

[4]Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), p. 272.

[5]Altick, p. 279.

able ideals, restraint, rather than ornate language and luxuriant images--moral content became the supreme criterion of Victorian art. This idea that art should teach and inspire, as well as give pleasure, was not new, but seldom had it been so firmly established as it was in this period. Society seemed to have such need for self-understanding, criticism and direction at this period, possibly because of the social, economic and scientific changes of the times.

England was changing from a rural, agricultural country to a highly industrialized nation; the number of factories was increasing, huge cities were developing, the rural countryside was criss-crossed by a network of canals and railroads. As workers moved from the countryside to sprawling, industrial cities, they experienced feelings of transition and upheaval. The harmony between man and the land so extolled by the Romantics was now erased by the factory system with its division of labour, and the subsequent feelings of insignificance and unimportance experienced by the workers in this system replaced man's former sense of pride and achievement in his work. Such conditions created what Karl Marx first defined as a form of alienation:

> the result of activities in a specific institutional context--the economic system--which leads to estrangement from one's self and others in other spheres of life as well.[6]

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[6]Quoted in Ephraim Mizruchi, "An Introduction to the Notion of Alienation," in Alienation, ed. Frank Johnson (New York: Seminar Press, 1973), p. 113.

As industrialization increased, this feeling of alienation became more intense.

Paralleling these feelings of estrangement and alienation which had their basis in the changes of the social and economic system were the feelings of general unease and anxiety, perceptions of spiritual alienation which had their basis in the scientific and intellectual advances of the times. Since the discoveries of Isaac Newton, the Christian view of the universe, with man maintaining a central position, was receding and another view was taking its place--the scientific picture of a vast mechanism of cause and effect, acting by physical laws that governed even man himself. This process was hastened when several publications gradually weakened the authority of the Bible. Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-1833), Robert Chambers's Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation (1844) and Darwin's The Origin of Species (1859) made a literal acceptance of the story of creation impossible to many. The idea of man's privileged relationship and ultimate communion with God was now questioned and often rejected.

The artist, the poet, during these disquieting times found himself unable to retreat into the past or to give full agreement to a present that was spiritually impoverished. The artist, as Matthew Arnold described him, was "wandering between two worlds, one dead / The other power-

less to be born."[7] Yet those Victorians who looked to art for guidance and direction saw the poet as hero and prophet. Richard D. Altick notes that both Shelley and Carlyle, each with his own ideal of the heroic and prophetic qualities involved, exalted poets as constituting a modern priesthood of secular oracles who interpreted the purpose of the universe to ordinary men.[8] The belief that the true literary man is "the light of the world; the world's Priest; guiding it like a sacred pillar of fire"[9] was common. The poet, blessed with inspired insight, had to use his talents to improve society. On no account was he to live a life of aesthetic pleasure or pursue art for art's sake. It was not until the second half of the century that the Pre-Raphaelites redirected attention to art as art, not as a vehicle for social and moral commentary. Most mid-Victorian poets, then, found themselves torn between two impulses, their natural bent and the public's insistence that they devote themselves to society's interests as sources of spiritual counsel, moral guidance, reassurance and admonition.

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[7]Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas From The Grande Chartreuse," in Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 187.

[8]Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: Norton & Co., 1973), p. 278.

[9]Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 153-154.

In an age which, according to Matthew Arnold, demanded poetry in a "grand style," "to compose and elevate the mind,"[10] "to animate and ennoble mankind,"[11] Robert Browning's natural bent was towards dramatic portrayal and psychological analysis, for revealing what he first described as "Action in Character, rather than Character in Action." Browning's first publication was an unrestrained expression of the self looking inward, and his later work, though more dramatic and objective, frequently studied the way in which men's minds work. Most Victorian critics emphasized the outward view, as opposed to the self looking inward, and the psychological insight of Browning's poems was neither understood nor appreciated by the reading public. Browning's natural inclination towards "recondite subject-matter and experimental methods,"[12] as E.H. Johnson describes it, also accounts for the misunderstanding and rejection of his work by the critics. The early work of Browning was criticized, in particular, for its obscurity and what Carlyle described as "unintelligibility." The point to be made is that Browning in his natural bent and talents as an artist was unable

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[10]"To Arthur Hugh Clough," 1 March 1849, Letter 26, Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. Howard Foster Lowry (London: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 100.

[11]Arnold, Letters to Clough, 30 November 1853, Letter 49, p. 144.

[12]E.H. Johnson, Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 71.

to fulfill the requirements of a society which demanded that the poet speak with the voice of a prophet and a seer. As F.R.G. Duckworth says:

> ... we find that Browning's admirers in the Fifties [1850's] were few, but that for the most part they included the greatest minds of his day and the keenest in literary insight. The great mass of people knew nothing of him: the public which read the reviews read in them nothing but condemnation of him; and one of the severest criticisms passed on him was that he did not appreciate the true worth of his own people and his own age. This ought always to be borne in mind by those--and they are not a few--who called Browning a typical Victorian. For if he was a Victorian, then we may say that he came to his own and his own received him not.[13]

Browning's personal philosophy alienated him from his British public. Many of his dramatic works present conflict between the individual and society, and Browning emphasized realization of the self and integrity of the individual at the expense of society. Certainly, he emphasized the centre of authority as existing within the resources of individual beings and not within the social order. Man's dependence on instinct and intuition, rather than intellect and reason, was essential to his fulfillment and happiness, and man's realization of self would be achieved, if it were achieved at all, without aid from an externally imposed set of values. Browning's position on so many issues--established religion, authority, conventional morality--was very much at

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[13] F.R.G Duckworth, Browning, Background and Conflict (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1932), p. 33.

odds with a society who looked to the poet as a source of spiritual counsel, moral guidance, and reassurance. Consequently, the content of much of his work reveals an empathy for the individual who has been restricted and isolated for violation of some sanction of society or alienated for opposition to some authority or institution of society.

Because of Victorian society's demands and expectations of the poet, Browning's position was very difficult. Neither his natural abilities nor interests, nor his personal philosophy, was conducive to his fulfilling the role of the poet as hero and prophet. This inability to live up to society's demands and an uncertainty about his role are evident in Browning's early work. In these works, Browning is trying to decide what is the duty of an aspiring poet to himself, to man and to God. Although it is difficult to pin down or fix as belonging to him attitudes or opinions found in his work, a careful examination of his early poetry does reveal that a recurring theme runs through this early work, which when studied together with the related imagery and tone in which it is expressed, does provide a degree of consistency. This recurring idea is the isolation and alienation experienced by the poet in his quest for purpose and identity. These works deal with common sources of isolation faced by all artists--the difficulties of communication, the problem of expressing intellectual abstractions in concrete images, and the dull intellect and inadequate understanding

of the audience. All of these problems create isolation for the artist, but the main causes of his alienation are his high ideals and the inability to understand or identify with man or society.

The third chapter of this study examines the major work of Browning's early period, Sordello. This narrative work is particularly important since it traces the development of the artist. Significant in this work is the isolation of the artist on many levels; he moves from romantic isolation to society and temporary acclaim to eventual dissatisfaction and failure. However, in the middle part of this work, Browning expresses affirmation and purpose. In a direct comment, which is very rare for Browning, he defines his purpose and his subject. His service to God is promoting understanding of man and the world and he chooses suffering humanity in all its weakness and ugliness as his subject. His purpose as an artist is to compel the audience to reconsider its easy condemnations of those that the world calls upon it to despise. Browning also expresses the idea that man can only aspire to the Infinite through the finite, the world and man, created by God. Sordello is unable to live up to such idealism and affirmation. For Browning, however, this is the main purpose of the artist, and the artist, without the world and humanity as subject matter and inspiration, works in purposeless isolation.

Some selections of Browning's later work are studied to demonstrate the importance of this idea. These works focus on the artist who ignores the world and feels neither compassion for nor fellowship with man. In particular, the artist in the ivory tower is studied. Chapter four focuses on two artists, the artist-figure Jules from Section II of Pippa Passes and the artist-monk in the poem "Pictor Ignotus." Both artists dedicate their energy and talent to art for art's sake, and both ignore the finite and therefore, work in isolation. Chapter five deals with the artist-figures of two of Browning's greatest dramatic monologues, "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi." Both artists turn to the world. Because of the world, one artist loses vision and direction as he gets caught up in the approval and materialism of the world; he is not motivated by sympathy or empathy for man, and he loses sight of the Infinite. The second artist attempts to present the finite, the world, in his art, as a reflection of the Infinite. He is rejected by every level of society.

The conclusion emphasizes the artist's position in the world. The artist, if he is to aspire to the Infinite, must recognize the finite and he must work through man and the world. Browning rejects the artist in the ivory tower and he rejects the artist who seeks the world's approval. He emphasizes that the artist must make right use of the world by observing and interpreting the world to men. His func-

tion is to make men see what they have not observed before. He imparts to them his gift of seeing.

CHAPTER 2

PARACELSUS

Although Paracelsus was Browning's second poem, it is more reflective of the poet's mature outlook on life than his first publication, Pauline. The first poem, published in 1833, recounts a typical Victorian soul crisis in which the young narrator holds up the mirror to his past life of twenty years, and looks back with passionate regret at the loss of his simple Christian faith of childhood. Browning was later embarrassed by this poem, possibly because of its rejection by critics like John Stuart Mill who described its author as possessing "a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than I ever knew in any human being."[1] The very subjective and confessional style of the poem may have been indicative of the young poet's intensity and introspective nature, but it was a style and form which he, himself, rejected and would never use again. This poem was written before the poet had "found himself," before his genius had crystallized; it was altogether foolish and not boy-like, he wrote to Elizabeth Barrett, when she asked to see it; it was

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[1]Quoted from Frances M. Sim, Robert Browning The Poet and The Man (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1972), p. 10.

ambiguous, feverish, he assured her. [2]

His second publication, Paracelsus, however, contains the initial but surprisingly mature statement of Browning's outlook on life, and many of the ideas and seeds of convictions which were to appear in Browning's later work are present in this poem. William O. Raymond agrees on the importance of this poem. He says:

> Though the poem was composed in his twenty-third year, Browning may be said to have established definitely in it the basis of his reflective thought on the fundamental problems of humanity. Few writers have oriented themselves so completely at such a youthful age. While further elaborated in his later works and given a different setting, practically all of the leading and controlling ideas of his poetry are present in Paracelsus.[3]

The main idea of this poem is the quest of Paracelsus for knowledge which will free mankind. In the description of this quest, however, Browning makes some profound comments on man's situation and the many factors which lead to isolation. A major factor is the intellectual pride and hubris of the main character. Society with its emphasis on deception also imposes limitations which prevent understanding and communication. Then, there are the unalterable factors of the human condition which impose isolation. The duality

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[2]"To Elizabeth Barrett Barrett," 15 January 1846, Letter 201, The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, ed. Elvan Kintner (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 389.

[3]William O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 156.

of man's nature is emphasized, and the opposition between the physical and the spiritual results in man, restricted by the physical and the temporal, aspiring for a higher reality, the Infinite, which he can never achieve. These limitations often cause man to resort to compromise and trickery, which in turn, result in loss of purpose and further alienation from his Creator. Often man stresses the physical and ignores the spiritual, or stresses the spiritual and ignores the physical. Either choice leads to dissatisfaction within the individual, and often he finds himself isolated from self, society and God.

Part One of the poem establishes Paracelsus's mood of hope and confidence as he leaves home and friends to begin his quest. He expresses his idealism; he rejects past tradition and emphasizes the superiority of the intellect and spirit. He rejects contact with ordinary men. Before he even begins his quest, he is setting up conditions which must lead to failure and alienation.

The opening scene is in a garden in early autumn; Paracelsus bids farewell to Festus and Michel. Peace and harmony dominate this world, which has become for Paracelsus a "sequestered nest" (I, 36)[4] or sheltered "nook" (I, 52). He is happy that this world is so protected, since he can leave

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[4]Because of the convenience of its system of line numbering, all citations to Browning's poetry in this study will be to The Complete Works of Robert Browning, eds.

Festus and Michel knowing they are "shut in so well / From all rude chances" (I, 71-72). For him, however, this protected world is limited and he must leave it, if he is to accept "God's great commission" (I, 143). He is determined to seek truth and knowledge and thus liberate mankind.

As he describes this commission, he reveals a confidence and a pride that he should be singled out by God for such a great task. He comments to Festus on his uniqueness:

> ... I, singled out for this the One!
> Think, think! the wide East, where all Wisdom sprung;
> The bright South, where she dwelt; the hopeful North,
> All are passed o'er--it lights on me! (I, 369-72)

Festus, however, rebukes Paracelsus for seeking out wisdom and knowledge in "strange and untried paths" (I, 394), and he is dismayed by Paracelsus's rejection of "past example, practice, precept" (I, 415). He questions the sincerity of Paracelsus's assertion that knowledge is his goal.

> Whatever you may protest, knowledge is not
> Paramount in your love; or for her sake
> You would collect all help from every source--
> Rival, assistant, friend, foe, (I, 419-22)

Paracelsus's presumption and pride are revealed in his description of his special role. At an early age, he found himself isolated or removed from ordinary men and, even

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Charlotte Porter and Helen A. Clarke (New York, 1898). Of the nineteenth-century editions, this is the only one which numbers the lines of each poem consecutively. Other editions either have no line-numbering, or begin their numbering anew at the top of each page.

though he wanted to "wring some wondrous good / From heaven or earth for them" (I, 463-64), he wanted "never to be mixed with men" (I, 469). He assures Festus that his seeking knowledge is not for personal gain. He wants to use his god-like potential:

> ... to comprehend the works of God,
> And God himself, and all God's intercourse
> With the human mind; ... (I, 533-35)

Having been assured by a voice that God will guide and strengthen him on his quest, he now feels that he has no need for past examples and teachings or human contact. His idea of Divine Guidance and his excessive confidence are revealed when he asserts his likeness to birds:

> I see my way as birds their trackless way.
> I shall arrive! what time, what circuit first,
> I ask not: but unless God send his hail
> Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
> In some time, his good time, I shall arrive:
> He guides me and the bird. (I, 560-65)

Throughout this section, images of birds, the tern, the geir-eagle, are used to reveal his lofty ideals and his removal from mere man.

Paracelsus's excessive confidence and aspiration have led him to reject and scorn man. He proposes to serve mankind but he sees no reason for contact or reward from mankind. He explains to Michel, "I never will be served by those I serve" (I, 613). This "carelessness to human love" (I, 620), as Festus describes it, will become one of the causes of Paracelsus's failure and isolation. He chooses to

pursue his quest by means of the mind, the intellect alone, and he chooses to cut himself off from human love. Such pride and aspiration are condemned by Festus and Michel. Festus begs Paracelsus not to isolate himself from mankind. He warns:

> You cannot thrive--a man that dares affect
> To spend his life in service to his kind
> For no reward of theirs, unbound to them
> By any tie; nor do so, Aureole! No--
> (I, 661-64)

He predicts that such an attitude will lead to Paracelsus becoming "a being knowing not what love is" (I, 679).

Paracelsus, however, rejects the advice of his friends. He sees no need of the world with its "labours and the precepts of old time" (I, 724), since he believes truth cannot be imposed from without; it comes from man's spiritual nature, and the solution to man's search for meaning and knowledge is the release of that inner truth. He emphasizes the superiority of man's spirit in the following lines:

> Truth is within ourselves; it takes no rise
> From outward things, whate'er you may believe.
> There is an inmost centre in us all,
> Where truth abides in fullness; and around,
> Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
> This perfect, clear perception--which is truth.
> A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
> Binds it, and makes all error: and to KNOW
> Rather consists in opening out a way
> Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,
> Than in effecting entry for a light
> Supposed to be without.
> (I, 726-737)

The inferiority of man's physical nature is emphasized in the words "gross flesh" and "carnal mesh," and Paracelsus sees his mission as "discovering the true laws by which the flesh / Accloys the spirit" (I, 776-77), and thus setting free the soul.

In Part One, the quest and the nature of the quest have been established. Paracelsus perceives himself as very special, and his high calling removes him from ordinary man. He proposes to free mankind and yet he wants little or no contact with the world. At this stage of his quest, the emphasis is on che intellectual and the spiritual.

Part Two examines Paracelsus's progress nine years later. He has emphasized the intellectual but he feels he has accomplished very little. He summarizes the extent and the significance of his knowledge:

> ... the little gained; the whole
> Shipt in the blank space 'twixt an idiot's gibber
> And a mad lover's ditty--there it lies. (II, 34-36)

His notes or "blottings" represent his quest, and despair envelops him, as he meditates on his passing life and his failure. The only truth he has acquired is the knowledge that "Time fleets, youth fades, life is an empty dream" (II, 43). He is now willing to abandon his quest and he consoles himself with the idea that he has done his best. He says:

> At worst I have performed my share of the task:
> The rest is God's concern; mine, merely this,
> To know that I have obstinately held
> By my own work. (II, 90-93)

Paracelsus's sole emphasis on the intellect and knowledge have led to his subduing the physical; he has ignored all desires of the body; he has experienced no enjoyment of life; he has even disregarded or forgotten love. His uninvolvement with life is obvious in the following comment:

> ... life, death, light and shadow,
> The shows of the world, were bare receptacles
> Or indices of truth to be wrung thence,
> Not ministers of sorrow or delight:
> (II, 155-59)

Instead of experiencing life, he remained the detached observer, who sought knowledge. He even admits now to having set aside love.

> ... there was a time
> When yet this wolfish hunger after knowledge
> Set not remorselessly love's claims aside.
> (II, 123-25)

He even admits to having lost his power to feel, to be human. He says, "This heart was human once" (II, 126).

At this stage of the quest, despite his admission that he has ignored the physical side of his nature, Paracelsus still emphasizes the importance of the intellect and he begs God to spare him his mind, even if all else is destroyed:

> God! Thou art mind! Unto the master-mind
> Mind should be precious. Spare my mind alone!
> (II, 229-30)

These musings are interrupted by the entrance of Aprile who represents the poetic, the emotional and all that is suggested by love. His aspiration is "to love infinitely and be loved" (II, 385), and he yearns to reveal and trans-

figure the beauty of the natural world by reclothing it in the forms of art. Aprile loves unrealistically and he inhabits a world of idealized abstractions. The unreal nature of his world is revealed by the manner in which he tries to express love through every artistic form. He declares:

> First: I would carve in stone, or cast in brass,
> The forms of earth ... (II, 421-22)

Having done this, he would then create a world for his sculptures.

> ... I would contrive and paint
> Woods, valleys, rocks and plains, dells, sands and
> wastes ... (II, 450-51)

Having placed men in this world, he would then turn to language, poetry, to express the passions of his creations. Finally, he would move to music to reveal "mysterious motions of the soul" (II, 478). Aprile could not work through the finite, the lowest form, until he gradually achieved knowledge to acquire union with the infinite. He denies the immediate, and unlike Paracelsus, who has restricted himself too much, he restrains himself too little. Earlier in his meeting with Paracelsus, he describes this flow:

> ... I could not curb
> My yearnings to possess at once the full
> Enjoyment, but neglected all the means
> Of realizing even the frailest joy, ...
> (II, 388-90)

Because Aprile ignored the immediate and the finite in his quest for the infinite, he now finds that he cannot express

all the sensations and ideas that swarm in upon him. He finds that his mind has been "dazzled by shapes" (II, 576), abstract shapes "clustered there to rule thee, not obey, / That will not wait thy summons" (II, 577-79). Blinded by his impressions, he has lost his way. Just before he dies, he realizes that man, a finite creature, can possess the infinite only in fragments and through some mediating structure.

Both Paracelsus and Aprile are guilty of hubris. Paracelsus has pursued knowledge at the expense of love and emotional life, and he has attained only hubris and fatal imbalance. The poet Aprile, his counterpart in hubris, has sought only love at the expense of knowledge, and he too fails for want of wholeness. One has emphasized the intellect; the other has stressed love of beauty and the desire to create beauty. Paracelsus is aware of their fatal mistake when he tells Aprile that they are "halves of one dissevered world" (II, 634).

In Part Three, Paracelsus and Festus are united. Twenty years have passed, and Paracelsus is now a professor at Basil. He has obviously turned to service of humanity, and he is worshipped and acclaimed by his audience. However, in the midst of apparent fame and success, this teacher-magician is isolated from self, from society and from God. He is more alone than at any other time, and the mood is dark and despairing.

The trappings of success, the crowded lecture hall and the praise of the public, deceive Festus; Paracelsus was sure his friend would look beyond the appearances, "the false glare that confounds / A weaker vision" (III, 206-07), and realize the truth. Paracelsus is filled with despair and cynicism and he comments on the pointlessness of it all. He asks:

> Why strive to make men hear, feel, fret themselves,
> With what is past their power to comprehend?
> (III,229-30)

He admits failure. He says, "I have not been successful, and yet am / Most miserable" (III, 256-57). He has pursued knowledge and gained very little. He even feels that he deserves such defeat.

> I have pursued this plan with all my strength;
> And having failed therein most signally,
> Cannot object to ruin utter and drear
> As all-excelling would have been the prize
> Had fortune favoured me. (III, 271-75)

Paracelsus's abandoning his former goals and compromising his ideals have resulted in the despair and self-hatred he now experiences. Compared with his previous high goals, his present lecturings are talks "approved by beardless boys, and bearded dotards worse" (III, 415). The striving, the aspiration and the lofty idealism have deteriorated to duping the public by feats of magic. He even enjoys "a host of petty vile delights, undreamed of / Or spurned before" (III, 538-39). In comparison with his dead aims, his present delights are a "fungous brood sickly and pale, / Chill mush-

rooms coloured like a corpse's cheek" (III, 542-43). The disease imagery here reflects the death of Paracelsus's aims and the gradual eating out or hollowing out of a once healthy nature. The imagery of birds and light is not present in this section; Paracelsus has abandoned his lofty aspiration and he is no longer sure of his direction and purpose.

For Paracelsus, the quest has been pointless; he has accomplished nothing. He admits that:

> Truth is just as far from me as ever;
> That I have thrown my life away; that sorrow
> On that account is idle, and further effort
> To mend and patch what's marred beyond repairing,
> As useless ... (III, 502-05)

Despair now envelops him.

Paracelsus explains to Festus why he had chosen to impart his knowledge to men. He was led by Aprile to dedicate himself to serve his fellow man. He describes this influence:

> ... 'twas a man
> With aims not mine and yet pursued like mine,
> With the same fervour and no more success,
> Perishing in my sight; who summoned me
> As I would shun the ghastly fate I saw,
> To serve my race at once; to wait no longer
> That God should interfere in my behalf,
> But to distrust myself, put pride away,
> And give my gains, imperfect as they were,
> To men. (III, 573-82)

He is now bitterly contemptuous of the stupidity of those he would serve with his learning. Very early in his conversation with Festus, he comments on their capacity for decep-

tion.

> ... And this for ever!
> For ever! gull who may, they will be gulled!
> They will not look nor think; (III, 199-201)

He believes he is superior to them. He says, "I precede my age" (III, 887), and he realizes they cannot grasp the knowledge he presents. He says of them:

> My followers--they are noisy as you heard;
> But, for intelligence, the best of them
> So clumsily wield the weapons I supply
> And they extol, that I begin to doubt
> Whether their own rude clubs and pebble-stones
> Would not do better service than my arms
> Thus vilely swayed ... (III, 891-97)

He is very aware of the fickle nature of his audience and he expects that sooner or later, he will be rejected by them. "Fortune is fickle / And even professors fall" (III, 595-96). He describes his audience to Festus in pejorative terms; many are attracted by "Mere novelty, nought else" (III, 619); others of "innate blackish dulness" (III, 620) expect miracles wrought in their behalf; other "sagacious knaves" (III, 628) seek "by flattery and crafty nursing" (III, 630) to destroy him. All of his audience are selfish, for "Each has his end to serve, and his best way / Of serving it" (III, 633).

Despite his contempt for humanity, he admits that the emotions of love, hope, fear and faith are a mark of one's humanity and he no longer possesses such feelings.

> Love, hope, fear, faith--these make humanity;
> These are its sign and note and character,
> And these I have lost!--gone, shut from me for ever,

> Like a dead friend safe from unkindness more!
> (III, 1028-31)

He scorns the society he would serve but he realizes that his emphasis on reason and intellect has removed his power of feeling and responding. Despite Aprile's emphasis on love in Part Two, he is not able to love or respond to ordinary man. This loss of love is a prime cause of his isolation.

Because Paracelsus has given up his quest and abandoned his striving for the Infinite, and because he rejects mankind, there is another area of isolation in his life. There is a sense of cosmic aloneness. Paracelsus has no sense of God or of God's presence in his life. He says very movingly:

> I know as much as any will of God
> As knows some dumb and tortured brute what Man,
> His stern lord, wills from the perplexing blows
> That plague him every day (III, 517-20)

This image of dumb, uncomprehending man is further developed when Paracelsus describes his present, powerless condition.

> ... I know as little
> Why I deserve to fail, as why I hoped
> Better things in my youth. I simply know
> I am no master here, but trained and beaten
> Into the path I tread; and here I stay
> Until some further intimation reach me,
> Like an obedient drudge (III, 523-29)

At this stage of his quest, Paracelsus is wandering without goal, purpose or certainty. He has no control of his universe and no intimation of purpose. There is still the duality of his nature, and he wonders how to maintain a balance between flesh and spirit. In his situation, spirit and

intellect have dominated at the expense of body.

> ... how can I change my soul?
> And this wronged body, ...
> ... used to care
> For its bright master's cares and quite subdue
> Its proper cravings ... (III, 688-92)

To compound the problem, Paracelsus still strives or aspires, despite the failure of his quest. He cannot remove this aspect of his being; he cannot quench "this mad and thriveless longing" (III, 712) and therefore, he feels at odds with the physical world around him. He belongs to neither the world of truth and Divine knowledge nor the physical world. He describes his exclusion:

> I have addressed a frock of heavy mail
> Yet may not join the troop of sacred knights;
> And now the forest-creatures fly from me,
> The grass-banks cool, the sunbeams warm no more.
> (III, 714-17)

The description of nature which closes this section is subdued and without hope. The darkness seems "Diluted, grey and clear without the stars;" (III, 1033), and day, normally a symbol of hope, flows in "clouded, wintry, desolate and cold" (III, 1038). The somber picture of increasing isolation emphasizes the plight of Paracelsus, now at odds with society, God, and his own nature. Generally, the imagery in this section is that of inert, solid matter which seems to obstruct and to restrict. The truth, "the imprisoned splendour" (I, 735) of "man's inmost centre" (I, 728) cannot shine forth. Paracelsus has learned through experience that the "carnal mesh," the flesh and the world, the physical,

has indeed blocked its release. The barriers to man's development, in spirit and flesh, are described in terms of images of chains, rocks, solidity--all images of restriction. Man is a restricted, divided creature, at odds with himself, his society and his God.

Part Four emphasizes Paracelsus's bitter scorn and contempt for humanity. He now believes mankind wants to be deceived and to remain ignorant; when he tried to impart his knowledge, he was rejected by this society. He is now faced with the choice of open defiance of society or compromise and perpetuation of deception and falsehood. His abandoning of his former goals and aspirations has led to loathing and hatred of self. He cannot return to the innocence of his past. He now belongs nowhere.

This section begins with Paracelsus describing to Festus how he was deposed from his position. The admiring crowds have ceased to acclaim the wonders of his skill; he no longer pleases them, and others have stolen his secrets. In this particular section, his alienation is very real; he is an outcast, rejected by the people he sought to serve. He feels nothing but disdain and scorn for the "rabble," realizing that their values and tastes are decided by others and that very soon they will have another to "fawn on" (IV, 27). He realizes his situation is not unique; it is "the case of men cast off by those they sought / To benefit" (IV, 66-67). He comments on how shallow men are and how easy it

is to impress them:

> ... Just so long as I was pleased
> To play off the mere antics of my art,
> Fantastic gambols leading to no end,
> I got huge praise: (IV, 83-86)

However, Paracelsus's great mistake was that he developed "a trust" and "a respect--a sort of sympathy for them" (IV, 92-93). He began to try to instruct and teach them, rather than deceive and dupe them. He discovered, however, that man wants to be deceived and his predictions in Part Three about the fickle nature of man have been confirmed.

Paracelsus is now aware of the evil that exists in man. He believes that hatred is the strongest motivating force. He tells Festus he could inform him of man's nature:

> --I would lay bare to you the human heart
> Which God cursed long ago, and devils make since
> Their pet nest and their never-tiring home.
> Oh, sages have discovered we are born
> For various ends--to love, to know: has ever
> One stumbled, in his search, on any signs
> Of a nature in us formed to hate? To hate?
> If that be our true object which evokes
> Our powers in fullest strength, be sure 'tis hate!
> (IV, 143-51)

Now that Paracelsus is fully aware of man's capacity for hatred and man's preference for deception, he considers the various alternatives which face him. He now has to decide between cutting himself off from all human contact and becoming a symbol of defiance, "a monument of one their censure blasted" (IV, 160-61), or becoming a grovelling servant beneath the command and control of his inferiors.

> Proud to be patted now and then, and careful
> To practise the true posture for receiving
> The amplest benefit from their hoofs' appliance
> When they shall condescend to tutor me? (IV, 167-70)

He is forced to choose between rebellion and social alienation or servility, loss of self-respect and self-alienation. In both choices, he will reduce himself to a lower form of life on the scale of being. In the first choice, he sees himself as retreating into a silent shell, that of a snail. In the second choice, he is reduced to the level of a domesticated animal. He is far removed from the ideals and aspirations which started him on his quest.

In his exile and anger, Paracelsus decides he will change his approach. He will now snatch at "the meanest earthliest sensualist delight" (IV, 244), and instead of emphasizing knowledge as before, he will indulge the senses. He says:

> I seek to know and to enjoy at once,
> Not one without the other as before.
> (IV, 240-41)

This course offers him little satisfaction and he admits to Festus that he longs for death to end his now miserable life:

> Death! To die! I owe that much
> To what, at least, I was. I should be sad
> To live contented after such a fall,
> To thrive and fatten after such reverse!
> The whole plan is a makeshift, but will last
> My time. (IV, 415-20)

This whole makeshift plan cannot prevent Paracelsus from looking at his own deception and compromise. He is so far

removed from the former ideals and ambitions that he now feels revulsion and disgust for himself. He asks if Festus doesn't feel scorn and contempt for him:

> Do you not scorn me from your heart of hearts,
> Me and my cant, each petty subterfuge,
> My rhymes and all this frothy show of words
> My glozing self-deceit, my outward crust
> Of lies which wrap, as tetter, morphew, furfair
> Wrapt the sound flesh? (IV, 627-31)

His deception has led to a hatred of self which, at times, verges on madness.

Festus's suggestion that he forgo all his ambitions and return to Einsiedeln to spend his remaining days in peace is rejected by Paracelsus. He cannot return to his past, to this innocence and former happiness. This "would not turn to good" in the words of Paracelsus, since he has erred and sinned and he would be a source of corruption in this type of Eden.

> A spotless child sleeps on the flowering moss--
> 'Tis well for him; but when a sinful man,
> Envying such slumber, may desire to put
> His guilt away, shall he return at once
> To rest by lying there? Our sires knew well
> (spite of the grave discoveries of their sons)
> The fitting course for such: dark cells, dim lamps,
> A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm:
> No mossy pillow with blue violets! (IV, 535-42)

He is removed and alienated from a world of innocence and youth; a world where his ideas and aspiration were so high. The concluding lines of this section emphasize his total scorn for the "rabble" of his present world. He has no feeling for or identity with the ordinary man. He views

them as rabble scrabbling for "snug back seats" (IV, 691) to view the fight among the "brave about to perish" for their sport (IV, 693).

Images of darkness, animals and disease dominate this section of the poem. Paracelsus's regression from his ideals and his descent from his former god-like position are suggested in the images of animals. "Reptiles" (IV, 15), "gaunt cows" (IV, 38), "gasping sheep" (IV, 38), "snails" (IV, 158) are included among the inhabitants of his present world. His disdain for man is also suggested by these terms. The fading of Paracelsus's aims and ambitions is suggested in his surroundings. "Dim chamber" (IV, 405), "night" (IV, 381), "seasons dark as the thoughts they breed" (IV, 255-56) create a sombre, despairing mood. Disease and sickness of the flesh are presented in images such as the following:

> ... your eyes the eyes to ache
> At gangrene-blotches, eating poison-blains,
> The ulcerous barky scurf of leprosy
> Which finds--a man, and leaves--a hideous thing
> (IV, 138-41)

This disease imagery suggests the effect of deception on the soul. Paracelsus's deception has led to hatred of man and hatred of himself, which is gradually eating out the soul, as disease eats out the body.

The final section of the poem has an overwhelming mood of rejection and entrapment. Paracelsus lies dying in a dark cell, tended by the faithful Festus. Festus looks upon

the "fixed eyes," the "fallen discoloured mouth," the "decaying body" (V, 5-6), and the general feeling is that light, life, the spirit is quenched forever. Paralleling the spirit's entrapment in the body is the physical isolation. Paracelsus was brought to this stifling cell to die alone. He was removed from others in the hospital to this "tomb-like place" (V, 34), this cell. Images of contracting walls, deepening shadows, hands groping amid the blackness, death-traps, all reinforce the mood of enclosure and rejection. To complement these ideas of entrapment and rejection is the theme of betrayal.

Paracelsus has been betrayed by the public. Earth's "bravest champion" (V, 37) has been rejected by mankind. During his dying hours, he is deserted and abandoned. His quest for knowledge to bring freedom to these people has led to this dismal conclusion. Paracelsus's awareness of his setting and situation intensifies his rejection and alienation.

> ... This murky loathsome
> Death-trap, this slaughter house, is not the hall
> In the golden city! (V, 226-28)

For Paracelsus, at this stage, there is total loss of meaning in life, and he even questions the possibility of life beyond death

> If this be all ...
> And other life await us not--for one,
> I say 'tis a poor cheat, a stupid bungle,
> A wretched failure. I, for one, protest

> Against it, and I hurl it back with scorn.
> (V, 275-79)

There is a sense of betrayal by the body and now, in his dying hours, when he needs its "best assistance" (V, 285), it "will crumble fast" (V, 285). He feels that the body fades and the soul is destroyed with it.

> Thus fades the flagging body, and the soul
> Is pulled down in the overthrow.
> (V, 292-93)

The theme of betrayal is suggested as well in Paracelsus's charge that all is quackery and deceit. Obstacles taught him tricks, he says

> You know the obstacles ...
> ... envy and hate,
> Blind opposition, brutal prejudice,
> Bald ignorance--what wonder if I sunk
> To humour men the way they most approved?
> (V, 353-57)

Saddest of all is Paracelsus's lament that past teachers have misled and imprisoned humanity by lies. What is worse is that he too has been deceived by them, "their lies misleading me / And their dead names browbeating me" (V, 172-73). Even now, despite his awareness of deception and his awareness of impending death, he admits to his desire to be one of them:

> ... all I ask
> Is, that the world enroll my name with theirs.
> (V, 163-64)

This comment reveals his need to belong and to be acknowledged by mankind.

In the second half of this section, Paracelsus casts off the bonds of self-deception and accepts the reality of his situation, of the present and of the flesh. In images of light and energy, he reasserts the presence of God in the evolutionary process of earth. He presents Festus with a lyrical description of physical creation; in logical fashion, he shows how mass was created, then form, finally life and then the "consummation of this scheme of being," Man (V, 684). In this scheme of being, "progress is the law of life / Man is not Man as yet" (V, 742-43). Hence, man is ever-changing, ever-evolving and ever-aspiring. Paracelsus's ultimate, final vision indicates that man's aspiring is the natural outcome of his creation and of the evolutionary process. It is the attempt of the soul, incased within the flesh, to get to God. Hence, while there is life, there will be this tension or anxiety or alienation of the world.

Paracelsus now realizes that in his quest for knowledge, he misunderstood the importance and meaning of love. Because man worshipped him for his "first revealings" (V, 863), and later rejected him for his "real knowledge" (V, 867), he hated him. As he says, "I saw no good in man" (V, 868). Now, in his vision of God and evolution, he realizes that man is a creation of God, and in man's weakness and struggle, there is much to love; despite this weakness, man is striving for God. Paracelsus describes to Festus his former lack of love:

> In my own heart love had not been made wise
> To trace love's faint beginnings in mankind,
> To know even hate is but a mask of love's,
> To see a good in evil, and a hope
> In ill-success; to sympathize, be proud
> Of their half-reasons, faint aspirings, dim
> Struggles for truth, their poorest fallacies,
> Their prejudice and fears and cares and doubts;
> All with a touch of nobleness, despite
> Their error, upward tending all though weak,
> Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
> But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
> And do their best to climb and get to him.
> (V, 872-83)

He now feels a fellowship and empathy with his fellow human beings. The pride and emphasis on intellect, the scorn and contempt for man--the isolation and alienation are erased. Now, at death, he is in harmony with nature and his fellow beings.

This last section of Part Five of this poem seems to lack credibility. The previous four sections of the poem all seem to lead to the inevitable conclusion, the despair and failure of Paracelsus in Part Five. This is the logical outcome of his hubris: lack of love for mankind, loss of goals and betrayal by a public. Alienation is the predictable state of one who quests for knowledge, freedom and truth for all of mankind. Hence, the final positive vision of Paracelsus does not follow logically. The natural sequence of events in the poem could not lead to such insight by Paracelsus. It seems to be imposed from without. Roma A. King describes this conclusion as follows:

> In Paracelsus Browning achieves a resolution to his problem by tour de force. The solution, however,

> contradicts his earlier assumptions about truth. Having failed to release the "imprison'd splendour," Paracelsus is saved by a vision that comes from without. It was inevitable, therefore, that Browning would return to question the validity of the mystic vision by which Paracelsus is saved. As an intellectual commitment and an artistic device, it could not long satisfy him. It did enable him, however, to bring Paracelsus to a conclusion, although in doing so, he perhaps compromised his essential vision.[5]

Despite the concluding section of Paracelsus, Browning's essential vision as presented in this poem is not positive or optimistic or convincing. The hero does not fulfill his quest to serve and enlighten man. Only near the end does he glimpse man's ultimate perfection and man's striving towards God, and this vision seems forced upon the poem. For the most part, the would-be liberator of man is isolated by his goals and the restrictions of his human nature. Near the conclusion, the main character is alienated from self, from God, and from the society he sought to serve. Browning is still uncertain as to how one can best serve society.

Within the work, Paracelsus, the striving by the poet to communicate effectively results in a combination of poetry, drama and the philosophical essay. The content is little more than philosophical statement by the speakers, and there are few outward actions to make up the narrative

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[5]Roma A. King, The Focusing Artifice (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1968), p. 19.

line of the poem. Basically, each scene is a debate which provokes Paracelsus to express his doubt, feelings and gradual understanding. The hero's hopes and attainments are presented in a very obvious dramatic form without the common elements of conflict, action, and suspense. The form, therefore, does not relate to content.

At this early stage of his career, Browning had not fully defined the role of the artist. Although he has adumbrated some of his ideas, they are not yet held with the conviction that allows for a fully unified communication of them. He is still restricted to philosophical essays and there is no genuine blending of form and intent. It was not until the middle of his next work that he articulated a purpose which seemed to direct his form, determine his subject matter, and alleviate some of the isolation experienced by the poet.

CHAPTER 3

SORDELLO

Browning's third publication, Sordello, has as its central character a thirteenth-century Italian troubadour. Like the main character of the previous publication, Paracelsus, the hero is searching for identity and truth. The conclusion, however, unlike the conclusion of Paracelsus, is neither positive nor optimistic. The hero, Sordello, gradually realizes that each of the principles upon which he has tried to structure his life is an illusion. Romantic nature, pure art, social and religious institutions, abstract thought, political action--all lead to isolation and lack of direction. There is neither vision nor divine illumination, and Sordello reaches and experiences the depth of despair and isolation that Paracelsus endures just before his vision. This poem is particularly important in a study of Browning since it reveals his growing awareness of the suffering of mankind and the social responsibility of the artist. According to W.C. De Vane,[1] it took the poet seven

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[1]William Clyde De Vane, A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton-Century Crofts, 1955), pp. 71-87.

years to complete this work (1833-1840), and, during this period, he visited Russia and Italy, published Paracelsus, Strafford, and several shorter poems, and naturally expanded and changed his views of life and art. Many of the previous themes of Paracelsus are developed. The dim perceptions and mediocre expectations of dull audiences, the self-deceptions and hypocrisies of mankind, conformity to dull convention, limitations of self, and the conflict between body and soul, the many factors which contribute to man's ienation, are all considered in this poem. More important than these themes, however, is the theme of poetic isolation. Therefore, Sordello is of major importance in this study since it reveals Browning, through Sordello, attempting to describe the nature and choices of the poet and to define the function of the poet in a society where meaning and value, and the idea of a traditional God, had disappeared.[2] The isolation of the poet is emphasized; one of the major causes of this isolation is the intellectual superiority of the poet and his consequent assumption that he can comprehend the absolute and that he has no need of ordinary man. This hubris leads to the poet's eventual failure and destruction.

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[2]See Stewart Walker Holmes, "Browning's Sordello and Jung: Browning's Sordello in the light of Jung's Theory of Types," Publications of the Modern Languages Association, VI (September 1941), pp. 758-96. Holmes sees Sordello as highly autobiographical. Holmes believes that Browning was describing his own dilemma when he was presenting the problems of the introverted, intuitive poet, Sordello.

Sordello also examines the traditional poet and his role, and the conflict between art for art's sake and art for society's sake is outlined. Regardless of choice, the poet is shown to be out of unity with mankind and to suffer a division within himself. The concept of the Poet-as-Hero, popular in Victorian society, is shown to be an impossibility, and the poem concludes in isolation and despair with the death of the central character.

The poem is also important in the study of Browning's stylistic development. Despite the obscurity of material, the abstract arguments and involved casuistry, the poem is an artistic whole. It has drama and force as a narrative, and content is related to form. Unity is maintained throughout the whole poem, as the central character continues his quest, and the ideas are presented with conviction. The power of Browning to analyze character and suggest psychological depth is revealed in the portraits of Sordello and Salinguerra, and his keen powers of observation and his understanding of human nature are evident in his description of the citizens of Ferrara. Browning's power to describe nature, and his brilliant use of figurative language to elucidate a point are all evident. De Vane says of this work:

> It is a great pity for Browning's sake that Sordello is not better known, for here Browning put forth his strength as well as his weakness. There are magnificent passages which repay much labor, such as the amazing landscapes of Northern Italy, the woods near Goito; there are the scenes of Ferrara in siege, and above all the portrait of

> Salinguerra. There are also Browning's lines to Shelley (I, 60-73), and those to Landor, his "patron friend" (III, 961-68). Sordello contains, too, some of the noblest and boldest of Browning's theories upon the function and method of poetry, ideas which show him well ahead of his time.[3]

Basic themes and convictions, important in Browning's later work, surface in this work. In particular, Browning comments on his purpose and duty as an artist. This expression of purpose, however, does not mean that all problems of communication and isolation are solved, or that all artists can communicate with and serve society. Despite Sordello's discovery of purpose, the awakening of sympathy for mankind, he fails on every level and becomes increasingly isolated from society.

The seclusion of the young poet is described very early in this poem. His origins are uncertain and his contact with the world is limited.

> Some foreign women servants, very old,
> Tended and crept, about him--all his clue
> To the world's business ... (I, 622-24)

He lives in the castle of Goito, ringed by mountains and isolated from Italian society. The description of the castle's interior creates an atmosphere of secrecy and isolation:

> A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
> Dusk winding-stairs, dim, galleries got past,

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[3]William Clyde De Vane, A Browning Handbook (New York: Appleton Century-Crofts Inc., 1955), p. 86.

> You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
> A maple-panelled room: that haze which seems
> Floating about the panel, if there gleams
> A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold
> And in light-graven characters unfold
> The Arab's wisdom everywhere; (I, 390-97)

There is a further retreat in this castle, "the main wonder," a darkened vault lit fitfully by a dim light that filters through fine slits across the buttress. In the centre of this vault is a font:

> A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
> Round it,--each side of it, where'er one sees,--
> Upholds it; shrinking Caryatides
> Of just-tinged marble like Eve's lilied flesh
> Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh
> First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
> (I, 410-15)

Every evening, Sordello comes and sits with each figure in turn and "begs / Pardon for them" (I, 428-29). Through his sympathy and in his imagination he becomes "the same / As one of them" (I, 430-31), and there he stays until sunset and he imagines the maiden smiles because "Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain / Obscured her forehead" (I, 436-37). Because of his ministrations, Sordello believes he has eased the burden of each caryatid, and he comes away with a lighter step and "a heart more large" (I, 440). The identification of Sordello with these caryatides foreshadows his role and function as an artist--the alleviation of the suffering of mankind. Sordello's main problem as an artist is foreshadowed here also--these figures of caryatides are stone and non-responsive. His human audience

will be non-responsive, and he will be as incapable of relieving the suffering of mankind as he is of changing the fate of these figures.

Sordello is surrounded by art and beauty, and the narrator describes him as:

> ... foremost in the regal class
> Nature has broadly severed from her mass
> Of men, and framed for pleasure
> (I, 467-69)

His perception of the fullness of sensuous beauty makes him a being apart; he is at once blessed and yet cursed since he is controlled by a beauty and a love he cannot express. The "curse that haunts such natures" (I, 487) is their finding out they "can work no good / To what they love nor make it very blest / By their endeavour" (I, 488-90).

The artist belonging to this class is passionate in his devotion to beauty and there is a romantic yearning to be part of what he worships. He has "a need to blend with each external charm" (I, 507). This devotion to beauty becomes stronger and stronger until it has control over the worshipper:

> ... they would belong
> To what they worship--stronger and more strong
> Thus prodigally fed--which gathers shape
> And feature, soon imprisons past escape
> The votary framed to love and to submit
> Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
> Whence grew the idols empery. (I, 509-15)

This worship though can lead to the total absorption of the poet, and the extended image of light penetrating dark-

ness is used to illustrate the danger and the futility of such idleness.

> ... light had birth ere moons and suns,
> Flowing through space a river and alone,
> Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
> Hither and thither foundering and blind:
> When into each of them rushed light--to find
> Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.
> (I, 516-21)

There is, however, another class of regal natures, the members of which have the keenest sense of beauty; this class does not devote itself to beauty or any object outside of its being. The members of this class regard each revelation of beauty as a reflection of a type already existing in their own souls. They proclaim:

> ... each new revealment born a twin
> With a distinctest consciousness within,
> Referring still the quality, now first
> Revealed, to their own soul--its instinct nursed
> In silence, now remembered better, shown
> More thoroughly, but not the less their own;
> (I, 525-30)

This class worships themselves; "homage, other souls direct / Without, turns inward" (I, 535-36), and they are excessively proud of their ability to imagine all existence in the universe. They have, they believe, the ability to "soar to heaven's complexest essense, rife / With granduers unaffronted to the last, / Equal to being all!" (I, 546-48).

There are two dangers awaiting these self-centred members of the regal class. Because of lofty idealism, they may use none of their powers for the good of mankind, since

their opportunity may be limited and the occasion the world offers is too small for the exhibition of their talents; life's arena is too narrow "to reward / Emprise--the world's occasion worthless since / Nor absolutely fitted to evince / Its mastery!" (I, 558-61). The second danger is that a member of this regal class may strive to work out all his ideals in the sphere of human existence; he may attempt to display completely on earth "The mastery another life should learn, / Thrusting in time eternity's concern,--" (I, 565-66). This desire to surpass the physical sphere and to "wrest from eternity the knowledge and power that are the concern of the Infinite alone"[4] will become one of the alienating factors of Sordello's life. This intellectual arrogance and excessive aspiration are the fatal flaws or errors of Sordello, and as he, a youth, loiters at Goito, this mental defect might be detected upon him as the first dark marks of leprosy may be detected on the body. The narrator comments:

> ... Fool, who spied the mark
> Of leprosy upon him, violet dark
> Already as he loiters?
> (I, 567-69)

The image of leprosy suggests the diseased nature of the poet, diseased by self-indulgence and hubris. Man who

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[4]Norton B. Crowell, The Triple Soul: Browning's Theory of Knowledge (Albuquerque, N.M.: University of New Mexico Press, 1963), p. 143.

aspires to be God-like cannot identify with suffering, miserable humanity. This mark of "leprosy," excessive aspiration and intellectual pride, alienated Paracelsus from mankind and will become a major cause of Sordello's isolation from mankind.

Sordello, thus singled out from men, has a tendency to slumber in the solitude and ignore the plight of mankind. He wanders alone and solitary in Goito. He is absorbed in his love of nature and the mood is tranquil and secure. Eden is suggested by the security, the limitations and the harmony with nature.

> And first a simple sense of life engrossed
> Sordello in his drowsy Paradise (I, 626-27)

Each day holds a new wonder. Like the "great palmer-worm" (I, 632), which consumes all life and puts forth wings in autumn to go after new delights, Sordello never stops in the progress of his pleasures. His fancies flit from one object to the next, and the "upland objects" (I, 65) of his environment gain or lose their glory, depending on his imagination. His imagination reaches the most unlikely objects, and as the spider, making light of distance, "shoots her threads from depth to height / From barbican to battlement" (I, 666-67), so Sordello spins his dreams with himself as the centre. His fancies and dreams, the product of his imagination, are flung as far and wide as the threads of the spider.

This world of Romantic nature gradually becomes unsatisfactory for Sordello. Even though he is sheltered from the world ("amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone") (I, 704), he begins to yearn for human fellowship, moving from sympathy with nature to romantic fantasies about people. He has had little contact with the real world, except for a few servants. Therefore, he creates his own characters:

> ... he discerned
> A sort of human life: at least was turned
> A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.
> Lord, liegeman, valvassor, and suzerain,
> Ere he could choose, surrounded him ...
> (I, 765-69)

Even though he becomes absorbed with these characters, as he did earlier with nature--"he may spend / Himself, be man now, as he used to blend / With tree and flower" (I, 807-09), these are purely characters of his imagination. He is still removed from the world of man.

The movement in this section of the poem has been from romantic isolation and absorption in art, and later in nature, to a dissatisfaction with this environment, and a longing for human fellowship as represented by the characters of the young poet's imagination. There is need to study man and to communicate with this external world, or the world beyond Goito. The point being made is that the poet cannot develop his ability in a world removed from the human world. The artist isolated in his world of beauty and art will find no fulfillment.

Sordello's descent from his world of art and beauty to the world of man is a study of alienation on many levels. His emphasis on the intellect, and his pride and superiority, isolate him from ordinary man. Problems with language, expectations of dull audiences, frustrate the artist. Eventual conformity to society's demands leads to conflict and division within the artist, and he is alienated from his ideals. Eventually, the artist withdraws from society and returns to his isolation in Goito's art and beauty. The movement in this section, Book The Second, is cyclic--from isolation in nature to alienation by society, to isolation again.

In Book The Second, Sordello leaves Goito and his innocence and becomes the popular poet of Mantua, replacing Eglamor, the previously reigning minstrel. Although Eglamor was the court minstrel, he was as isolated from society as Sordello was in Goito, the reason being that Eglamor was entirely devoted to his craft, to the exclusion of all else.

> Then, how he loved that art!
> The calling marking him a man apart
> From men--one not to care, take counsel for
> Cold hearts, comfortless faces--(Eglamor
> Was neediest of his tribe)--since verse, the gift,
> Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
> Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
> And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
> (II, 219-26)

Popular applause, or popular neglect, mattered little to Eglamor, and pomp, wealth and power were of little value to this artist, in comparison with his great gift, which marked

him as a man apart from society. Isolation from society and society's values is of little consequence to this artist. As E.H. Johnson says, Eglamor has "the virtue of absorption in the technical demands of his craft,"[5] but when he meets Sordello, he realizes that the techniques of his craft have been excelled and outdated by a superior artist. He "lost his purpose, lost his rank, / His life--to that it came" (II, 241-42). His art and his life are one and now that he sees his art as inferior, there is no purpose in life. His isolation from society and his material success in the world were of no significance to Eglamor, as long as he could develop what he perceived as his great gift. He realizes his inferiority to Sordello, and he dies.

Sordello also remains isolated from the society of Mantua but his reasons are different from Eglamor's. He believes that he is intellectually superior to ordinary man and that he is restricted or guided by none of the ordinary laws guiding mankind. His assumed superiority to mankind is indicated by the narrator:

> Never again for him and for the crowd
> A common law was challenged and allowed
> If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
> By a mad impulse nothing justified
> Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce
> Is clear: Why needs Sordello square his course
> By any known example? (II, 373-79)

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[5]E.H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 79.

He believes that "Men no more / Compete with him than tree and flower before" (II, 379-80) at Goito.

This emphasis on intellect also results in Sordello's finding neither dedication nor purpose in his art. Since he believes that all excellence is within him, there is nothing to command his being or demand his total attention.

> That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
> Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
> To its exclusive purpose. (II, 395-97)

Consequently, he displays his powers to mankind, hoping that he will be worshipped as a God. He believes:

> "... the world that counts men strong or wise,
> Who, themselves, court strength, wisdom,--it shall bow
> Surely in exampled worship now,
> Discerning me" (II, 412-14)

God-like, Sordello will contemplate the pleasures of life but will not indulge in them. This intellectual arrogance and God-like detachment are revealed in Sordello's comment:

> The world shall bow to me conceiving all
> Man's life, who see its blisses, great and small,
> Afar--not tasting any; no machine
> To exercise my utmost will is mine:
> Be mine mere consciousness! (II, 425-29)

This superiority and this refusal to become involved in actual life create isolation which is reflected in the artist's work. He speaks in abstractions which are meaningless to his audience, who ask him to

> '... fly
> A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
> Of essences? the period sure has ceased
> For such: present us with ourselves, at least,
> Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates
> Made flesh: Wait not!' (II, 563-68)

Sordello is not able to express his thoughts in language which ordinary man can understand. He attempts to communicate in the language of the people by:

> ... welding words into the crude
> Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude
> Armour was hammered out ... (II, 575-77)

The words "crude mass" suggest that Sordello seeks a lower form of expression. Most probably, the phrase refers to the problem of converting literature to the vernacular from Latin or "The Roman panoply" (II, 578).[6] This metaphor of language being hammered and molded into an armour suggests the often unnatural diction and form of poetry. Because of this difficulty with language, the audience understand his work less and less.

> ... He found that, every time
> He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
> His auditory recognized no jot
> As he intended ... (II, 621-24)

Their inaccurate perceptions and mediocre expectations cause the poet to become increasingly isolated. Eventually, the poet faces a conflict within himself, the poet in him "thwarting hopelessly the man" (II, 659). This "man-part" is hampered by the idealist, or "poet-part," who is determined not to sing anything of the common type, and not to sing at all unless his song would express all the perfection of his regal nature.

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[6]See David Duff, An Exposition of Sordello (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood & Sons, 1906), pp. 58-59.

The man and the artist split apart; Sordello is "sundered in twain" (II, 657). He feels that the world with the "dull convention of his day" (II, 710) is not ready for him. His thoughts give him far-reaching ideas and concepts, "God's large" answers (II, 723). These ideas can hardly be reduced to the limited intelligence or "opinions" (II, 729) around him. Therefore, Sordello feels "more disgust and more" (II, 745). He wonders "Why move his soul" (II, 746) for such insignificant matter. Consequently, he descends to using conventions of all sorts, "ready-made opinion," "quips," "maxims," "gestures and tones" (III, 749-51) to please his audience. He sees "less and less to strive / About" (II, 757-58). His pride and intellectual superiority are very obvious at this stage of the poem, and his indifference and disregard for man are indicated in the lines:

> And as for men in turn ... contrive
> Who could to take eternal interest
> In them, so hate the worst, so love the best!
> (II, 758-60)

The attitude of Sordello, at this stage of the poem, is a marked contrast to the attitude of Browning, who in Book The Third directly speaks of his compassion for all men.

Sordello regresses to the point where he seeks security in conformity. His ambition is summed up in the following:

> ... better think
> Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
> Back expeditiously to his safe place,
> And chew the cud ... (II, 835-38)

However, "even this / Conformity was partial" (II, 839-40), because often he would miss some chance of pleasing his audience; he simply did not have the experience to reach them on this low level; he often was brought into contact with them before he was "Assured in what small segment of the sphere of his existence they attended him" (II, 842-43). Meanwhile, Taurello Salinguerra, a great general of the Ghibellines, is returning to Mantua and Sordello is appointed to "Sound the great man's welcome" (II, 928). He is advised by his friend, Naddo, that "'t is a test" (II, 928). However, Sordello loathes the task; he decides not to sing at all and he retreats to Goito.

This section of the poem emphasizes the difficult position of the artist in society. He comes as a kind of Romantic Hero to a world which is unable to understand him. His verse is not what his audience wants; his ideals and abstract perceptions are beyond the understanding of ordinary men. Consequently, he finds himself out of contact with the society he wishes to enlighten. If the artist conforms to the demands of society, he continues the deceptions of society. The vision and insight of the artist will never improve or enlighten this society, since he will be catering to its tastes. His art may delight; it will not instruct. The artist who conforms to the demands of society also experiences alienation of self. He abandons his ideals and poetic integrity, and he finds little purpose or fulfillment

in his work. In both situations, the artist faces alienation--either from society or from self.

This section emphasizes the dangers of excessive pride and sole dependence on intellect. In the case of Sordello, the emphasis on intellectual perceptions leads to poetry without substance or meaning for mankind. The artist is unable to feel compassion or empathy for mankind and he refuses to heed the advice of Naddo, his advisor and critic.

> Would you have your songs endure?
> Build on the human heart (II, 797-98)

Sordello returns to Goito, and he throws his crown into the font; this act symbolizes that he no longer needs the world or mankind, either for inspiration or acclaim. He is retreating to his former world of imagination and creativity. He also withdraws the scarf, placed around his neck by Palma, the "sole child of Agnes Este" (I, 941-42) and the ruler, Ecelin. This act is a rejection of life and love. However, the world of intellect and the spirit alone will not provide inspiration for the artist. He cannot develop fully, as an artist, in isolation.

Sordello finds that change has occurred at Goito. The slim castle has "dwindled of late years" and "gone to ruin-trails / Of vine through every loop hole" (II, 979-80), and the maple chamber has gaps in its "intersecting cedar beams" (II, 983). The physical change that is evident in Goito, parallels the psychological change in Sordello. This change

is not immediately evident, since Sordello resumes his old self-indulgence and "the suspended life begins anew" (III, 5). He erases all memories of Mantua and "the stain of the World" (III, 15-16). A year later, however, his eyes are dull and his senses saturated with the passive enjoyment of nature. And he gradually becomes dissatisfied since he is conscious of a want.

> ... some distress
> Was caused too by a sort of consciousness
> Under the imbecility,--nought kept
> That down; he slept but was aware he slept, ...
> (III, 61-64)

This want becomes even more obvious to Sordello through an event which occurs.

One autumn evening, when Sordello reflects on "nature's and his youth gone" (II, 82), he becomes aware that nature, unlike man, has power to restore itself. A convulsion of the earth causes a marsh to disappear and a "broad water" (III, 89) to take its place. Sordello realizes that "Nature has time, may mend / Mistake, she knows occasion will recur" (III, 98-99). Man has but one temporal existence, and if he does not use this opportunity or this existence, he is not, like nature, given a second chance. Sordello now realizes "I / Must perish once and perish utterly" (III, 101-02). He refused to respond to any of the experiences of life, which are "fragments of a whole ordained to be" (III, 141). He has merely reflected and observed without experiencing life and he now considers what he may have missed. Now, at this

stage, the intellectual pride and superiority of earlier days disappear as the longing for ordinary, physical relationships and earthly sensations swarms upon him. He longs for the experience of love; he might have wooed a country maid; he might have revelled in licentious scenes; he might have won a soldier's glory and reward. The images of nature, the images of the sensual, the exotic and the physical which dominate this section emphasize the flesh, the senses and the world, as opposed to the world of intellect and the spirit which Sordello emphasized earlier. Instead of emphasizing the superiority of his intellect, he should have experienced life for its own joys. He now imagines a love he could have experienced:

> ... by thorn-rows
> Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
> And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire
> She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
> Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst
> Answer 't was April ... (III, 104-09)

The interests and objects that ordinary men love and serve enter into their souls and become part of their consciousness. For Sordello, however, there has been nothing outside his soul; yet he cannot love or find satisfaction until he has translated into action or the flesh all the conceptions of his soul. He realizes that he must "Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend / In spirit now" (III, 173-74). Unlike ordinary man, Sordello has nothing to draw forth his soul in service. He asks, "What's to blend / With? (III, 174-75).

The experiences of real life would have aided in the expression of such perception, but because of his experience in Mantua and the inability of the Mantuans to understand his perceptions, he rejected the external physical world. He now regrets his dismissal of the world:

> ...t'was my bond
> To tread the very joys that tantalize
> Most now, into a grave, never to rise.
> (III, 178-80)

He also condemns his intellectual superiority and his lack of action in Mantua. He realizes that he complained his "will was fettered" (III, 188), and he contented himself, doing so very little. He describes himself as "content within a tether half the range/I could assign it" ((III, 189-90). Sordello now realizes his responsibility and the extent of his pride. He says:

> ...Mantua's yoke,
> My minstrel's trade, was to behold mankind,--
> My own concern was just to bring my mind
> Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,
> Each object suffered stifle in the mist
> Which hazard, custom, blindness interpose
> Betwixt things and myself. (III, 198-204)

His ineffectiveness and his inability as an artist are realized. Dreaming in a world of art and beauty in Goito is no more fulfilling than his attempts at communication in society. Emphasis on intellect has alienated him from mankind and from the experiences of mankind which would give substance to his perceptions. Oneness with nature, introspection and dreams, the process of imagination striving to

embody beauty--the elements of his youthful days in Goito can no longer satisfy Sordello. His innocence and former Eden have disappeared; Sordello decides that he will return to the world and accomplish what he can. Men may acquire a faint idea of what he might have accomplished if he had used his powers properly.

At this point in the poem and in what is a rare occasion, Browning introduces and speaks in his own voice. The time is Venice, 1838,[7] and when one considers that this poem was started in March, 1833,[8] and that the first two and a half books of the poem explore the nature of the poet and his responsibility to society, it becomes obvious that this direct statement is the result of meditation and introspection. Browning speaks here with conviction and certitude.

As Browning sits on a "ruined palace-step" (III, 676) in Venice, he uses a poetic convention of Sordello's time to make his statement about purpose and responsibility. According to this convention, the poet or troubadour would choose a beautiful lady, either real or imaginary, as an ideal figure to whom he would dedicate his poetry. Browning now wonders who will "be given to me?" (III, 681); who from all the surrounding, lively Italian girls will be his inspiring lady-figure? He rejects them all and selects the

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[7] De Vane, pp. 80-83,

[8] De Vane, p. 72.

most deprived of all women, the prostitute. This sad, rejected figure amidst the beauty and colour of Italy is to be his queen, and he admits that he has always possessed a sympathy and interest for those who experience the hardships of life. These figures interest him more deeply than those who are successful and acclaimed by the world. He says:

> ...care-bit erased
> Broken-up beauties ever took my taste
> Supremely; and I love you more, far more
> Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor.
> (III, 747-50)

Browning presents the picture of this poor creature passing other important people and coming to him for help.

> Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass
> Or not each formidable group, the mass
> Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,
> God's great day of the Corpus Domini)
> And, wistfully foregoing proper men,
> Come timid up to me for alms?
> (III, 763-68)

This idea of his directly being chosen by this poor girl suggests that the poet is singled out by humanity, and by God, as Browning later indicates, for special duty and responsibility. This special responsibility does not bring with it any great awards or honours but the poet is happy to be able at least to offer sympathy and compassion.

> .....I regret
> Little that she, whose early foot was set
> Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
> Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
> Toward me--no wreath, only a lip's unrest
> To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
> Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange
> Such sad chance should produce in thee such change,
> My love! (III, 773-81)

He willingly accepts his responsibility and his duty and he then expresses what Norton B. Crowell describes as "one of his noblest statements of sympathy for the hurt and the poor, and indirectly a description of the stuff of poetry."[9]

> ... Warped souls and bodies! Yet God spoke
> Of right-hand, foot and eye--selects our yoke
> Sordello, as your poetship may find!
> So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
> Their foolish talk; we'll manage reinstate
> Your old worth; ask moreover, when they prate
> Of evil men past hope, "Don't each contrive,
> Despite the evil you abuse, to live?--
> Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,
> His own conceit of truth?

He believes that God selects the "poet's yoke," and the artist must accept his yoke and fulfill his purpose. Browning's immediate yoke is to console symbolically this poor prostitute and "reinstate" her old worth; in general terms, his duty is to compel the audience to reconsider its easy condemnation of those that the world rejects and ignores. Even the evil man "past hope" has his idea of what is truth and good. All his dishonest conduct is the way by which he seeks what he takes to be his good. Browning is making the point that every man however despicable has a sense of self, a viewpoint on the world, and the right to have it taken into account. If we were to convert this thought into

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[9]Crowell, p. 145.

Christian terms, it would be that every man had a soul, and receives the attention of God.

Browning, in direct voice, continues to expound the direct and immediate nature of his sympathy for mankind. He emphasizes looking beyond the pride and deception of man to see the good therein. He says:

> ... 'All men appear
> To think all better than themselves, by here
> Trusting a crowd they wrong; but really,' say,
> All men think all men stupider than they,
> Since, save themselves, no other comprehends
> The complicated scheme to make amends
> --Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance,
> Good labours to exist. (III, 797-804)

Man is capable of deception and hypocrisy but good still exists, even though evil and ignorance surround it. Man is worthy of love because of this inherent good. Often "the mugwort ... conceals a dew drop safe" (III, 815); often there "flounders" in each man "a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ / In unexpanding infancy" (III, 983-84), and often "What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint" (III, 989).

Browning expresses the belief that none of us really understands the purpose of human life. He compares this life to a machine we are merely fitting together to work in another existence.

> The scope of the whole engine's to be proved;
> We die: which means to say, the whole's removed,
> Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin,--
> To be set up anew elsewhere, ...
> (III, 849-53)

It is, however, the poet's duty to guide us in this existence by making us see what we have not observed for ourselves.

> So occupied, then, are we: hitherto,
> At present, and a weary while to come,
> The office of ourselves,--nor blind nor dumb,
> And seeing somewhat of man's state,--has been
> For the worst of us, to say they so have seen;
> For the better, what it was they saw; the best
> Impart the gift of seeing to the rest ...
> (III, 862-68)

The poorer poet will simply describe what he sees; the better poet presents life in a general sense, as it appeared to him. The best poet makes man see what he sees; he brings out the deeper significance of the world which would never be seen without the poet's aid. In all three categories, although the poet is limited by the extent of his vision and his ability to communicate that vision, Browning stresses the duty of the poet towards mankind. He particularly stresses the duty of the third category, the "Makers-see" (III, 929), whose vision enables mankind to glimpse the Infinite.

> ... Meanwhile where's the hurt
> Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,
> At whose defection mortals stare aghast
> As though heaven's bounteous windows were slammed fast
> Incontinent? Whereas all you, beneath,
> Should scowl at, bruise their lips and break their teeth
> Who ply the pullies for neglecting you.
> (III, 928-34)

Before completing his direct remarks to his audience, Browning again emphasizes the direct and immediate nature of

his sympathy for mankind, and he renews his dedication to humanity. He admits that suffering humanity has inspired him to finish his poem:

> Dishevelled form, wherein I put mankind
> To come at times and keep my pact in mind,
> Renewed me (III, 969-72)

In this section of the poem, Browning has defined his function and responsibility. He has rejected the isolated world of Goito, and the artist in the ivory tower who devotes himself to nature, art and beauty. He has also rejected inaction, introspection, and assumption of intellectual superiority and consequent hubris. The world and humanity must provide subject matter and inspiration for the artist, and the artist has a responsibility towards God and man. Browning's responsibility or "yoke" is to promote understanding and compassion for man. Specifically, he chooses humanity with its flaws and evils as his subject, and he makes his audience look beyond the surface and the obvious, to see the good in all men. Browning believes that through this subject and through the world, he can aspire to the Infinite and become what he describes as a "Maker-See" (III, 929). Most importantly, in this section, Browning has defined the role and purpose of the artist; this definition determines his subject matter and allows for unity and conviction in his work.

In the last three books of this poem, Sordello becomes aware of the plight of humanity, and he comes gradually to

believe that the Guelf Cause, the cause led by forces of the Pope, is in the best interests of the people. Despite his new-found sympathy for mankind, he still fails in his duty as an artist. He recognizes his duty but his approach is half-hearted. There are still elements of intellectual pride, flattery of self, and he still uses his art to promote himself and to display his superiority, rather than alleviate the suffering of mankind. He later attempts to use his art as a kind of political oratory, and he lacks conviction and power. Although he has espoused the cause of suffering humanity and the masses, he is not willing to give himself selflessly to the people. His dedication is not complete and he remains an ineffective, isolated artist.

The movement in The Fourth Book is from introversion and self-absorption to society and an awareness of the human condition. This becomes evident when Sordello walks through war-torn Ferrara and meditates on the destructiveness of war and the misery of the people of Ferrara.

His first specific realization is that the fate of so many people and their suffering, victimized state is the result of the ambitions and power of a few. The author comments on what Sordello observes:

> Reckon that morning's proper chiefs--how few!
> And yet the people grew, the people grew,
> Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
> More left behind and most who should succeed,--
> Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,

> Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,--
> Mingled with, and made veritably great
> Those chiefs ..... (IV, 217-224)

The masses serve as stairs by which the few mount to greatness, and these same masses never ponder seriously what might be wrong. Despite their "passive and disposed of, uncared for" condition (IV, 229), they remain "smiling." Later in the poem, as Sordello looks at the opposing forces, the Guelfs and the Ghibellines,[10] he comes to the realization that this war is nothing more than a difference of opinion as to how man's happiness can be best secured. Sordello observes:

> ..... 'Behold
> The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
> O' the contest!--Which of the two Powers shall bring
> Men good, perchance the most good: ay it may
> Be that! the question, which best knows the way.
> (IV, 317-321)

The strife between Pope and emperor was like a "confused shifting sort of Eden tale" (IV, 304). Each faction sees the other as evil personified. The image surrounding the Pope suggests that traditional religion has inhibited and stunted man's growth and progress. The pontiff is described as

> One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
> Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound
> Some saving tree ... (IV, 312-14)

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[10] The parties of Northern Italy which support Emperor Frederick II, who was excommunicated by Pope Honorius the third. The forces supporting the Pope were the Guelfs. See David Duff, An Exposition of Browning's Sordello (Edinburgh: Wm. Blackwood and Sons, 1906), pp. 3-8.

The Kaiser is described as the avenging angel who will dislodge the serpent. Both institutions, church and state, or Pontiff and Kaiser, ultimately exploit mankind and wreak misery, as the suffering masses of Ferrara can testify.

Sordello now realizes that he should have thought about man first and he should have taken man's wants, which he now beholds very clearly on all sides, as his own, and only after his duty to man is fulfilled should he concern himself with the revelation of the rare qualities of his own soul. He realizes the extent of his former self-absorption:

> While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,
> Behoved him think of men, and take their wants,
> Such as he now distinguished every side,
> As his own want which might be satisfied,--
> And, after that, think of rare qualities
> Of his own soul demanding exercise.
> (IV, 265-70)

He now feels bound to serve and save mankind and he realizes that by saving man, he will save himself.

> He felt now in their toils, theirs--nor could leave
> Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,
> Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool!)
> Had never ever entertained the thought
> That this his last arrangement might be fraught
> With incidental good to them as well,
> And that mankind's delight would help to swell
> His own. (IV, 274-281)

Inspired by such compassion and altruism, Sordello decides to consult with the Ghibelline general, Salinguerra, and to convince him of the rightness of the Guelf cause.

The artist confronts the general who represents the world, power and authority. The narrator contrasts the two--

general and artist, and, in every area, Salinguerra is superior. His appearance is youthful, despite his "sixty years," and his presence is powerful and compelling, and as vital as the "spray of fire" from the sunlight that flashes on his armour. In contrast, Sordello is "lean, outworn and really old" (IV, 421). In the ability to communicate, Salinguerra speaks Greek, knows "arabic lore" (IV, 600) and "Strung the angelot" (IV, 612). In comparison, Sordello is "a stammering awkward man that scarce dared raise / His eye before the magisterial gaze" (IV, 422-23). In this world of action, the artist is reticent and powerless, and Sordello comes away "blind, mute / And deaf, like some fresh mutilated brute ..." (IV, 334-35). His knowledge of Ghibelline policy has oppressed him deeply. More importantly, Sordello does not feel enough passion for the suffering poor of Ferrara, or for the Guelf cause to express his views to Salinguerra. Consequently, he does not have the conviction or the dedication to compensate for his inadequacies as an artist. Therefore, lack of experience and difficulty with language render the artist <u>blind</u>, <u>mute</u> and <u>deaf</u>. He is powerless and ineffective as an artist.

There is another example in Book The Fourth of Sordello's unwillingness to devote himself completely to the people. On his return to Ferrara, he is asked by the war-stricken victims to lighten their burden and "drive bad thoughts away" (IV, 360) by a song. He fulfills the task

unwillingly, since his concern for his safety overrides any concern for the poor:

> He had been happy to deny, this time,--
> Profess as heretofore the aching head
> And failing heart,--suspect that in his stead
> Some true Apollo had the charge of them ...
> (IV, 365-68)

Even though he has supported the Guelf cause, he is not willing to give himself selflessly to the people. This Book concludes with a soldier suggesting to Sordello a ballad about a former great consul of Rome. This prompts Sordello to consider an ideal government modelled on the former greatness of Rome, and he resolves to erect a government based on the rights and wishes of the people. He will now turn to political oratory.

Book The Fifth begins with Sordello's realization that an ideal state cannot be built from the human material he surveys in his walk through Ferrara. He sees humanity as callous, degraded beings, and his mood is one of dejection and misery. A "voice" intrudes and tells him why he has failed:

> ... Sordello, wake!
> God has conceded two sights to a man--
> One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
> The other, of the minute's work, man's first
> Step to the plan's completeness: What's dispersed
> Save hope of that supreme step which, descried
> Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
> Only to give you heart to take your own
> Step, and there stay, leaving the rest alone?
> (V, 84-92)

Sordello's emphasis on the ideal and his yearning to realize, or give expression to, the ideal immediately account for his failure in certain areas. Progress, the voice informs, is slow and gradual, and there is a wide gap between the comprehensive vision and actual reality. Sordello's emphasis on ideals, intellect and high aspirations--his hubris--has prevented him from any actual achievement; all he has done is to dream of and to attempt, unsuccessfully, to visualize the Infinite. He is bounded by his flesh, the world, time and the language. The voice bids him to acknowledge his affinity with man and to use his ability to improve the lot of suffering humanity. He can no longer live in his former world of imagination and ideals. The voice advises:

> But all is changed the moment you descry
> Mankind as half yourself, then, fancy's trade
> Ends once and always: how may half evade
> The other half? Men are found half of you
> (V, 250-53)

He is challenged to prove to himself how his ideals and fancies can help mankind.

> ... make proof
> Of fancy,--then, while one half lolls aloof
> I' the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top--
> See if, for that, your other half will stop
> A tear, begin a smile! (V, 257-61)

The people of Ferrara desperately need help, and the voice advises him to perform his duty to mankind by persuading Salinguerra to join the Guelfs.

In his second interview with Salinguerra, Sordello fails to convince Salinguerra of the rightness of the Guelf cause. His speech does not have passion or conviction, since it is not linked to his purpose or the cause of suffering humanity. There is not a bonding of speaker and thought.

> Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
> Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
> Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.
> (V, 332-34)

He breaks from his "yoke," and he still wishes to display his superiority and amaze his audience by his powers.

> Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,
> His inmost self at the out-portion peeped,
> Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those
> Appealed to, curious if her colour rose
> Or his lip moved ... (V, 341-45)

Salinguerra remains indifferent to his speech and commments that he sees "couplet-making jars / With common sense" (V, 410-11). Motivated by the scorn of Salinguerra, Sordello then articulates the purpose and power of the poet.

He expresses the belief that "A poet must be earth's essential king" (V, 506). He has the power to affect the world by intellectual means alone. He can also impart the gift of seeing to other men.

> ... how much can mortals see
> Of life? No more than so? I take the task
> And marshal you Life's elemental masque,
> Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
> This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
> All ordinary hues that softening blend
> Such natures with the level. (V, 582-88)

In this situation, however, Sordello's art is ineffective and he does not win Salinguerra to the Guelf Cause. Instead, Salinguerra sees him as a performer, and he realizes he can use Sordello as part of his plan for a whole new campaign for the House of Romano and leadership of the Ghibellines. Salinguerra realizes:

> ... The least help
> Would like the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp.
> His neck is broad enough--a ready tongue
> Beside: too writhled--but, the main thing, young--
> (V, 715-18)

He throws the "Imperial Baldric" on Sordello's neck and declares him to be head of the House of Romano and the Ghibellines, since he is betrothed to Palma. Salinguerra declares that "he would make Sordello that and more" (V, 731). In a sudden moment of vision, however, Salinguerra and Sordello recognize one another as father and son:

> Up in the midst a truth grew, without speech.
> And when the giddiness sank and the haze
> Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,
> Sordello with the baldric on, his sire
> Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire
> Momently; (V, 742-47)

Palma now tells Salinguerra that Ecelin's wife, Adelaide, on her death-bed, confessed that Sordello was Salinguerra's son who did not die at birth, as Salinguerra believed, during a siege in Vicenza. Adelaide, for her own ambitious reasons, had concealed Sordello's rescue and she had him hidden from the world at Goito. After the initial shock of recognition, Salinguerra immediately makes plans for the

making of a mighty power, independent of Guelfs and Ghibellines. He has been given purpose and motivation, now that he has found his son and he is no longer content to dedicate all of his skill and intelligence to the service of the Emperor Friedrich. Sordello is overwhelmed by the intensity and strength of Salinguerra and by the political choices that now lie open to him. The effect of this discovery and the knowledge of his father weaken him. He "rose--tried to speak, then sank" (V, 799). He is left alone by Palma and Salinguerra to consider the power and prestige offered him by his father. He wears the emperor's badge on his neck as he now considers the prospect of his becoming Chief of the Ghibellines.

The young poet is now faced with having to choose between honor, glory and the acclaim of the people or the Guelf cause which he sincerely believes represents the best interests of suffering mankind. The conflict is symbolically between the artist's serving political and materialistic ambitions and consequent acclaim, and dedicating all his powers and abilities to what he perceives as the higher cause, the service of humanity. If he chooses the former, he will have power, acclaim and honor, and he may even have the means to effect change in the lives of people. He will, however, have surrendered his poetic integrity. To abandon the Guelf cause, the cause he believes most sincerely repre-

sents the needs of mankind, is to abandon the quest and duty of a poet which he had so eloquently quoted earlier. He will no longer affect the world by intellectual means. Commitment to this cause, however, means continued frustration and isolation. This struggle of Sordello results in his death, "the victim of his warring emotions."[11] He rejects Salinguerra's offer of authority and power by trampling underfoot the badge of Salinguerra. The reader assumes that his final choice was the people.

Although the Victorian audience could accept the idea of death induced by stress, it is possible that Browning meant for Sordello's death to have symbolic meaning. In the last three books of the poem, Sordello is presented as physically weak. In Book The Fourth, the narrator comments on the aged appearance of Sordello and when Sordello has his first interview with Salinguerra, he emerges from the meeting "older by years / Than at his entry" (IV, 332-33). In Book The Fifth, he is described as "a puny uncouth ailing vassal" (V, 417). Salinguerra describes Sordello to Palma as her "pale friend" (V, 715), and in the scene of recognition between Salinguerra and Sordello, Palma removes Salinguerra's "iron arms" (V, 885) from Sordello's "shrinking shoulders" (V, 886). After this scene, Sordello is speechless and too weak to move from the chamber.

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[11]De Vane, p. 84.

This physical waning may be representative of his artistic powers waning, because of the misdirection of his powers and purpose as an artist. In Book The Third, Sordello becomes aware of the world and suffering humanity but he never fully responds to this world. In a detached, uninvolved manner, he observes the wretched state of humanity and he sees himself as a superior being who can save mankind by his oratory and his ability to change Salinguerra's ideas and plans. Also, in his interviews with Salinguerra, he is interested in display of his excellence and power; in his last interview he comments on the superiority of the poet as "earth's essential king" (V, 506). In spite of his expression of purpose and definition, Sordello has not recognized his function as an artist. He has not discovered that his purpose is the recognition of the reality of God's world and that, as an artist, he must observe, recognize and reproduce the God-like element in all things. In Book The Sixth, Browning in his own voice tells Sordello why he struggled and why he failed. He says:

> Ah, my Sordello, I this once befriend
> And Speak for you. Of a power above you still
> Which, utterly incomprehensible,
> Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
> Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man--
> What need! And of--none the minutest duct
> To that out nature, nought that would instruct
> And so let rivalry begin to live--
> But of a power its representative
> Who, being for authority the same
> Communication different, should claim

> A course, the first chose but this last revealed--
> This Human clear, as that Divine concealed--
> (VI, 590-602)

Sordello had need of God and of earthly object to represent God and claim his service. In the human, the artist can discover the divine. Sordello has searched for the divine within himself. When Sordello is therefore put in a position of making a choice between political power or representation of the people, suffering humanity, there is recognition of failure as an artist. In the first choice, he would be misusing his power; he would be a political pawn of Salinguerra. In the second choice there is realization that he has not developed the compassion and understanding acquired through observation and interaction with the world. He is unable to represent the world. Therefore, h s death represents his failure as an artist in the world.

Throughout the poem, Sordello is an alienated figure. In his days at Goito, he loses himself in a world of art and beauty, and he aspires to spheres of time, expansions of soul and perceptions of the universe which are beyond the temporal and the physical. When a yearning for something more sets in, Sordello moves to society and becomes very isolated from ordinary man. He assumes God-like superiority and comprehension, having God's "large" answers, and his attitude is one of indifference and disregard for man. He is, therefore, out of harmony with mankind and society. When

he becomes aware of his need for a force outside of himself which can control his intellect and direct his perceptions, he turns again to society. He is still not able to realize his limitations nor is he willing to represent the physical and the world. Even when he decides to represent suffering humanity, he is not able to free himself from his self-centeredness or his desire to display his superior powers. His commitment to humanity and his sympathy for mankind are not intense enough to become the sole inspiration and the controlling force of his work, and he is not able to fulfill his duty to God and to man. His tragedy is summed up in the image of the hero trying to "fit to the finite his infinity" (VI, 499); consequently, throughout the poem, he is an isolated ineffective artist.

Browning had resolved his dilemma regarding the position and duty of the poet in society. He had answered the important questions of the artist's duty to God, to man, and to himself. The artist has a responsibility to society and Browning emphasizes that artists like Sordello work in purposeless isolation. The artist's inspiration must come from society, and his work must be directed toward understanding man and society. In Browning's case, he urges compassion and understanding for all of men, especially the rejected and the unfortunate, and he attempts to make men see through his work what they would have previously ignored. Through expressing and encouraging compassion and love for man, the

artist fulfills his duty to God; it is through the world and man, the finite, that the artist can best develop his talents and aspire to the Infinite. These ideas become more obvious when one studies the artist figures of Browning, particularly the artist in the ivory tower. This artist figure is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

ART AS OPPOSED TO LIFE

In order to demonstrate the importance of the ideas and conviction expressed by Browning in Sordello as to the artist's function in society and responsibility to God and man, I have chosen specific poems from Browning's early and middle work which focus on the artist. The two poems discussed in this chapter deal with the artist in the ivory tower. A study of these poems indicates that these artists work in meaningless isolation. They are either not aware of suffering humanity or they have rejected humanity because of its vulgar tastes and demands, as perceived by the artist. Without an awareness of, and dedication to, suffering humanity, the artist is isolated in an ivory tower where he may succumb to notions of superiority and to an intellectual and ineffective moral isolation.

The two poems which illustrate Browning's theory of art and isolation, during this period of his career, are Section II of Pippa Passes, which centers on the artist figure, Jules, and "Pictor Ignotus" in Dramatic Romances and Lyrics. One artist responds to life; the other withdraws from life. The subject matter and imagery in each poem reflect that choice and reveal the opposing philosophy of each artist.

The second scene of Pippa Passes centers on the young French sculptor, Jules, and his bride Phene. The young sculptor has been isolated from the real world for so long that he is able to view reality only in terms of art. The impression of lifelessness dominates and the reader is forced to question if art can and should be created in a world so removed from actual life. How effective is art created in an ivory tower?

Surrounded by books and statues, Jules contemplates Phene's beauty. His inability to respond to the human is suggested in the terms and images used by Jules to describe Phene. He compares her face to a flower and the harmony of their married life is described in terms of an artificial modelling position or pose. The inertness and passivity of the much later "Andrea del Sarto" is foreshadowed in the following lines:

> ... you by me,
> And I by you; this is your hand in mind,
> And side by side we sit: all's true.
> (II, 10-12)

Jules sees her as a possession, a sculpture, rather than a person, and he considers her position in this static world. He wonders "Where must I place You?" (II, 16). His admission that "once / This roomful of rough block-work seemed my heaven" (II, 16-17) indicates the extent of his removal from the real world.

The static nature of his world and the sterility of his work are reflected in his surroundings. He describes the inanimate objects of his story--"a Coluthus, writ in red" (II, 39), "this Odyssey in coarse black vivid type"(II, 43), an "Almaign Kaiser" (II, 50), and his vision of Phene captured in sculpture and myth, "Hippolyta / Naked upon her bright Numidian horse" (II, 54-55). He even sees his bride's gaze as being "like my very life's-stuff, marble-marbly / Even to the silence" (II, 80-81). He tells Phene that before he found her, he lived totally in a world of art. He admits:

> ... 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.
> (II, 81-86)

He tried to interpret everything in nature in terms of the human form. The fruit on the bough resembled "rosy limbs" (II, 90), and a "cleft rose-peach" becomes a "Dryad" (II, 92). This practice reveals the isolation of his world, since he sees natural objects as human forms. It reveals too his belief that he can improve on nature through his concepts of life as revealed in art.

His belief that he can improve on nature through art and that art is superior to life is evident in his description of his abilities and powers. He boasts of "the stuff one can be master of" (II, 93) and his power "to divine

their capabilities" for his use. The imagery of "soft-rinded smoothening facile chalk" (II, 95) and "crisp imperious steel" (II, 98) reinforces his idea of his mastery in these materials. His contention that "marble!--'neath my tools / More pliable than jelly" (II, 100-101) can be worked by his tools to "Lay bare those bluish veins of blood asleep" reveals his belief that through his art, he can bring life to the inanimate. The language and images here describe marble as being superior. It is "Some clear primordial creature" (II, 102) from which "all baser substance may be worked" (II, 104). The artist believes that marble has the compactness of the diamond, the hardness of metal, and the qualities of flesh which are hidden until revealed by the artist. He even ascribes the quality of fire to marble, since flame "lurks" and "Flashes and glowings radiate and hover" (II, 112) around it. Language which ascribes qualities of life and heat to marble indicates how removed the sculptor is from the world of the flesh and the physical. He is involved with his medium and absorbed in his art to the point where he blurs art and reality.

Jules, however, is quickly brought down to earth by the speech of Phene. Despite her being caught up by Jules' enthusiasm and idealism, and her desire to stay with him, isolated "above the world" (II, 129), she repeats a set speech which reveals the cruel deception of his friends and her role in this deception. His friends have, by means of

sham letters which they have concocted between them and sent Jules, as coming from the girl he loves, led him to believe she was a cultivated woman. Her speech reveals that she is a prostitute and he has been tricked into marriage by his malicious fellow students. Jules reacts as reason dictates by flinging his gold to Phene and vowing to avenge himself on these cruel deceivers. The song of Pippa, however, brings forth a nobler impulse and he sees beneath the visible surface and recognizes the true moral worth of Phene and her need for him. His response to Phene brings about a change in his attitude to art and life.

Jules first realizes his power over Phene. His power to bestow a soul upon her is paralleled to his power to bring form to a lifeless block of marble. He states:

> Look at the woman here with the new soul,
> Like my own Psyche,--fresh upon her lips
> Alit, the visionary butterfly,
> Waiting my world to enter and make bright.
> Or flutter off and leave all blank as first.
> 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:
> Now, it will wake, feel, live--or die again!
> (II, 288-97)

Phene was passive in her environment as the marble was pliable in Jules' hands. Now Jules can bring meaning and love to her life. By deciding to reject traditional modes of revenge and conduct, Jules turns to Phene, and to life. For the first time, he questions the superiority of life to art. He asks:

> 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!
> (II, 298-300)

His ownership of a "new soul" applies to more than Phene. In his case, it is his response to humanity. He sees Phene as a human form he can discard and ignore, or a human form he can save and infuse with a soul. Jules, the artist, has looked beyond surface beauty and its possibilities as a subject for his art. He sees instead into the human soul and another dimension is added to his art. His preoccupation with creating forms out of "unshaped stuff" (II, 298) has been replaced by compassion and love and a knowledge that he can draw forth the soul and the spiritual from the physical.

Jules, in his decision to accept and help Phene, has turned from his world of art, with its statues and imitations of mythological and classical figures, to a world of humanity and life. He seems to realize that only by experience and response to life can he produce meaningful art. His admission that "I wanted silence only; there is clay / Everywhere" (II, 307-08) indicates his knowledge of his previous removal from life, and his knowledge now that life is art. His breaking from the past is suggested as well in his command to Phene to stand aside so that he can "break these paltry models up / To begin Art afresh" (II, 317-18).

In this poem, Browning emphasizes life and experience and the artist's need to become involved with mankind.

Browning emphasizes also the need for both the spiritual and the physical. The artist has the power to elevate the physical and the earthly to a spiritual intellectual level. This power is demonstrated by Jules's effect on Phene. His words, his ideas and ideals, and ironically enough, not his statues, have the power to draw forth her finer instincts--her soul. She states:

> ... I believe, all sin,
> All memory of wrong done, suffering borne,
> Would drop down, low and lower, to the earth
> Whence all that's low comes, and there touch and stay
> -Never to overtake the rest of me,
> All that, unspotted, reaches up to you,
> Drawn by those eyes! What rises is myself,
> Not me the shame and suffering; but they sink,
> Are left, I rise above them. Keep me so
> Above the world! (II,130-139)

Jules, the artist, has enabled a common street-girl to rise above her sordid environment and her past. The presence of this little street-girl and the song of a little factory worker have awakened the artist so that he can respond to the physical and to suffering humanity. However, it is the artist's response to the world and the physical, to life, which gives dimension and depth to his art, and enlarges his ability to evoke the spiritual. Emphasis on either the spiritual or the physical alone leads to sterility and lifelessness; Jules in his isolated studio, and Phene in a world of prostitution, were each emphasizing one side of their nature, Jules, the spiritual, and Phene, the physical. The blending of both the spiritual and the physical is needed

for completion, and the conclusion of the poem suggests the artist's acknowledgement of the physical and his harmony with life and the universe.

> Like a god going through his world, there stands
> One mountain for a moment in the dusk
> Whole brotherhoods of Cedars on its brow
> And you are ever by me while I gaze
> --Are in my arms as now--as now--as now!
> (II, 321-325)

Jules's break from tradition is suggested in Part IV by the Monsignor who comments on Jules and his rejection of the church as his patron. He quotes Jules's letter:

> "He never had a clearly conceived Ideal within his brain till today. Yet since his hand could manage a chisel, he has practised expressing other men's Ideals; and in the very perfection he has attained to, he foresees an ultimate failure; .... There is but one method of escape: confiding the virgin type to as chaste a hand, he will turn painter instead of sculptor, and paint, not carve, its characteristics."

Jules has totally abandoned his previous notions and past traditions of art. He has responded to his impulse towards original creation by deciding to work in a new medium, Paint. Instead of conformity and past tradition, originality will dominate. He has broken out of his isolation and responded to humanity. For him life has become art, and whether he is able to recreate life by art in the new medium of painting is not important. What is important is his realization that art cannot be created in an isolated environment, removed from the world.

In the publication of Dramatic Romances and Lyrics, published in 1845, the poem "Pictor Ignotus" appears. This poem is a study of the artist who has chosen to reject the physical world and to work in isolation. The result of this isolation is uninspired work and total ineffectiveness, as an artist. There is a comment, as well, on the inability of the artist to evoke the spiritual by ignoring the physical.

This rejection of the world and isolation by the artist is presented on the most obvious level as the decision of the artist who has refused to compromise his standards or the purity of his art by catering to the demands of his audience. However, his assertion of self-imposed isolation in preference to exposure and violation of his art by a vulgar public is not totally convincing. Neither is his assertion that he can respond to the physical world as well as some contemporary artist who is so popular. A closer reading of the poem reveals no empathy or sympathy for man and hence, no actual response to the physical world. If anything, a disdain and contempt for man and the world are revealed, and it is probably this dislike, or distrust, or fear, which has caused him to isolate or alienate himself. The compassion for suffering humanity, as emphasized by Browning in Book The Third of Sordello, is absent, and the artist seemingly takes refuge in ideas of superiority. The mental isolation of Pictor Ignotus is reinforced by the images of physical entrapment and retreat.

Although the speaker asserts in the opening line of the poem that he has the ability to paint as well as the young artist being praised[1], the remainder of the poem does not lend substance to his assertion. He boasts:

> And, like that youth ye praise so, all I saw,
> Over the canvas could my hand have flung,
> Each face obedient to its passion's law,
> Each passion clear proclaimed without a tongue;
> (13-16)

He immediately continues to describe such passion in abstract terms, and in traditional terms associated with medieval painting. Passions are interpreted almost as allegorical personifications, and there is lack of vitality and physical energy, as demonstrated in the artist's assertion of his ability to capture the passion of humanity:

> Whether Hope rose at once in all the blood,
> A--tiptoe for the blessing of embrace,
> Or Rapture drooped the eyes, as when her brood
> Pull down the nesting dove's heart to its place;
> Or Confidence lit swift the forehead up,
> And locked the mouth fast, like a castle braved,
> (17-22)

These lines reveal the artist's preference for mild and vapid art which deals with the abstract. He places little emphasis on the physical or the concrete. The reader doubts if such art, if ever produced, would have any effect on an audience.

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[1]The 'youth' of the poem, the artist being praised, may be Raphael. See Paul F. Jamieson, "Browning's "Pictor Ignotus, Florence 15-," in the Explicator XI (November, 1952), Item 8.

In spite of the artist's present isolation, he reveals his desire to have an audience who will accept him with love and enthusiasm. The idealistic nature of his expectations is evident in the following lines:

> Nor will I say I have not dreamed (how well!)
> Of going--I, in each new picture,--forth,
> As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
> To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South or North,
> Bound for the calmly-satisfied great State,
> Or glad aspiring little burgh, it went
> Flowers cast upon the car which bore the freight,
> Through old streets named afresh from the event,
> Till it reached home, where learned age should greet
> My face, and youth, the star not yet distinct
> Above his hair, lie learning at my feet! (25-35)

When this artist is exposed to the real world, he is shocked, and the reader gradually becomes aware of this artist's inability to accept the world on any terms other than his own. His view of the world as coarse and paganistic is revealed:

> ... Glimpses of such sights
> Have scared me, like the revels through a door
> Of some strange house of idols at its rites!
> This world seemed not the world it was before ...
> (41-44)

His concept of the aesthetic and refined superiority is contrasted with the world's brutality and coarseness, as suggested in the following lines:

> ... Though I stooped
> Shrinking, as from the soldiery a nun,
> They drew me forth, and spite of me ... enough!
> (47-49)

The harsh exposure and judgement of his work he sees as a kind of rape, and the thought of his work possessed by such

unappreciative people repels him. The assumed superiority of the artist, the unworthiness of the acquisitors of his art, and most importantly, this artist's disdain and contempt for common humanity, are revealed in the following comment:

> These buy and sell our picture, take and give,
> Count them for garniture and household-stuff,
> And where they live needs must our pictures live
> And see their faces, listen to their prate,
> Partakers of their daily pettiness,
> Discussed of,--'This I love, or this I hate,'
> 'This likes me more, and this affects me less!'
> (50-56)

An artist possessing this attitude towards men, annoyed by "their faces," "their prate" and "their pettiness," and an artist who bemoans the fact that his pictures must live among such common beings, hardly sees suffering humanity as the fitting subject for his work. The result of such rejection of man and such notions of artistic superiority is total alienation. Art produced in such isolation is uninspired, and lifeless, and doomed for decay. The concluding lines and images of this poem reinforce the theme of death in life, decay, failure and futility.

The images of "the sanctuary's gloom" (63), "the silence of the shrine" (65), his paintings "blackening in the daily candle-smoke" (66) as "They moulder on the damp wall's travertine" (67) suggest the environment of a tomb. The abstract, substanceless nature of his present world is emphasized in his description of his art:

> These endless cloisters and eternal aisles
> With the same series, Virgin, Babe and Saint
> With the same cold calm beautiful regard,
> (59-61)

The lack of inspiration and the lifelessness of his art are impressed on the reader.

The environment of a gloomy, damp church and the artist's own admission that his pictures will "surely, gently die" (69) indicate that his work will inspire no one. This traditional approach to art is not successful in inspiring men to higher ideals, for his work remains unseen, in a church where "mid echoes, the light footstep never woke" (68). The present lifeless impersonality of his art is a far cry from using his "gift / Of fires from God" (5-6) to paint pictures like those of the youth who is presently acclaimed. Yet, in the final lines of the poem, the poet addresses a series of rhetorical questions to this youth:

> O youth, men praise so,--holds their praise its worth?
> Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
> Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?
> (70-72)

Pictor Ignotus is suggesting that the acclaim of the world and contact with the world contaminate the purity of the artist and his work. He contends that the purity and totally aesthetic nature of the artist's vision and work can only be preserved in seclusion or in an environment conducive to art alone. Now the trumpet's cry has become harsh and the purity of water has become stained with flecks of earth. If, however, Pictor Ignotus's criticism of his con-

temporary is correct, he is still without victory. Even if his work has the purity of vision absent in the youth's, it is still totally ineffective, since it is doomed to decay and death; by the artist's own admission no audience will ever pay attention to his work.

The closing lines and the whole tone of the poem suggest an artist who has been too timid to face the world and to develop his potential. This decision not to develop this talent he professes to possess has resulted in alienation from self. The lines "O human faces, hath it spilt, my cup? / What did ye give me that I have not saved?" (23-24) have an obvious Biblical reference to the overflowing cup. Both George Bornstein[2] and Loy D. Martin[3] see in these lines an allusion to the parable of the steward who buried his talent in the ground (Matthew 25). The pictor has preserved his talent or artistic ability by refusing to display his art to the public. He has failed to use his talent for the good of the public, or even for his own fulfillment. The denial of his own talents and ability has therefore alienated him from authentic being and meaningful existence. Therefore, the frustration of his meaningless work and the insignificance

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[2]George Bornstein, "The Structure of Browning's 'Pictor Ignotus,'" Victorian Poetry, 19 (1980), 69-70.

[3]Loy D. Martin, Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press Ltd., 1985), pp. 36-37.

of his existence are reflected in the poem's images of tomb-like enclosure and entrapment.

This study of Part II of Pippa Passes and "Pictor Ignotus" is a further example of the belief expressed in Sordello that the artist must respond to life, and draw on life for subject matter. Browning shows in these poems that the artist isolated from society cannot produce work which is meaningful either to the audience or to himself. In the case of Jules in Pippa Passes, the artist who responds to suffering humanity acquires purpose and inspiration, and the artist, again in the example of Jules who awakens Phene's moral sense or soul, has fulfilled his purpose by moving his audience to action. The artist who emphasizes the aesthetic alone cuts himself off from humanity, and his work may result in sterile traditionalism. As in the case of Pictor Ignotus, the aesthetic may eventually find his world confining and lifeless. He may even find that in his preoccupation with the aesthetic and the spiritual, he has failed to develop some aspect of his own person and his own talent. As Pictor Ignotus now produces his series of monotonous paintings for endless cloisters and eternal aisles, he becomes similar to a mass-producer; the only difference is that he rejects any commercial or mercantile control of his craft.

The point made in these two poems is that the artist who emphasizes art for art's sake is removed from the world

and man which is his true area of study and subject matter. Consequently, he will never fully develop his talents or aspire to the Infinite, and he will have little, if any, influence on the world. As an artist, he is ineffective.

The artist who turns to the world may, however, encounter difficulty. Without the right purpose and inspiration, this artist may be as isolated from the world as the artist in the ivory tower. This topic is the study of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THE ARTIST AND THE WORLD

The difficult position of the artist is further outlined in two of Browning's greatest dramatic monologues, "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," from his volume, Men and Women, published in 1855. The central characters of both monologues turn to the world and the physical, but both artists experience entrapment and intense isolation.

Andrea del Sarto, the first artist of study in this chapter, is like Sordello when he performs for his public in Mantua, or when he attempts to influence Salinguerra for the Guelf cause in Book The Fifth of Sordello. He is performing and he needs the approval and support of his audience. His dedication is not to the world or man and he is not moved by ideas or ideals which are selfless. Like Sordello, Andrea del Sarto uses his artistic talents for promotion of self, display of his superiority or excellence, or for selfish gain. Specifically, Andrea del Sarto turns to the world for support and approval, "allowing his choice of subjects to be determined by the market."[1] He loses the spiritual element and ideal he once possessed and he no longer strives for the Infinite. His art is used instead for personal and selfish

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[1]Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry, p. 111.

gain; he has no great dedication or interest in humanity or in promoting understanding and sympathy for humanity. An artist of this category gradually becomes isolated on many levels. He eventually exists without purpose, pride or achievement, since his worldly goals and gains gradually become meaningless. He realizes that he has sacrificed his talent for all the wrong reasons. He has failed as an artist in his duty to himself, to man and to God, and the result is intense isolation.

The second artist, Fra Lippo Lippi, is a contrast to Andrea del Sarto. Instead of displaying his talents and winning the approval and support of his public and his superiors, Fra Lippo Lippi attempts to be true to his artistic vision and to the purpose of art as he perceives it. He is a keen observer of man and the world, and he sees the physical world as a manifestation of God. It becomes obvious from the monologue that he has the power to move his audience to action and that his intention is to make men see the beauty and the wonder of the world and its creator. He believes that art which is true to life, to the world and the physical, can inspire men to a higher spiritual reality. His vision and his purpose, however, place him in conflict with established artistic and religious authority and he finds himself rejected and isolated on a social, moral and artistic level. He does not conform to accepted conventions and subject matter in art any more than he remains true to

his vow of celibacy. He rebels against accepted beliefs and traditions and he becomes an outsider who belongs neither to the night watch of Florence nor to the Cloister of the Carmines. Often the artist with vision and message, like the prophet of old, is rejected and ignored by the public he wishes to serve. Even though he has the ability to make men see the spiritual and the Infinite in the finite, he is not heeded. He remains a lonely isolated observer of man and the world, with message and vision which his public will not heed.

The monologue "Andrea del Sarto" is a study of isolation experienced in many levels of the artist's life. The first and most obvious example of this isolation is in his relationship with his wife, Lucrezia. The reader becomes aware of the troubled relationship of husband and wife from the opening lines of the monologue, as Andrea del Sarto bargains with his wife for a rare moment of communication.

> But do not let us quarrel any more,
> No, my Lucrezia; bear with me for once:
> Sit down and all shall happen as you wish. (1-3)

As the monologue continues, the bargaining nature of the relationship is emphasized, and Lucrezia is presented as the centre of his life and the major reason behind his decision to use his artistic talents for material gains. In the present, he agrees to pay for the "cousin's freak" by doing a number of paintings. He impresses upon her that if she would sit by him more often, then he "should earn more, give

you more" (207). He reminds her that he left the French Court of King Francis and sacrificed his golden days as an artist because she had "grown restless" (166) in Florence and urged his return. He nobly proclaims that his love for this woman overrode all desire to develop his ability as an artist. He states very simply: "You called me, and I came home to your heart" (172). He realizes, however, that her love for him was not permanent, as he tries to rationalize his failure to hold her heart.

> The triumph was--to reach and stay there; since
> I reached it ere the triumph, what is lost?
> (173-75)

His failure as a husband is made obvious as the monologue progresses. The series of questions about the cousin arouses the reader's suspicion, until gradually it becomes obvious that Andrea del Sarto knows he is a cuckold. The questions, "That cousin here again? he waits outside? / Must see you--you, and not with me? (220-21) ah, but what does he, / The Cousin! What does he to please you more?" (241-43), reveal his awareness that he is not the centre of Lucrezia's life.

He is now rejected by the nobility of King Francis's Court, a society which formerly applauded his work. He admits to Lucrezia his present attempts to avoid such society:

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

He prefers their ignoring him to any form of acknowledgement--"The best is when they pass and look aside" (147). The reader does not realize the reason for such avoidance of society until the closing moments of the monologue, when del Sarto admits to having stolen the gold of King Francis in order to build his present melancholy "little house," a house" built to be so gay with" (212-13), and as Andrea del Sarto discloses the information, the reader is inclined to believe that all was done for the love of Lucrezia. Edward Berdoe believes:

> Not only for her did he forsake the higher art ambitions, but the common ground of honesty; he descended to cement his walls with the gold of King Francis which he had stolen and for her.[2]

In the same kind of casuistic method, Andrea del Sarto makes Lucrezia responsible for his failure to develop his talent. It is she who has failed to give him "soul." If she had urged "God and the glory / Never care for gain" (128), then he might have achieved artistic greatness. If she had "brought a mind" (126) with her "perfect brow / And perfect eyes, and more than perfect mouth" (122-23), then he might have reached the levels of Agnolo or Rafael. He says "I might have done it for you" (132).

Despite these rationalizations, he briefly admits truth in the comment, "Besides, incentives come from the

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[2]Edward Berdoe, The Browning Cyclopaedia (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1949), p. 18.

soul's self/ The rest avail not" (134-35). Even though he hastily moves from this truth to a comment on the contradictory nature of man, he repeats the same idea in his admission of the importance of the will. He concedes "the will's somewhat--somewhat, too, the power--and thus we half-men struggle" (139-40). It is this comment which best reveals the essence of Andrea del Sarto's character. He has become a half-man because he lacks the will and the incentive to be the great artist he claims he could be. Instead of aspiring to "embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth,"[3] del Sarto has been concerned mainly with pleasing the "many below him." He is not impelled or motivated by any force or inspiration beyond immediate public admiration and praise. Although he realizes the larger purpose of the artist, as will be discussed later in this chapter, he has chosen to use his artistic talent to promote his own excellence and to impress his audience for his own ends. Because of this attitude and approach, del Sarto emphasizes public approval of his work.

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[3]See Robert Browning, "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley," in The Complete Works of Robert Browning, ed. Roma A. King, V (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1981), p. 138. Browning emphasized the duty of the poet to strive for the Infinite. He states "not what man sees, but what God sees--the Ideas of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divining Hand--it is toward these that he struggles."

Even in del Sarto's golden days at Fontainebleau, the approval of the court and of his patron were of major importance. He recalls:

> I surely then could sometimes leave the ground,
> Put on the glory, Rafael's daily wear,
> In that humane great monarch's golden look,--
> One finger in his beard or twisted curl
> Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
> One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
> The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
> I painting proudly with his breath on me,
> All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
> Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
> Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,--
> (151-61)

It was the public admiration that most appealed to him and kept his hand "plying." The use of his artistic talent to win awards and respect is indicated in his description of Lucrezia waiting amidst the nobility to "crown the issue with a last reward" (164). The remark of Agnolo to Rafael which complimented del Sarto's work is remembered by the artist--"I have known it all these years" (185), although he has not chosen to tell Lucrezia. Such cherishing of praise belies the earlier comment of the artist who claims to be "unmoved by man's blame / Or their praise either" (91-92). In the present, he pleads with Lucrezia, to "hear at least when people speak" (56) about his art, and he points out to her the popularity of certain of his paintings--"the cartoon, the second from the door / --It is the thing, Love" (57-58). He reminds her of "the Legate's talk last week / And just as much they used to say in France" (65-66). All

such comments are in praise of his work and it becomes obvious that he needs such acclaim. His perceptions of the world are "in reference to the many below"[4] and it would seem that his paintings coincide with "what man sees" and not "what God sees." His standards are dictated by what other people will approve. Emphasis on such forces outside of himself to validate the worth of his art makes one question the intensity and originality of his vision.

Because he seeks the approval of the world, he allows his art to become a commodity of the marketplace. This becomes evident in the opening lines of the monologue when the artist agrees to work for Lucrezia's friend, and to allow this friend to dictate the terms of the bargain. He can "Treat his own subject after his own way, / Fix his own time, accept too his own price" (6-7). The artist has no control over his art, for he merely produces what the customer desires. He sees himself as a mere "craftsman" and his work is now the result of practical skill. He admits:

> At any rate 't is easy, all of it!
> No sketches first, no studies, that's long past
> (67-68)

Del Sarto has lowered his work to the level of unthinking mechanical production. When he agrees to work for Lucrezia's friend, he emphasizes quantity and completion

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[4]Browning, "An Essay on Percy Bysshe Shelley," p. 138.

of a contract as quickly as possible. Quality and pride in one's art are not mentioned. He says:

> I take the subjects for his corridor,
> Finish the portrait out of hand--there, there,
> And throw him in another thing or two
> If he demurs; the whole should prove enough
> To pay for this same Cousin's freak.
> (235-239)

These lines indicate that his art is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. Later, in the poem, he triumphantly boasts of having painted two hundred pictures, again emphasizing the importance he places on quantity and production. His art has degenerated into a means of paying gaming debts or buying a "ruff" for Lucrezia.

The artist whose work is influenced by public approval and the demands of the marketplace has established his goals and his boundaries, and instead of striving for the Infinite, he emphasizes form and technique or exterior qualities which will impress the viewer. Andrea del Sarto's emphasis is on perfection of outline and form, as indicated by his awareness of the flaws in the art of the Urbinate:

> That arm is wrongly put--and there again--
> A fault to pardon in the drawing's lines
> Its body, so to speak: its soul is right ...
> (111-13)

He realizes, however, that this artist captured soul, the quality his art lacks. He recognizes and admits that artists, less perfect technically than he, can often reach heights undreamed of by him. Such an artist is attempting to fulfill his larger purpose or duty to God and man. By

striving towards expression of the Infinite, the artist attempts to raise man to a higher spiritual level through his art. Although such artists may not be successful, their "less is more" (78), for del Sarto concedes:

> There burns a truer light of God in them,
> In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain,
> Heart, or whate'er else, than goes on to prompt
> This low-pulsed forthright craftsman's hand of mine.
> (79-82)

It is the striving of the artist for expression of the Infinite which is important, for that striving often grants the artist a glimpse of the Infinite, a glimpse he may or may not be able to reproduce in his art. However, the striving will produce the quality of "soul" which del Sarto so envies in the work of the Urbinate. It is this realization of truth which makes Andrea del Sarto so tragic, as he admits:

> Their works drop groundward, but themselves, I know
> Reach many a time a Heaven that's shut to me ...
> (83-84)

The importance of aspiration is again emphasized in the lines, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp, / Or what's a Heaven for?" (97-98). In comparison with the artists who strive, Andrea del Sarto admits he has settled for so little in his work. Mediocrity and lack of passion permeate his art. He describes it as "silver-grey / Placid and perfect" (98-99). The perfection of form he has achieved is not a reflection of any vision of Infinite perfection he has glimpsed.

Richard D. Altick comes to very much the same conclusion regarding the artist and his aspiration to the Infinite. He says:

> True fulfillment in art occurs not in the creation but in the creator. This act of striving, stirred by the "truer light of God ... / In their vexed beating stuffed and stopped-up brain, / Heart or whate'er else," results in no tangible evidence of success, but in an experience as supernal and ineffable as that of Lazarus or the mystics.
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> We have, then, the paradox that the closer a work of art comes to physical perfection, the wider the gap that separates it from true, or spiritual, perfection; and so with the artist himself. Perfection, as Browning asserts so often in his poetry, may be beyond the possibility of human achievement, but ceaselessly to struggle toward it is the impulse and deed that distinguishes man from beast, and artist from mere craftsman.[5]

Del Sarto no longer strives or struggles, and he knows that he no longer has the ability to attempt expression of the Infinite. He laments his condition in the lines:

> But all the play, the insight and the stretch--
> Out of me, out of me! (116-17)

He has chosen the world and has responded to its demands; he has used his talent to promote himself. Consequently, he has denied his aspiration and his integrity as an artist. He is now imprisoned within self-made boundaries and within his consciousness and perceptions as an artist. The many

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[5]Richard D. Altick, "Andrea del Sarto: The Kingdom of Hell is Within," in Browning Men and Women and other Poems, ed. J.R. Watson (London: Macmillan Press, 1974), p. 232.

images of enclosure dominating his work and his world emphasize this entrapment and isolation.

The artist's view of the world is from a window that looks "forth on Fiesole" (15). The narrowness and constriction of this view are evident in his description:

> There's the bell clinking from the chapel-top;
> That length of convent-wall across the way
> Holds the trees safer, huddled more inside;
> (40-43)

The aspirations of his life, his youth, his hope, his art have been "all toned down / To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole" (38-39). He visualizes the limits of his role in the world:

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

His concept of Divine Providence is expressed in terms of control and enclosure. He says:

> ... 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!
> (49-52)

These lines indicate how far removed he is from the Infinite, for he perceives God as limiting and restricting. These lines indicate too his knowledge that he has failed in his duty as an artist to aspire to the Infinite. He excuses himself through rationalization.

His admission of the superiority of aspiring artists is presented in contrasts of freedom and enclosure. Other

artists "reach" and "enter" and "take their place" in Heaven, while del Sarto visualizes Heaven as "shut" to him; he can only "sit here" on earth. Only at the court of King Francis was it different, for then he "could sometimes leave the ground" (151). This imagery of enclosure even extends to del Sarto's vision of life beyond death, as the artist visualizes another chance to prove himself on one of the

> Four Great Walls in the New Jerusalem,
> Meted on each side by the angels' reed,
> For Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo and me
> To cover ... (261-64)

His relationship with Lucrezia is described in terms of enclosure. His time with her will be paid for with money he will "shut" into her "small hand." His assumption of masculine protection is presented in an image of closure.

> Your soft hand is a woman of itself,
> And mine the man's bared breast she curls inside.
> (21-22)

His decision to abandon King Francis for Lucrezia is described in a simple image of security and restriction: "You called me, and I came home to your heart" (172). He attempts to prolong the evening, and he expresses an invitation which suggests confinement and restriction:

> Come from the window, love, come in, at last,
> Inside the melancholy little house
> We built to be so gay with. (211-13)

Andrea del Sarto imposed limitations on his art and his ability at some point in his past. Those limitations have permeated his whole being and now his vision of his world

and his work is as enclosed and limited as his art. Loy D. Martin makes much the same comment:

> Andrea is enclosed within the prison of himself and cannot "reach" as other painters do, whether towards others or towards God.[6]

The monologue concludes with an image of a man who has failed on every level--husband, subject, artist. His only claim to fame, which he mentions at the end of the monologue, is his two hundred pictures. But this is little comfort to him since he is left alone to sit "The grey remainder of the evening out" (227), and to fantasize about another chance in another life to prove his worth as an artist. Even his fantasies about another chance in Heaven to redeem himself as an artist by working beside "Leonard, Rafael, Agnolo" (263) on one of the "Four Great Walls in the New Jerusalem" (261) are destroyed because he recalls "There's still Lucrezia,--as I choose" (266). At the end of the monologue, he is still using Lucrezia as the reason, past, present and even future, for his failure as an artist. Ironically, the symbol and object of del Sarto's devotion and sacrifice deserts him for the mysterious "Cousin," and he is left isolated and alone. The artist who emphasizes the world and uses his talent for personal benefit and acclaim is eventually left without purpose, pride or

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[6]Loy D. Martin, Browning and The Dramatic Monologue (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 141.

achievement. Del Sarto has lost the respect and love of Lucrezia, for whom he claims to have sacrificed his ability and his opportunity to develop this ability. He has used his talent not for the good of man but for his own advancement. He is now alone, surrounded by his "two hundred pictures" (256). Most tragic of all is his realization that he can no longer even aspire or reach towards God through his art. He can merely produce two hundred technically perfect paintings without passion or soul. He is now isolated from God and from man, and the reader feels a strong pity for the artist because of his realization of emptiness and failure.

Roma A. King says of this monologue:

> Nowhere does Browning work more surely than in this poem. Nowhere does he create a more fully realized character, a more nearly self-contained poem. "Andrea del Sarto" comes close to Browning's objective to create "things" rather than to write thoughts about them.[7]

The total picture of Andrea del Sarto as a sad, lonely figure is created by Browning in many ways, and the personality and character of del Sarto is revealed on many levels. The use of symbol and image is important in this poem. Lucrezia, for example, the dominant symbol in the poem, on one level represents the central love and the reason for sacrifice in the artist's life. The reader sees her as the exploiting,

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[7]Roma A. King, The Focusing Artifice, pp. 104-105.

half-attentive listener. On another level, she represents the deficient quality in Andrea's work; "her perfect brow / And perfect eyes and more than perfect mouth" (122-23) are representative of his emphasis on perfect form, and her soulless beauty eventually represents his art. She is also a symbol of the emptiness which Andrea comes to accept about himself.

The character of this marketplace artist is suggested by the emphasis on color and by the language of the marketplace. The colors of gold and grey are used to suggest the artist's denial and betrayal, as he sells out to the marketplace. His golden days at Fontainebleau represent the highest point of achievement. The "golden look," "gold chain," "fire of souls" are replaced by the gold of Lucrezia's hair, and his life changes until he becomes a grey "twilight piece." Grey suggests the emotional state of the artist. He is without color and life, and his work, like his life, is monotonous and boring. The marketplace terms, "worth," "pay," "gain," "reward," "price," "money," "profitless," suggest that his work has degenerated into a commodity and that he places a price on most things, including his wife's affection. The autumn setting suggests a decline of life, and the waning power of the artist.

Structurally, as Roma A. King points out, Browning's syntax reveals the emotional and intellectual instability of

del Sarto.[8] The character is hesitant, insecure and dependent on the will of others, as suggested by the numerous sentence fragments "many times containing only substantives and few or no verbs."[9] The following examples with their substantives and lack of verbs reveal the hesitant, passive nature of this artist:

> But all the play, the insight and the stretch--
> Out of me, out of me! (116-17)

> That Francis, that first time
> And that long festal year at Fontainebleau!
> (149-50)

> One finger in his beard or twisted curl
> Over his mouth's good mark that made the smile,
> One arm about my shoulder, round my neck,
> The jingle of his gold chain in my ear,
> I painting proudly with his breath on me,
> All his court round him, seeing with his eyes,
> Such frank French eyes, and such a fire of souls
> Profuse, my hand kept plying by those hearts,--
> (154-161)

Indicated here too in the syntax is the artist's tendency to reminisce and to justify past decisions and choices. As Roma A. King points out, "Andrea's is not a searching mind attempting to discover truth but a timid one afraid of discovering too much."[10] Consequently, he does not think or speak in direct statement any more than he faces or admits how he has compromised his artistic talent. He speaks in

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[8]Roma A. King, The Bow and The Lyre, pp. 11-31.

[9]Roma A. King, p. 23.

[10]Roma A. King, p. 22.

"segmented brief independent clauses frequently not syntactically related to a larger unit or complex sentences consisting of introductory independent clauses followed by one or more subordinate clauses."[11] The following examples of this syntax indicate his indirect approach to life:

> ... I could count twenty such
> On twice your fingers, and not leave this town,
> Who strive--you don't know how the others strive
> To paint a little thing like that you smeared
> Carelessly passing with your robes afloat,--
> Yet do much less, so much less, Someone says,
> (I know his name, no matter)--So much less!
> Well, less is more, Lucrezia: I am judged.
> (71-78)

> 'T is safer for me, if the award be strict,
> That I am something underrated here,
> Poor this long while, despised, to speak the truth.
> (142-44)

The interpolations, the exclamations also suggest his indirect approach and his tendency to disjointed musing and reminiscence. The following syntactical examples indicate this approach:

> So! Keep looking so--
> My serpentining beauty, rounds on rounds!
> --How could you ever prick those perfect ears,
> Even to put the pearl there! Oh, so sweet--
> My face, 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 ...
> (25-32)

> To Rafael's!--And indeed the arm is wrong.
> I hardly dare ... Yet, only you to see,
> Give the chalk here--quick, thus the line should go!
> Ay but the soul! he's Rafael! rub it out! (194-97)

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[11] Roma A. King, The Bow and The Lyre, p. 23.

The overall impression created by the syntax of the poem is that of a defeated, passive individual who does not want to realize or admit the extent of his failure as an artist. The reader becomes very aware of the price this artist has paid for so called material success. He has denied his integrity and his responsibility as an artist by ignoring the Infinite and seeking the approval of the world. The effect of the world has now destroyed him.

The second artist, Fra Lippo Lippi, is a contrast to Andrea del Sarto. Instead of seeking the approval of the world through a display of his talent, he attempts to be true to his vision of the world and his purpose as an artist. His adherence tc such vision and purpose puts him in direct opposition to the world, and his artistic ability is stifled and condemned by the world. Fra Lippo Lippi perceives that higher reality is manifested through the appearances of the world. The artist's use of the physical world can draw his audience to God and the spiritual by making man aware of the beauty of the world and of its Creator. The vision of the artist and his aspiration to the Infinite, in the example of Fra Lippo Lippi, are maintained and developed through the world, for he has the ability to interpret the world and give it spiritual meaning. Yet the world rejects this artist on a social, moral and artistic level.

The immediate evidence of his having "broken bounds" (224) is his seizure by the city's night guard. He is

returning from an alley, "where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar" (6), and, for a monk who has taken a vow of celibacy, he is in a very compromising situation. The skillful adept handling of this awkward situation reveals the quickness and sparkle of Fra Lippo Lippi, and an analysis of the opening lines of the monologue and the initial remarks of this monk reveal the monk's directness and confidence. Unlike del Sarto, he speaks with command and strength.

The first two lines of the monologue, "I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave! / You need not clap your torches to my face," indicate his assertiveness and authority. He thinks the watch should know him and he resents being halted and treated like a common criminal. His use of the oath "zooks" (3) is unexpectedly sacrilegious for a monk and he uses the word for effect and emphasis of his anger. He quickly establishes his man-of-the-world attitude by indicating his awareness of "sportive ladies" who "leave their doors ajar" (6) here in this alley. He then sets the watch on the defensive by answering that "The Carmine's my cloister" (7) and suggesting that if they are so keen on suppressing prostitution, then they should raid the whole district. The implication is that they should not bother him. He sarcastically recommends:

> Do,--harry out if you must show your zeal,
> Whatever rat, there, haps on his wrong hole,
> And nip each softling of a wee white mouse,

> Weke, weke, that's crept to keep him company!
> Aha, you know your betters? (8-12)

The implication here is that this Red Light District is maintained and supported by people of importance and the watch does not interfere. There is also the implication that the "rats" they arrest might prove to be eminent citizens. He warns the guard that he is also one of their betters. He warns "know me likewise" (14) and he then makes his point by casually mentioning that he is lodging with "Master--a ... Cosimo of the Medici, / I' the house that caps the corner" (17-18). The mention of this powerful name implies that the watch should release Fra Lippo Lippi immediately, and there is warning in the comment "You were best" (18). The monk now has the watch on the defensive and he maintains his advantage by pompously lecturing the captain on the behaviour of his men:

> But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
> Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
> Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
> And count fair prize what comes into their net?
> (21-24)

It is obvious he is offered an apology by the captain, "Why, sir, you make amends" (26), and Fra Lippo now reaches for a small bribe which would probably have been tactless to offer before. He offers them a quarterflorin to drink "to the health / Of the munificent House that harbours me" (28-29). Having established a connection with authority, he then invites the captain, in a man-to-man fashion, to "sit and

set things straight now, hip to haunch" (44).

Browning has compressed a remarkable amount of information into less than fifty lines of poetry. He has established the vigour and zest of Fra Lippo and his spontaneous response to life and its experiences, even in a situation as potentially embarrassing as this one. Most importantly, the reader is made aware of Fra Lippo's understanding of human nature as he skillfully manipulates his would-be arresting officers. This situation prepares the reader to accept Fra Lippo's version of his childhood, and to believe in the powers of observation he acquired during this period of his life. In the words which follow, the monk indicates how he happened to be in his present situation. He also tells of his background and his becoming a member of a Religious Order. As he does so, he reveals his ideals and philosophy which are at odds with his religious community and with his position in society.

He describes the restriction which exists in his present life. He has been shut in his "mew" for three weeks, and his only occupation is "a-painting for a great man, saints and saints / And saints again" (48-49). In this stifling room, he is overcome by spring-fever and the need for fresh air. Hence, he broke bounds to follow the noises of a carnival, and to satisfy carnal desire within him. He explains:

> ... three slim shapes,
> And a face, that looked up ... zooks, sir, flesh
> and blood,
> That's all I'm made of! (59-61)

He cannot resist the world, and he realizes that the guard condemns him for this lack of discipline; he knows how society views such actions:

> Though your eye twinkles still, you shake your
> head--
> Mine's shaved,--a monk, you say--the sting's
> in that! (76-77)

He defends his behaviour by explaining how he became a monk. At an early age, he was orphaned and discarded by society. He describes his situation:

> I was a baby when my mother died
> And father died and left me in the street.
> I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
> On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
> Refuse and rubbish, (81-85)

He is brought to a monastery and given food, his "first bread that month" (92). The boy's quickness becomes very obvious for when he is asked by the Head of the order, "Will you renounce" (96), he thinks far ahead of the pompous and slow-spoken monk. He not only perceives the end of the question, "'the mouthful of bread?' thought I" (96), but he also extrapolates the next step--that he has the choice of 'renouncing' the world or renouncing food. In return for his renouncing the world, he received

> ... the good bellyful,
> The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
> And day-long blessed idleness beside! (103-05)

Slightly later in the poem, however, Fra Lippo comments

on the unfairness of forcing a child to make such weighty decisions.

> You should not take a fellow eight years old
> And make him swear to never kiss the girls.
> (224-25)

However, because of immediate security, the boy renounced the world and the flesh. This discipline of the religious order now contradicts the monk's instinctive response to life, a response that had already been determined by his struggle for survival in the streets. This response eventually became the shaping force of his art. In the street his existence depended on how well he could read everything and everyone around him to know who would offer him food and who would "curse and kick him" (116). His response to reality was heightened by his suffering. As Fra Lippo says,

> Why, soul and sense of him grow sharp alike,
> He learns the look of things, and none the less
> For admonition from the hunger pinch. (124-26)

These powers of keen observation became obvious in the young artist's abundant drawings of the faces observed in the street. These drawings were done on copy books, walls, benches and doors. Later on, when Fra Lippo Lippi was commissioned to decorate a church wall, the pent-up energy and creativity of the artist were released, and his power of observation put to use.

> ... My head being crammed, the walls a blank,
> Never was such prompt disemburdening.
> First, every sort of monk, the black and white,

> I drew them, fat and lean; then, folk at church,
> From good old gossips waiting to confess
> Their cribs of barrel-droppings, candle ends,--
> To the breathless fellow at the altar-foot,
> Fresh from his murder, safe and sitting there
> (143-50)

His keen observation and his awareness of detail produced art so true to life that the other monks immediately saw resemblances to life. They exclaim:

> ... 'That's the very man!
> 'Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
> 'That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
> 'To care about his asthma: it's the life!
> (169-72)

The artist's perceptions of the world and the accuracy and realism of his drawings alarm his superiors.

Most monastic orders insisted on renunciation of the world because it was associated with the physical, the flesh and the devil. Fra Lippo, however, responds sensually and joyfully to the world, since he sees the world as created by God and therefore, good. He is an observer of the beauty of the world, beauty created by God. He comments:

> ... you've seen the world
> --The beauty and the wonder and the power,
> The shapes of things, their colours, lights and shades,
> Changes, surprises,--and God made it all! (282-85)

He sees beauty and meaning in the world and the flesh, since it is God's creation. He comments:

> If you get simple beauty and nought else,
> You get about the best thing God invents
> (217-18)

> I always see the garden and God there
> A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,

> The value and significance of flesh
> I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards.
> (266-69)

As he explains to the captain of the watch that the physical world in all its forms and shapes was created by God for man, he suggests that man should be thankful for the world and its beauty:

> ... Do you feel thankful, ay or no,
> For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
> The mountain round it and the sky above,
> Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
> These are the frame to? (286-90)

Consequently, this world and its beauty is to be "wondered at" (292) and dwelt upon. Since it is created by God, the artist-monk believes it should be recreated in art as accurately as possible.

> ... paint these
> Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
> God's works--paint anyone, and count it crime
> To let a truth slip. (293-96)

Fra Lippo believes it is the responsibility of the artist to awaken men by reproducing the beauty of the everyday world. He observes:

> For, don't you mark? 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;
> (300-04)

Art can thus awaken men to the beauty of the physical world, and Lippo believes that the gift and vision bestowed on the artist should be shared and given to others. As he says, "Art was given for that; / God uses us to help each other

so, / Lending our minds out" (304-06). He boasts to the captain of the watch that just as he could with a bit of chalk make him notice his "cullion's hanging face" (307), he could, if he were permitted by authority, make men see so much more that they have previously ignored. He asks the rhetorical question,

> ... How much more
> If I drew higher things with the same truth!
> That were to take the Prior's pulpit-place,
> Interpret God to all of you (308-11)

Through the accuracy of his art, he could awaken man to an appreciation and awareness of the world which reflects the power and beauty of its Creator. Man's response to and appreciation of the world is an indirect response to the spiritual, and Fra Lippo believes that indirectly through his art, he can lead man to an awareness of God.

This belief separates the monk from his religious community, and when he expresses this philosophy in his art, it is rejected by his monastic superiors. They demand a traditional approach to art, especially religious art, and they emphasize the conventions and subjects which they believe inspire man to the spiritual. Fra Lippo is told to imitate the work of "Brother Angelica" or "Brother Lorenzo," and to ignore realism in art. He is warned:

> Your business is not to catch men with show,
> With homage to the perishable clay,
> But lift them over it, ignore it all,
> Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.
> (179-82)

He is ordered instead to "paint the souls of men" (183), but when these same authorities try to describe the soul, they are confused.

> Man's soul, and it's a fire, smoke ... no, it's not ...
> It's vapour done up like a new-born babe--
> (In that shape when you die it leaves your mouth)
> It's ... well, what matters talking, it's the soul!
> (184-87)

Fra Lippo Lippi is admonished to "Give us no more of body than shows soul!" (188), and to follow the example of Giotto "with his Saint a-praising God," (189), which is undoubtedly meant to inspire the observer to praise of God. Realism in art, according to conventional theory, distracts the viewer and blocks any spiritual awareness; the monk is ordered to ignore the world and to emphasize the spiritual:

> Why put all thoughts of praise out of our head
> With wonder at lines, colours, and what not?
> Paint the soul, never mind the legs and arms!
> (191-93)

Two opposing responses to life are evident here and these responses dictate an approach to art. Fra Lippo Lippi is ordered to deny his perception of reality, and he is expected to inspire men to God through art which ignores the world, a world which the monk believes reflects the beauty and wonder of its Creator. The artist-monk is also required to deny what he believes is the function of art and the duty of the artist.

In his description of the power of art, Fra Lippo seems to embody the ideals of the highest class of poet as

described by Browning in Book The Third of Sordello. Browning says of the highest class, the "Maker-see" (III, 929): "The best / Impart the gift of seeing to the rest" (III, 867-68). Fra Lippo Lippi sees his responsibility as imparting the gift of seeing to others. The supreme duty of the artist, as he sees it, is to awaken man, to make him see the wonder and beauty of the world around him. As Fra Lippo understands, the end of art is appreciation and understanding, not action. In his present situation, he must produce art that instills obedience and conformity, and his superiors approve of art which incites emotions of anger and fear, as in the case of Fra Lippo Lippi's painting of Saint Laurence. They also approve of art which encourages men to the formal act of prayer, as established by the church. Art should remind men to "remember matins" (318) or to "fast next Friday" (319). As Fra Lippo says, "a skull and bones, / Two bits of sticks nailed crosswise ... does as well" (320-22). Such art does not make man aware of a higher being; rather it encourages conformity and obedience to established authority.

Fra Lippo Lippi's position is one of compromise, as he paints saints and madonnas for the authorities. The final section of the poem shows this compromise. He plans to make amends for his night of revelry by doing a painting for Sant' Ambrogio's. He describes this painting of ethereal subjects:

> God in the midst, Madonna and her Babe,
> Ringed by a bowery flowery angel-brood
> Lilies and vestments and white faces ...
> (348-50)

The absence of concrete images, the abstract nature of the painting, in contrast to the monk's previous vivid description of the world, reveal his cynical attitude to traditional artistic convention. Such a painting will atone for his transgressions as the church defines them, but he will have inspired no one to an appreciation of the world and God--the spiritual. The church will merely have gained "a pretty picture" (383).

Such compromise is not without cost and Fra Lippo admits to pain and frustration:

> ... so I swallow my rage
> Clench my teeth, suck my lips in tight, and paint
> To please them (242-44)

His present night of rebellion is but an expression of his inner anger:

> And I do these wild things in sheer despite
> And play the fooleries you catch me at,
> In pure rage. (252-54)

The artist-monk's life has become one of surface denial of everything he instinctively accepts, and the pain of such contradiction is obvious from the following comment:

> 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 (261-64)

In this series of paradoxes, Fra Lippo describes how he is forced by society and artistic convention to deny his basic

beliefs and convictions about life and art; this denial results in a life of pretension and frustration. The contradiction and compromise of the monk became very evident in the final image of Fra Lippo Lippi turning his back on the dawn and the world, and hurrying to his "mew" in the House of the Medici.

The image of this artist retreating from the world is very moving, since everything about him suggests an observation and response to the world. Fra Lippo's love of life and of the world is obvious even from the syntax of this poem. Structurally, as Roma A. King emphasizes, the syntax of this poem reveals the strength and force of Fra Lippo and the intensity and conviction of the ideas he wishes to communicate to his audience.[12] Unlike del Sarto, he is neither hesitant, passive, nor uncertain.

The opening lines of the monologue, for example, dominated by declarative sentences and exclamations indicate the strength and personality of the speaker:

> I am poor brother Lippo, by your leave!
> You need not clap your torches to my face.
> Zooks, what's to blame? You think you see a monk!
> What, 't is past midnight, and you go the rounds,
> And here you catch me at an alley's end
> Where sportive ladies leave their doors ajar?
> (1-6)

He is direct and outspoken in his confrontation with the guard and he assumes a control he does not have as he issues

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[12]Roma A. King, The Bow and The Lyre, pp. 32-51.

a series of commands:

> The Carmine's my cloister: hunt it up,
> Do,--harry out, if you must show your zeal,
> (7-8)
>
> ... Then, you'll take
> Your hand away that's fiddling on my throat,
> And please to know me likewise. (12-14)
>
> Remember and tell me, the day you're hanged,
> How you affected such a gullet's-gripe!
> (19-20)

The many short sentences indicate the quick thinking of the monk and his mental alertness. This is particularly obvious in the beginning of the monologue when he manipulates his way out of a compromising situation. Even though he is dealing with a situation, he is always observing.

> Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
> And count fair prize what comes into their net?
> He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
> Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
> Lord, I'm not angry! (23-27)

Often in this monologue, Fra Lippo breaks off from his thought or argument to make an observation on a subject for his art.

> .... I'd like his face--
> His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
> With the pike and lantern,--for the slave that holds
> John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
> With one hand ... (31-35)

Such interjections indicate the spontaneity and intensity of the artist. Unlike del Sarto, Fra Lippo dos not emphasize perfection of form; instead, he responds to life and sees in it the perfect subjects and models for his art.

Unlike the monologue of Andrea del Sarto with its substantives and participles, Fra Lippo's speech contains many active verbs. Within the first ten lines, he uses "clap," "see," "go," "catch," "hunt," "harry out," "haps," "nip." There is nothing passive about this monk, for the many active verbs suggest the eagerness and urgency of his speech and his desire to communicate. His urgency to communicate is also revealed in his use of colloquial speech and one-syllable words. Expressions like "zooks," "Boh, you were best," "Lord, I'm not angry," "Bid your hangdogs go," and one-syllable colloquial words like "mum," "crib," "funked," "gag," "hips to haunch" reveal his desire to communicate with the ordinary man. The syntax, the diction of the poem reveal a man with bounce, vigour and zest for life. He has an urgency to communicate with the world and to share his vision of the world.

However, an artist with such passion and conviction and power of observation is forced to retreat to the traditional role of the monk and the world of conventional art. He retires from the physical world to the seclusion expected of an ascetic.

Although the conclusion emphasizes how difficult it is for the artist to maintain his vision and integrity within a society which has expectations and established roles for the artist, Fra Lippo Lippi articulates the function of the artist in the world. In his energetic, observant manner, he

comments on the need for the artist to interact with the world. The isolation of the Carmine Cloister or the confinement of his patron's house does not produce effective subject matter or inspiration for his art. His occasional escapes from such isolation are his attempts to join the world, for Fra Lippo realizes that art must reflect close, sympathetic observation of the world and man. He believes that the duty of the artist is to reproduce his view as accurately as possible so that other men can share his vision and understanding of the world. The artist's observations and reproductions are his attempt to understand, explain and evaluate the meaning of the world to others. In Fra Lippo's case, he presents his vision of the world as meaningful and good, and man has the good fortune to live in the world. He wants to make men see God's power and beauty in the physical world around him.

Both monologues, "Andrea del Sarto" and "Fra Lippo Lippi," conclude with images of loneliness and isolation. The artists, though, are isolated for very different reasons. Andrea del Sarto conformed and catered to the tastes of the world. He tried to please the public and he conformed to the demands of society, thereby losing his vision of the spiritual or the Infinite. Even his will to aspire to a higher level is affected. His artistic ability is used for material and physical gain, and he pays the price of discontent with what he feels is mediocre art. His world

brings him no fulfillment. Fra Lippo Lippi challenges the standards and values of his world by his vision and observation. Because of his originality, he finds himself in opposition to convention and tradition; Fra Lippo is isolated because he is ahead of his time. Because of society and a variety of circumstances--childhood poverty, the asceticism of the church, his belonging to a monastic order--he is trapped. In many ways, Fra Lippo is representative of the artist who is well ahead of his time and is thus opposed and rejected by the establishment.

The first artist has betrayed his talents and sold out to the world; he has brought his isolation on himself. The second artist has tried to fulfill his duty to the world; because of time and circumstances, the world is not ready for him. He returns, at the end of the monologue, to isolation and seclusion but it is not of his choosing. The approach of both artists to the world is well represented in the concluding image of each poem. One artist looks out at the world; the other artist retreats unwillingly from the world.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Beginning with the assumption that many artists of the Victorian period were uncertain about their role and function in the Victorian world, I have in this study first briefly investigated the conditions, physical, social and spiritual which would give rise to such feelings of isolation and uncertainty. I have then looked at society's expectations of the artist during this time and suggested that Robert Browning was unsure of his position in a society that demanded that the poet be Prophet and Hero. His early works in particular reveal the uncertainty and doubt of the poet as he struggled to define purpose and to find form which best suited his ideas and expression.

The second chapter examined the early work Paracelsus in which Browning outlined what would be the major ideas of his later work. This poem revealed that the young artist was struggling to define purpose and, in particular, it revealed certain assumptions and ideas of Browning regarding service to humanity. His main character, Paracelsus, is striving to help mankind and is idealistic, but his quest is flawed by his emphasis on intellect, his attitude of superiority and his rejection of the world. When he is later motivated to turn to the world and his fellow man, he misunderstands his purpose in the world and he sets out to amaze

and astonish his public by his knowledge and ability, and gradually he becomes contemptuous of the stupidity and ignorance of his audience. Only at death does he envision man's ultimate perfection and the importance of man's place in the scheme of Divine Creation. Browning is aware intellectually of the need for compassion and understanding towards his fellow man, and he also indicates the need for interaction with the world, but he is uncertain how to direct his compassion for man or how to communicate with the world. He is unable to blend form and content, and his communication in this poem is a series of philosophical statements spoken by his characters. Consequently, his work lacks conviction and force.

Chapter three examined the major work of Browning's early period, Sordello. In this poem Browning has as his central character an artist whose development he traces from isolation in a world of beauty and nature to alienation in a world of man and society. The first three books of this poem examine mainly the position of the artist who believes that his function is to develop to the full his aesthetic powers and to exclude the world. Browning examines the artist's lack of purpose in this world and the artist's need for human contact and experience. He also shows the danger of the artist assuming intellectual superiority and God-like comprehension. Such isolation and self-centeredness result in the artist's rejection of man and the world. Even when

the artist-figure of this poem moves to society and first gets caught up in the acclaim of the world, he is unable to express his vision and perceptions to his audience; he does not have the experience and knowledge of the world to communicate in concrete terms and images. Even though such an artist may presume to have broad vision and understanding of the Infinite, his insight is of little use since his audience cannot understand him.

In the last half of Book The Third of Sordello, Browning, in direct voice, articulates what he believes to be his own responsibility and function as an artist. The rareness of this comment must be emphasized since Browning seldom speaks in his own voice. Here, however, he draws the reader's attention to his setting and the time and to the fact that he is speaking directly and sincerely to his reader about his art and his purpose. Clearly, he meant this statement to be a declaration and acceptance of his role and responsibility. This responsibility is broad and all-encompassing, as Browning sees it. His duty is to serve all of mankind, and specific examples chosen by Browning illustrate his belief that all of mankind is worthy of sympathy, and love and certainly worthy of the artist's attention. Browning chooses as his inspiration those scorned and rejected by society and he emphasizes the deep compassion and sympathy he has for all of mankind. He believes that the duty of the artist is the study of the world and man-

kind; he must observe and interact with the world so that he can understand and appreciate it. Through this observation and appreciation, he can evaluate, explain and maybe even interpret the meaning of the world to man. Through his art, he must enable man to see what he has previously ignored.

Having described his purpose and responsibility, Browning then studies the artist Sordello who fails to fulfill the artist's role and function, as just defined and outlined by Browning. The main character moves into the world and he observes the suffering and misery of the people he meets. He is concerned with the plight of the people, and he wishes to alleviate their suffering. He does not, however, have full compassion and understanding for the people and he cannot represent their cause since he lacks conviction and dedication. He seeks any opportunity to display his powers of excellence and at one point, he resorts to political oratory, thinking that he can effect political change. His death is symbolically the death of the artist who, despite his intentions, has not directed his faculties of observation and understanding towards mankind. In Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott," the artist must view reality through the mirror of her imagination, and she is unable to observe the world directly. Sordello has not used his powers of observation and he is unable to participate in the world directly. Consequently, he has not developed his talents for the service of mankind. Browning indicates through

the example of Sordello that the artist must not get caught up in the affairs of the world. His duty is not in the service of politicians or social institutions. Neither is it a display of his superior abilities and intelligence in the form of song which amuses and entertains. His function is observation, appreciation and the promotion of understanding of the world and man.

At this pcint in his career, Browning had decided on the artist's responsibility to God and to man, and consequently his work had the conviction and intensity it previously lacked. In particular, some of the scenes in the last two books of Sordello are moving and impressive. The scenes, characters and their speeches have dramatic power and force, and theme is embodied in the characters and their situations. Browning had decided on his duty and function as an artist, and he had found a medium for expressing his views on life and art.

The remainder of this study looked at artist-figures who approach the world in the wrong way and misuse their talent. Chapter four examined the artist who emphasizes the aesthetic and ignores the world. These poems show Browning's opposition to the artist in the ivory tower and they emphasize his belief, already expressed in Sordello, that art can only be produced through response to life and the world. The artist who removes himself from the world is producing meaningless, sterile work, for he does not have the

powers of observation or depth of understanding to create art which can move his audience. In the first poem, discussed in this chapter, Jules, the artist, is immersed in a world of classical and mythological figures, and he loses sight of the human. When he is made aware of a suffering soul, he responds with compassion, and he becomes aware that life is art. Browning emphasizes that awakening the moral and the spiritual in man is the artist's true function, and he can only achieve this through involvement with humanity. Isolation of the artist produces art as lifeless as Jules's statues.

The second poem discussed in chapter four shows Browning's belief that the artist cannot pretend to evoke the spiritual in man by ignoring the world and the physical. The artist-monk of this poem works in seclusion and emphasizes the superiority of the aesthetic world. He believes that contact with the world and public acclaim destroys the purity of art. Yet, by his own admission, he acknowledges that the art he produces will be unnoticed and unobserved and will have no effect on the world. Although his paintings of Madonnas and Babes are meant to inspire man to a higher spiritual level, they are doomed to decay in dark, empty churches. Both of these poems, particularly the latter, reveal that Browning believed that the spiritual in man can only be evoked by the artist who works through and in the world. The artist who acknowledges the existence of the

world and sees its value is much more likely to inspire man to the spiritual than an isolated artist who rejects the world or sees it as evil and corrupt.

The last chapter of this study deals with two artists who turn to the world. The first artist, Andrea del Sarto, is comparable to Sordello. He does not make right use of the world or of his talents. The second artist, Fra Lippo Lippi, is an example of the artist whose approach to the world is right.

Andrea del Sarto uses his talents and abilities for selfish gain and for profit. Although he can reproduce the human form flawlessly in his work, he is not motivated to inspire man to deeper appreciation and deeper understanding of the world through his art. He sought the world's approval and his art was a means by which he could acquire respect or, as he unwisely thought, love. He is now reduced to producing art for the marketplace and, because he emphasized perfection of form and the visual to please his public, he now realizes that he no longer has the desire or ability to strive for the passion and soul that he recognizes in Rafael or Agnolo. This poem emphasizes that the artist who interacts with the world for personal gain and approval will eventually be discarded by the world. Just as Sordello fades and dies because of his misuse of the world, del Sarto's isolation at the conclusion of the monologue is the result of his misuse of the world. He betrayed his

vocation as an artist and, in turn, the world eventually betrayed him.

The last poem discussed in this study, "Fra Lippo Lippi," embodies many of Browning's ideas concerning life and art. As De Vane says, the monk expresses "well-thought-out aesthetic and religious opinions which chimed with Browning's own."[1] The monk articulates the meaning of the flesh and the world and he is aware of the power of art to represent this meaning to man. Instead of denying the world or perceiving it as associated with the flesh and the devil, he sees it as an expression of beauty and truth, since it is created by God. His views are like Browning's in that he rejects the idea that art which is created in secluded cloisters conforming to tradition and convention can inspire men to discovery of higher truth. Such art which ignores the physical and the world as subject fails to make man aware of his soul; in reality, such art instills in man the idea that he must conform to traditional religious beliefs and that he must subdue the flesh and ignore the world.

Fra Lippo emphasizes the importance of the world and he sees physical objects and man as the subject of art. His purpose as an artist is to make man aware that the world "means intensely and means good" (314). He can fulfill his purpose only by joining the world and by observing and cele-

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[1]De Vane, p. 219.

brating life. As he interacts with man, he is always aware that God created man. Instead of renouncing the world as evil, he sees beauty and truth in all, and he attempts to reproduce through the accuracy of his art this God-like element. Specifically, he believes that if he can reproduce the world and man with accurate realistic detail, then he will awaken man to see what he has previously ignored. By awakening man's senses to the world, he can guide him to realize that this world has meaning and goodness because it was created by God.

This last artist expresses an attitude comparable to that of Browning. In Book The Third of Sordello, Browning speaks directly on his purpose and inspiration, and his duty to all of mankind; he accepts the whole of suffering humanity and the reality of the world as the subject matter for his art. His duty is to make men see beyond the surface and the obvious to recognize the element of good or God in all things. Fra Lippo has the same philosophy although he describes objects and the physical world more than he does the human. Essentially, the philosophy is the same. Both Browning and his artist-monk see the beauty and the reality of the world. Browning proposes to draw man to God by making him aware of the God-like element in all people, even those scorned by society. Fra Lippo Lippi responds to the existence and the values of the world and proposes to draw

man to God by making him aware of the reality and value and beauty of the world.

In conclusion, Browning by the third book of Sordello had very definite views on life and art. He rejected intellectual isolation and superiority by the artist, as well as the aesthetic approach of the artist in the ivory tower. He disapproved of the artist as a source of mere entertainment. Equally unsatisfactory to him was misuse of art or prostituting one's talents for approval and worldly gain. Browning saw the artist as a mediator between God and man. His service to God, however, is through man, for he must represent and understand mankind and help him to see the divine element in others. The position of the artist in the world, as Browning sees it, is to observe, interact, evaluate, explain and interpret. The artist who accepts this role then becomes what Browning in Sordello described as the Maker-see. He shares his vision and his understanding, and he joins the ranks of those who "Impart the gift of seeing to the rest" (III, 868).

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