

BROWNING: POEMS OF DISTORTED LOVE

A THESIS

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PREFACE

An early fascination with Robert Browning's dramatic monologues, particularly "Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister," led me to wonder if describing distorted individuals were a recurring theme in Browning's work. Coupling Browning's poems involving troubled personalities in intolerable situations with a layman's interest in psychology, I decided to combine both interests in the writing of an analysis of seven of Browning's twisted characters. After months of study and writing, I feel that this endeavor has been one of the most satisfying in my years of English studies.

In addition to the satisfaction, much work has been expended. Furthermore, this thesis could not have been completed without the cooperation, understanding, and encouragement of the English faculty at Texas Woman's University, my family, and one very special friend. My sincerest gratitude and appreciation go to Mary Low Howell whose steadfast support and technical assistance made this paper possible. My family, too, deserves special mention for its limitless patience and kindness during the long hours of writing and typing. Lastly, but most importantly, I wholeheartedly thank

Dr. J. Dean Bishop for his technical assistance, encouragement and cooperation. Without his extensive efforts in my behalf this thesis would not have been completed in time for summer graduation. In addition, I extend my appreciation to Dr. Fulwiler and Dr. Kobler for serving on my thesis committee.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Sigmund Freud was not yet born when the intense, passionate young Robert Browning began to explore and record the behavior of individuals known to him through reading and conversation, but to understand why he came to focus on personalities as the subjects of his poems and the influences which led Browning to become a poet, one must take into account the early experiences of childhood. Admittedly, Browning's parents were the foremost shapers of the character and goals of the future poet. The elder Browning possessed an overly-emotional temperament which allowed him to identify with children and to invent experiences that would appeal to them.¹ He set out to make his son a genius. He had a talent for making up grotesque verses which he used to increase young Browning's vocabulary and to help him remember Latin declensions.² As a young man, the elder Browning had wanted to become an artist. He did not achieve his dream, but

¹Elisabeth Luther Cary, Browning: Poet and Man: A Survey (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899), p. 6.

²Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Life and Letters of Robert Browning (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1908), p. 12.

throughout his life he delighted in drawing caricatures and pictures of people in action.³ This interest in art and, more importantly, an intense love of reading were valuable legacies which he passed on to his son.

Robert Browning's mother bequeathed to her only son an early passion for religion and a nervous, sensitive disposition.⁴ This nervous temperament caused young Robert to respond quickly to people and surroundings. His sensitivity had both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, it increased his enjoyment of physical activities.⁵ Yet, in a negative way, it adversely affected Browning's health; for during the thirty-four years he lived at home, any illness which befell his mother afflicted Browning also.⁶ His early passion for religion served him well until 1826 when he began reading the poetry of Shelley. Shelley's writings caused Browning to become an atheist. Browning's new beliefs caused an intense conflict with his devoutly religious mother. Realizing that he could not continue to live at home and retain his current viewpoint, Browning compromised his beliefs and again accepted God. He did not arrive at this decision easily. He struggled for six years to find a fundamental philosophy

³Maisie Ward, Robert Browning and His World: The Private Face (1812-1861) (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), I, 8.

⁴Ward, I, 11.

⁵Orr, p. 20

⁶Betty Miller, Robert Browning: A Portrait (London: John Murray, 1952), pp. 13-14.

which would harmonize with the religious zeal of his adored mother and his belief in the supremacy of the intellect to which Shelley exposed him.⁷

Aside from his parents, Browning's own personality, talents, and interests led him to poetry as a profession. He was a restless child with a vivid imagination, keen powers of observation, and a flare for the dramatic. He was a talented musician and also a child prodigy at drawing.⁸ By school age, he was even drawing caricatures to delight his friends.

Drama, too, fascinated Browning. At an early age, he played a devil for a woman visitor whom he disliked. His costume was his "birthday suit," a paper tail, and as ferocious a face as he could make before he was whisked away.⁹ He once assumed the role of a preacher and spoke so severely to his little sister that he made her cry.¹⁰ Later he played a leading part in "The Royal Convert" while a student at the Readys' school.¹¹ He also wrote plays for his school mates to act in, and, in later life, he recalled giving original rhymed speeches for visiting parents on special school days.¹²

Furthermore, Browning practiced and became quite proficient in a number of social skills. While at home, he

⁷Miller, pp. 9-10.

⁸W. Hall Griffin and Harry C. Minchin, The Life of Robert Browning (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1938), p. 30.

⁹Ward, I, 17.

¹⁰Ward, I, 25.

¹¹Ward, I, 23.

¹²Orr, p. 29.

took lessons in music, singing, dancing, boxing, fencing, and riding.¹³ Even with all his talent and social skills, Browning liked staying close to home and engaging in solitary pursuits. He enjoyed walks through the countryside and sat for hours gazing at paintings in the local gallery. Because of his keen powers of observation, interest in life, and dramatic proclivity, one can easily imagine the fantasies he invented while sitting among the portraits in Dulwich Gallery or walking past strangers in Dulwich Wood and the surrounding countryside.

As a teenager, Robert Browning was still something of a solitary figure. He liked to travel a short distance with gypsies, hobos, or other wayfarers, attend the fair at Camberwell, and walk to Richmond to see plays with his cousin, James Silverthorne.¹⁴ Excepting these pursuits, he socialized little during this period. In his late teens, after some formal schooling and a brief encounter with the poetry of Shelley and Keats, Robert Browning left his schooling behind and informed his family that he had definitely chosen to be a poet. Shelley had shown Browning that poetry could be "the expression of the human soul at its most characteristic moments, that drama need not be an affair of scenes and puppets, but may be the struggle and progression of emotions and convictions in that inner theatre of the mind, which is for one observer only."¹⁵

¹³Orr, p. 41.

¹⁴Ward, I, 33, 35.

¹⁵Cary, p. 16.

Browning had concluded in his own philosophy that the mind was but a servant to the soul. Further, he felt that a poet was responsible to God to speak the truth from his soul.¹⁶ He had apparently accepted this poet's responsibility when he wrote Pauline, which was published in 1833. When John Stuart Mill analyzed Pauline and revealed that it was the psychological history of Browning himself, the poet was so shocked and hurt that he refused to bare his soul ever again. It was at this point that he decided to let other people speak through his poems.¹⁷

Browning's humiliation after Pauline was probably not the only reason he used other personalities as subjects of his poems, for he had inherited yet another trait from his father. This most valuable bequest was a "taste for out-of-the-way learning and out-of-the-way people,"¹⁸ and through his love of reading, also a legacy of his father, he developed and enhanced this penchant for the unique individual in strange situations. While he was still young and impressionable, Browning found in his father's ample library two sources which fed his unusual appetite. These books were Wanley's Wonders of the Little World, which contained accounts of abnormal people and bizarre events, and the fifty-volume edition of Biographie Universelle.¹⁹

¹⁶Miller, pp. 11-12.

¹⁷Miller, p. 22.

¹⁸Griffin and Minchin, p. 18.

¹⁹Ward, I, 20-22.

Browning felt that in Pauline he had not written as he truly believed. Seeing this flaw in his own character led him to a life-long interest in "the psychology of the charlatan, the quack, the second-rater and the 'apparent failure.'"²⁰ Thus guided by the failure of his introspective first poem, the influences of home and family, and his own interests in the unique and dramatic, Browning moved to safer subjects, the lives and souls of other people, but in order to compose vivid poetic portraits, Browning now had to search for another form for his poems. He resurrected an old form, the dramatic monologue, because he felt it would best suit his purpose. Through this form characters could reveal themselves while conversing with other individuals who act as listeners within the poems.

Upon looking at the body of Browning's works, one finds that Browning has written enough poems concerned with the abnormal to isolate specific ones for closer study. Browning was fascinated with love relationships involving troubled people who chose murder or suicide to solve their complex psychological problems. Without formal training in psychology, Browning accurately portrayed outward actions and complex mental workings of abnormal individuals. Four works in particular illustrate his interest in the study of abnormality. "Porphyria's Lover," published in 1836, and the first section of Pippa Passes, published in 1842, reveal

²⁰Miller, p. 12.

his early absorption with unique persons in intorerable situations. His later fascination with the same subject is evident in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, published in 1873, and The Inn Album, published in 1875. It is interesting to note that all four poems were written either before his marriage to Elizabeth Barrett or after her death. Perhaps while he was so completely happy with Elizabeth, he had no interest in the love affairs of distorted or weak personalities. However, an exploration of these four poems shows that Browning's fascination with and understanding of abnormal personages involved in love affairs was not a passing fancy but an integral part of the body of his poetical works.

Robert Browning will long be remembered for penning vivid portraits of the outward appearances and, more importantly, the innermost nuances of personality and spirit of vast numbers of unique individuals. These individuals apparently do not come from aspects of Browning's own personality or from people he knew intimately. Instead, they are products of his creative genius resurrected from careful reading or possible keen observation of strangers. Moreover, modern literature owes much to Browning for popularizing the dramatic monologue and focusing on the stream of consciousness of the individual psyche, notably that of the abnormal personality bent on murder and suicide.

CHAPTER II

MADNESS AND SALVATION: "PORPHYRIA'S LOVER" AND PIPPA PASSES

In his early twenties Robert Browning wrote and published three long poems; however, none of them was popular with the public. He then turned to writing plays for his friend Macready, a successful actor. His first play enjoyed enough popularity with the general public to encourage Browning to write other dramas. However, disagreements with Macready and the general unpopularity of his plays put an early end to his career as a dramatist. During this time Browning wrote two poems which reflect his fascination with abnormality. In 1841, he wrote the drama Pippa Passes, one segment of which involves a pair of lovers caught in an intolerable situation. Five years earlier while on a trip to Russia, Browning had written "Porphyria's Lover," a monologue on the same general subject as the first segment of Pippa Passes.¹

"Porphyria's Lover" was Browning's first dramatic monologue, and in it he explores the thoughts and feelings of a deranged paramour. The skill with which the insane speaker is described illustrates Browning's intuitive flair for psychology even before psychology was a recognized science.

¹William Clyde DeVane, A Browning Handbook, Second Edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1955), p. 125.

As in most of Browning's dramatic monologues, the speaker is revealed "at a moment of crisis: when he or she is wrought up, emotionalized by some happening; and Porphyria's lover has been wrought up past the borderline of sanity."²

The poem begins with the lover's description of the setting, a rainy, windy night. Unpleasant imagery immediately conveys the despair in the speaker's mind:

The sullen wind was soon awake,
It tore the elm-tops down for spite,
And did its worst to vex the lake.³

Describing the wind as "sullen" and saying that it blew down trees for "spite" and tried "to vex the lake," the speaker reveals a distorted view of the situation. Then, in the fifth line, he clarifies his mood of depression: "I listened with heart fit to break." (p. 188) Symbolically, this storm represents the speaker's mental storm even while he is outwardly apathetic.

At this point Porphyria enters; from the speaker's description of the events, her personality is revealed. She efficiently sets the scene for their tryst, and then with deliberate skill coaxes her pouting lover into a better mood:⁴

²A. Allen Brockington, Browning and the Twentieth Century (New York: Russell and Russell, 1932), p. 123.

³The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning (New York: The Modern Library, 1934), p. 188. All further references to "Porphyria's Lover" and Pippa Passes are from this edition and hereafter will be cited in the text.

⁴David Eggenschwiler, "Psychological Complexity in 'Porphyria's Lover,'" Victorian Poetry, 8(1970), 41.

She shut the cold out and the storm,
And kneeled and made the cheerless grate
Blaze up, and all the cottage warm;
Which done, she rose, and from her form
Withdrew the dripping cloak and shawl,
And laid her soiled gloves by, untied
Her hat and let the damp hair fall,
And, last, she sat down by my side
And called me. When no voice replied,
She put my arm about her waist,
And made her smooth white shoulder bare,
And all her yellow hair displaced,
And, stooping made my cheek lie there,
And spread o'er all her yellow hair.

(p. 188)

The manner in which she "shuts out" the storm and causes the fire to "blaze up" shows her forcefulness and competence. The verbs "withdrew," "laid by," and "untied," which are used to picture her making herself comfortable, indicate her calmness and practicality. She further shows her strength in the way she cajoles her lover into a better mood.⁵

In the next five lines, the speaker explains how he sees Porphyria. He views her as passionate but weak:

Murmuring how she loved me--she
Too weak, for all her heart's endeavour
To set its struggling passion free
From pride, and vainer ties dissever,
And give herself to me for ever.
(p. 188)

Certainly, the speaker's judgment of Porphyria's character does not match his description of her activities after she enters his cottage.

The speaker then claims that her passion for him caused her to leave a party and, through a violent storm, come to his side:

5 Ibid.

But passion sometimes would prevail,
 Nor could to-night's gay feast restrain
 A sudden thought of one so pale
 For love of her, and all in vain;
 So, she was come through wind and rain.
 (pp. 188-189)

Interestingly, Porphyria's actions do not show her to be the same type of person that the speaker indicates her to be. This conflict in fact and the opinion of the speaker, taken with his opening mood, immediately make his sanity questionable. After weighing the two descriptions, one is logically forced to judge Porphyria as a person skillfully controlling her destiny rather than someone weakly letting fate take its course.⁶ On the other hand, her lover is revealed as lonely and prone to fantasize on the surface, while his subconscious personality is violent, full of hate, and aware of Porphyria's true character.

The poem, thus far, "has progressed from incident to misinterpretation and distortion,"⁷ within the mind of the poem's speaker. In the following lines, the speaker's attitude changes from desolation and apathy to elation and preparation for action:

Be sure I looked up at her eyes
 Happy and proud; at last I knew
 Porphyria worshipped me; surprise
 Made my heart swell, and still it grew
 While I debated what to do.
 (p. 189)

Suspense builds in these lines by suddenly contrasting the speaker's two personalities. He no longer feels hateful

⁶Eggenschwiler, p. 42. ⁷Ibid.

and worthless. He has now fantasized that Porphyria adores him and he is a god. This is a delusion of grandeur common to many people suffering from paranoia.⁸ His moment of supreme happiness is "That moment she was mine, mine, fair,/
Perfectly pure and good." (p. 189)

Then the speaker seems to obey an inner voice which tells him that Porphyria wants him to kill her: "Without the least remorse or qualm he strangles her with her hair to preserve for eternity a moment of beauty and truth⁹:

. I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And Strangled her. No pain felt she:
I am quite sure she felt no pain.
(p. 189)

The long yellow hair, a mark of beauty and a symbol of love and sensuality, ironically becomes the murder weapon. At this point, one becomes aware, too, of the irony of the title, since a lover does not usually express his depth of feeling by murdering the one he loves.

Next, like a child calmly playing with a doll, the speaker opens Porphyria's eyes, loosens the tress of hair from her neck, and positions her as before:

⁸James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life, Fourth Edition (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), p. 312.

⁹Norton B. Crowell, The Triple Soul: Browning's Theory of Knowledge (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1963), p. 187. Hereafter referred to as Crowell, The Triple Soul.

and lyricism. Park Honan feels "Porphyria's Lover" is a lyrical narrative of an incident.¹⁰ It is this very lyrical quality which provides the contrast with the subject matter and makes such an impact on the reader.

In five years, Browning again used lyricism and drama to explore the minds of different lovers in a very different situation. It was in the first section of Pippa Passes that Browning introduced the lovers Ottima and Sebald. Instead of using the monologue, Browning wrote Pippa as a drama, thus allowing both lovers to reveal themselves in dialogue with each other.

Browning's purpose in this entire drama is to portray man in response to normal human situations. Chesterton asserts that Pippa Passes is with one or two exceptions, the finest poem ever written which expresses love for humanity.¹¹ In the first section, man reacts to physical love. Pippa, at first, as in subsequent sections, is more of an amoral force than a real character in the play. She plays the part of innocence, a force which frees the characters to react to the situations in which they are involved.¹²

¹⁰Park Honan, Browning's Characters: A Study in Poetic Technique (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1969), p. 30.

¹¹G. K. Chesterton, Robert Browning (London: Macmillan and Co., 1936), p. 43.

¹²Roma A. King, Jr., The Focusing Artifice: The Poetry of Robert Browning (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1968), p. 48.

One must now consider the situation of Ottima and Sebald, their characters, and the manner in which Pippa's song frees them to act.

The first section of the poem is set in the morning, inside a shrub-house where Ottima, Luca's wife, is with her lover, Sebald. Sebald drinks and sings as Ottima says:

Night? Such may be your Rhineland nights, perhaps;
 But this blood-red beam through the shutter's chink,
 --We call such light, the morning's: let us see!
 Mind how you grope your way, though! How these tall
 Naked geraniums straggle! Push the lattice
 Behind that frame!--Nay, do I bid you?--Sebald,
 It shakes the dust down on me! Why, of course
 The slide-bolt catches.--Well, are you content,
 Or must I find you something else to spoil?
 Kiss and be friends, my Sebald! Is it full morning?
 (p. 365)

With these lines Browning superficially sets the scene and relates an incident. As Ottima relates that it is morning, Sebald moves aside the plants to open the shutters. He pushes on the shutters only to have dust fall on both lovers, and Ottima tells him petulantly that the shutters must be unlatched first. Then she wants him to kiss and make up now that the shutters are open.

Browning, on a deeper level, uses images which reveal the characters of both Ottima and Sebald and foreshadow a revelation of Ottima's seduction and Luca's murder. As Park Honan remarks, "The 'tall/Naked geraniums' suggest the scene of Ottima's seduction by Sebald in the woods."¹³ Luca's

¹³Honan, p. 84.

murder is intimated with the "blood-red beam" image. In later lines, the commands "Push the lattice/Behind that frame!--Nay, do I bid you?"(p. 365) reveal Ottima's authority. Sebald's shaking of the bolted shutters implies that he is impatient and suggests the results of the murder, dust on their heads rather than sunlight with its promise of happiness.¹⁴

Ottima then tells Sebald: "Oh, don't speak, then!" (p. 365) However, Sebald has something to say and proceeds to tell Ottima of what he has observed:

Ay, thus it used to be!
 Ever your house was, I remember, shut
 Till mid-day--I observed that, as I strolled
 On mornings through the vale here: country girls
 Were noisy, washing garments in the brook,
 Hinds drove the snow white oxen up the hills,
 But no, your house was mute, would ope no eye!
 And wisely--you were plotting one thing there,
 Nature, another outside: I looked up--
 Rough white wood shutters, rusty iron bars,
 Silent as death, blind in a flood of light.
 Oh, I remember!--and the peasants laughed
 And said, 'The old man sleeps with the young wife.'
 This house was his, this chair, this window--his!
(pp. 365-366)

Sebald cuttingly remarks that Ottima has never been an early-riser. He further suggests that in the darkness of the house, she was busy plotting evil, while natural events went on outside. Lastly, he hints at the murder of Luca: "This house was his, this chair, this window--his!"(p. 366) Clearly Sebald is distressed over murdering Luca and cannot

¹⁴Honan, pp. 84-85.

be happy even with his beloved Ottima.¹⁵ However, Ottima does not sympathize, but instead, changes the subject by looking at the view and trying to interest Sebald in what she sees:

Ah, the clear morning! I can see St. Mark's
That black streak is the belfry. Stop: Vicenza
Should lie . . . There's Padua, plain enough, that blue!
Look o'er my shoulder, follow my finger.
(p. 366)

However, Sebald remains unconsoled:

Morning?
It seems to me a night with a sun added.
Where's dew? Where's freshness? That bruised plant,
I bruised
In getting through the lattice yestereve,
Droops as it did. See, here's my elbow's mark
In the dust on the sill.
(p. 366)

The nature imagery blends with the situation as Sebald experiences a dark, stale mood. The image of the "bruised plant" evokes the darkness, violence, and guilt which cloud Sebald's mind. He dwells on the clues he left while climbing in the window.

Ottima's attitude changes from indifference to impatience: "Oh shut the lattice, pray!" (p. 366)

Yet Sebald's remorse will not let him, and suddenly he verbally confronts Ottima:

Let me lean out, I cannot scent blood here,
Foul as the morn may be.
There, shut the world out!
How do you feel now, Ottima? There, curse
The world and all outside! Let us throw off

¹⁵Ethel Colburn Mayne, Browning's Heroines (London: Chatts and Windus, 1913), pp. 36-37.

This mask: how do you bear yourself? Let's out
With all of it!

(p. 366)

He first imagines that he smells Luca's blood inside the shrub house. Then he abruptly closes the shutters, curses the world, and demands that Ottima tell him how she honestly feels about herself.

She contends, "Best never speak of it,"(p. 366) but Sebald disagrees:

Best speak again and yet again of it,
Till words cease to be more than words.

'His blood,'
For instance--let those two words mean 'His blood'
And nothing more. Notice, I'll say them now,
'His blood.'

(p. 366)

He wants to repeat any words which refer to Luca's murder until they become commonplace and lose any connotation of horror.¹⁶ Sebald's guilt in this passage is reminiscent of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth when she imagined that she still saw blood on her hands.

Ottima's attitude shifts once again and she seemingly tries to placate Sebald: "Assuredly if I repented/The deed--," (p. 366) but Sebald breaks in angrily, suggesting that he had not even considered repentance for her or himself. She tries to speak again, but Sebald again demands plain talk from her so that the words she avoids will have no particular meaning for either of them.¹⁷

¹⁶Mayne, p. 38.

¹⁷Jacob Korg, "A Reading of Pippa Passes," Victorian Poetry, 5(Dec., 1967), 11.

Ottima interrupts him with an offer of wine and, at the same time, puts him off, continuing to avoid mention of their crime:

OTTIMA Here is the wine;
I brought it when we left the house above,
And glasses too--wine of both sorts. Black? white then?
SEBALD But am not I his cut-throat? What are you?
(p. 366)

Ottima's callousness is appalling, for she has remembered to bring both red and white wine with glasses just after she and Sebald have murdered her husband and left his body in the house above. Perhaps Sebald has accepted wine before in place of something else he has wanted. But this time he ignores the wine and questions Ottima more precisely about their roles in the murder.

Seemingly without feeling, Ottima again refuses a direct answer when she comments on a passing monk:

There trudges on his business from the Duomo
Benet the Capuchin, with his brown hood
And bare feet--always in one place at church,
Close under the stone wall by the south entry.
I used to take him for a brown cold piece
Of the wall's self, as out of it he rose
To let me pass--at first, I say, I used--
Now, so has that dumb figure fastened on me,
I rather should account the plastered wall
A piece of him, so chilly does it strike.
(p. 366)

In this passage Ottima's outlook has definitely changed. Before the murder of her husband, Ottima paid so little attention to the monk that he seemed only a part of the wall which he sat beside. Yet, now Ottima has become obsessed with the monk to the point that the brown wall seems a part of the man. Subconsciously, the monk and the wall represent Sebald

and the crime. At first, Sebald was only a part of the murder, but now she implies how deeply the murder has become a part of Sebald. In spite of her outward calm, Ottima has, through her imagination, become as disturbed as Sebald over their crime.¹⁸

Ottima offers Sebald the red wine, but he chooses to drink only white wine: "No--the white wine - the white wine!" (p. 366) Even though he wants to speak naturally about his crime, he paradoxically wants to deny any association with anything which might remind him of Luca's blood.

As he drinks, he reminds Ottima of New Year's day a year ago, and Ottima recalls how she had to trick her husband so that the lovers could be together:

Well, Ottima, I promised no new year
Should rise on us the ancient shameful way,
Nor does it rise: pour on! To your black eyes!
Do you remember last damned New Year's day?
OTTIMA You brought those foreign prints. We
looked at them
Over the wine and fruit. I had to scheme
To get him from the fire. Nothing but saying
His own set wants the proof-mark, roused him up
To hunt them out.

(p. 366)

He toasts her black eyes, perhaps suggesting that he sees her as evil. The ironic contrast between the white wine and Ottima's black eyes intensifies the seriousness of the situation.

Sebald then asserts, "'Faith, he is not alive/To fondle you before my face!" (p. 366)

¹⁸Ibid.

Ottima answers him quickly with the challenge that he should be taking advantage of their newly-won freedom:

Do you

Fondle me, then! who means to take your life
For that, my Sebald? (p. 366)

Sebald seems to be recovering slowly from his feelings of remorse, and he sees that the murder at least had the advantage of getting Luca out of the way. Ottima apparently is feeling amorous, for she challenges Sebald to touch her now that nothing stands in his way. As feelings of guilt return, Sebald's point of view changes rapidly:

Hark you, Ottima

One thing's to guard against. We'll not make much
One of the other--that is, not make more
Parade of warmth, childish officious coil,
Than yesterday--as if, Sweet, I supposed
Proof upon proof was needed now, now first,
To show I love you,--yes, still love you--love you
In spite of Luca and what's come to him
--Sure sign we had him ever in our thoughts,
White sneering old reproachful face and all!
We'll even quarrel, Love, at times, as if
We still could lose each other, were not tied
By this--conceive you?

(pp. 366-367)

He warns that they must not cling to each other. They must act natural. They must even quarrel sometimes to deny that Luca's murder has any meaning to them.¹⁹

Ottima, too, changes her strategy and poses to reorder the circumstances to show that they are not as serious as Sebald thinks:

¹⁹Mayne, pp. 40-41.

OTTIMA Love, to be wise, (one counsel pays another)
Should we have-months ago-when first we loved,
For instance that May morning we two stole
Under the green ascent of sycamores--
If we had come upon a thing like that
Suddenly . . .

SEBALD 'A thing'--there again--'a thing!'

OTTIMA Then, Venus' body, had we come upon
My husband Luca Gaddi's murdered corpse
Within there, at his couch-foot, covered close--
Would you have pored upon it? For 'tis here
As much as there in the deserted house:
You cannot rid your eyes of it.

(p. 367)

She reminds him of their first love scene and asks if her husband's murdered body would have made any difference in Sebald's feelings then. Here, for the first time, she uses the words he has been asking her not to avoid, suggesting she has lost patience with him and become angry. She challenges him for dwelling on their crime and asks what is the good of thinking always of it.²⁰

She remembers how much she hated her old husband. Taking Sebald's hands, as if they were those of Luca, Ottima gives vent to her hatred:

For me,
Now he is dead I hate him worse--I hate . . .
Dare you stay here? I would go back and hold
His two dead hands, and say, I hate you worse
Luca, than . . .

(p. 367)

Hysterically, Sebald recoils: Off, off; take your hands off mine!/'Tis the hot evening--off! oh, morning, is it?(p. 367)

²⁰Mayne, p. 41.

Ottima has tried to make Sebald feel better. However, she does not succeed; so she reverts to her old callousness, perhaps tinged with revenge for Sebald's repulse²¹:

There's one thing must be done; you know what thing.
Come in and help to carry. We may sleep
Anywhere in the whole wide house to-night.
(p. 367)

Ottima reveals her practicality and, moreover, her passionate inclinations. Yet, horror of their deed has returned to Sebald's consciousness, and he just wants to leave the body where it is:

What would come, think you, if we let him lie
Just as he is? Let him lie there until
The angels take him: he is turned by this
Off from his face, beside, as you will see.
(p. 367)

From wanting to make the murder seem of no consequence, Sebald has moved to wanting to ignore it entirely.

Ottima evades his suggestion and focuses attention on herself:

This dusty pane might serve for looking-glass.
Three, four--four grey hairs! Is it so you said
A plait of hair should wave across my neck?
No--this way!
(p. 367)

Sebald is not passionately aroused by focusing on Ottima's hair as she had hoped. For the first time, Sebald admits that he would give Ottima up just to have the deed undone:

Ottima! I would give your neck,
Each splendid shoulder, both those breasts of yours,

²¹Mayne, p. 42.

That this were undone! Killing?--Kill the world
 So Luca lives again!--ay, lives to sputter
 His fulsome dotage on you--yes, and feign
 Surprise that I returned at eve to sup,
 When all the morning I was loitering here--
 Bid me dispatch my business and begone.
 I would . . .

(p. 367)

It is obvious that Sebald is ready to do anything that would rid him of his guilt, but he is mentally paralyzed and can do nothing. Sebald expresses his sadness and guilt over killing a man who fed him, clothed him, and gave him a job. He feels that he owes his very life to Luca and that he would commit ten greater crimes if Luca were alive again. Then he asks Ottima how she now feels about him:

No, I'll finish! Do you think
 I fear to speak the bare truth once for all?
 All we have talked of is, at bottom, fine
 To suffer--there's a recompense in guilt;
 One must be venturous and fortunate:
 What is one young for, else? In age we'll sigh
 O'er the wild, reckless, wicked days flown over;
 Still, we have lived! The vice was in its place.
 But to have eaten Luca's bread, have worn
 His clothes, have felt his money swell my purse--
 Do lovers in romances sin that way?
 Why, I was starving when I used to call
 And teach you music, starving while you plucked me
 these flowers to smell!

.

He gave me
 Life, nothing less: what if he did reproach
 My perfidy, and threaten, and do more--
 Had he no right? What was to wonder at?
 He sat by us at table quietly--
 Why must you lean across till our cheeks touched?
 Could he do less than make pretence to strike me?
 'Tis not for the crime's sake--I'd commit ten crimes
 Greater, to have this crime wiped out, undone!
 And you--O, how feel you? feel you for me?

(p. 367)

Sebald excuses all of the things about Luca that once irritated him. He reasons that he really had no cause to kill Luca.

After explaining his true feelings he wonders if perhaps Ottima pities him.

Ottima claims she loves Sebald more than ever. She tells him to accept the greatness of their crime, but at the same time to see that their love was even greater than the evil they committed:

Well, then, I love you better now than ever,
 And best (look at me while I speak to you)--
 Best for the crime; nor do I grieve, in truth,
 This mask, this simulated ignorance,
 This affectation of simplicity,
 Falls off our crime; this naked crime of ours
 May not, now, be looked over: look it down, then!
 Great? let it be great; but the joys it brought,
 Pay they or no its price? Come: they or it!
 Speak not! The Past, would you give up the Past
 Such as it is, pleasure and crime together?
 Give up that noon I owned my love for you?
 The garden's silence! even the single bee
 Persisting in his toil, suddenly stopt;
 And where he hid you only could surmise
 By some companula's chalice set a-swing:
 Who stammered--'Yes, I love you?'

(pp. 367-368)

Craftily Ottima reminds Sebald of the first day they told each other of their love for one another. She effectively uses nature imagery to stimulate her lover's senses, and to emphasize the importance of the occasion, she maintains the "garden's silence."

Sebald responds and, once more, is under Ottima's sensuous domination as he remembers with her help the hot passion of their early love:

And I drew
 Back; put far back your face with both my hands
 Lest you should grow too full of me--your face
 So seemed athirst for my whole soul and body!
 OTTIMA And when I ventured to receive you here,
 Made you steal hither in the mornings--

SEBALD When
I used to look up 'neath the shrub-house here,
Till the red fire on its glazed windows spread
To a yellow haze?

OTTIMA Ah--my sign was, the sun
Inflamed the sere side of yon chestnut-tree
Nipt by the first frost.

SEBALD You would always laugh
At my wet boots: I had to stride thro' grass
Over my ankles.

(p. 368)

Sebald and Ottima complement each other by both using heat and fire images to describe their secret morning meetings. Words like "athirst" and "sere side" of the tree evoke the heat of their passion for each other. Also, the "red fire" reference to the sun connotes their intense desire.

Ottima next reminds her paramour of that "crowning night! / The July night." (p. 368) She skillfully uses sensual storm imagery to create a dramatic passion which carries Sebald's thoughts away from the murder and into a vivid recollection of the magnificence of loving Ottima:

When the heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat,
Its black-blue canopy seemed let descend
Close on us both, to weigh down each to each,
And smother up all life except our life.
So lay we till the storm came.

(p. 368)

When the storm does come, "the lightning seems to search for the guilty lovers, Sebald and Ottima, like the bared sword of divine justice"²²:

Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;

²²William O. Raymond, "The Infinite Moment," Victorian Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. Austin Wright (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 107.

And ever and anon some bright white shaft
 Burnt thro' the pine-tree roof, here burnt and there,
 As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen
 Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
 Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke
 The thunder like a whole sea overhead--
 (p. 368)

At this point Sebald might naturally feel guilty again, but he is so completely under Ottima's seductive spell that he thinks of nothing but the two of them. He does, however, feel she is pushing too fast, and he protests Ottima's rapid seduction and compares it with the intoxication of drinking wine:

Less vehemently! Love me!
 Forgive me! take not words, mere words, to heart!
 Your breath is worse than wine. Breathe slow, speak
 slow!
 Do not lean on me!
 (p. 368)

But Ottima's passion grows "hotter and hotter"²³ as she reminds Sebald of their ecstasy and his wish to die as punishment for their illicit love:

Who said, 'Let death come now! 'tis right to die!
 Right to be punished! nought completes such bliss
 But woe!' Who said that?
 (p. 368)

He falls deeper under her spell as he asks, "How did we ever rise?/Was't that we slept? Why did it end?"(p. 368)

Ottima answers him in sensuous imagery describing her hair:

²³Henry Charles Duffin, Amphibian: A Reconsideration of Browning (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1956), p. 74.

I felt you,
 Tapering into a point the ruffled ends
 Of my loose locks 'twixt both your humid lips--
 (My hair is fallen now: knot it again!)
 (p. 368)

Her erotic words have charmed him into forgetting his sorrow as his passion is aroused. He asks her forgiveness and calls her his "great white queen."²⁴

Suddenly, Pippa's song floats through the window:

The year's at the spring,
 And day's at the morn; . . .
 God's in His heaven--
 All's right with the world!
 (p. 368)

Her song forms "an ironic contrast with the evil everywhere about her, blighting lives, both literally and figuratively."²⁵ The song brings Sebald an instant revelation of his crime. He understands the song to say that evil is still evil whether it brings about good or not. Had he not interpreted her song as meaning that God's plan balanced evil with good, he could justify his crimes and continue to love Ottima, but instead "The voice of Sebald's conscience is stimulated by the happy song to inform his will when the intellect fails, to the end that the test may be completed and justice prevail."²⁶

²⁴Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. 163.

²⁵Norton B. Crowell, The Convex Glass: The Mind of Robert Browning (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968), p. 25.

²⁶Crowell, The Triple Soul, pp. 163-164.

Ottima is no longer Sebald's "great white queen"; she becomes a disgusting sight in his eyes²⁷:

My God! and she is emptied of it now!
 Outright now!--how miraculously gone
 All of the grace--had she not strange grace once?
 Why, the blank cheek hangs listless as it likes,
 No purpose holds the features up together,
 Only the cloven brow and puckered chin
 Stay in their places--and the very hair,
 That seemed to have a sort of life in it,
 Drops, a dead web!

(p. 369)

Inwardly, Sebald now perceives Ottima as a morally corrupt creature, and as the image of the web suggests, she is also a snare which has hopelessly entangled him.²⁸ He feels she is like something dead and empty because she acts not from her own free will, but as a puppet controlled by her passions.²⁹

Ottima understandably becomes angry and accuses Sebald:

. . .--ungrateful, perjured cheat!
 A coward, too: but ingrate's worse than all!
 Beggar--my slave--a fawning, cringing lie!
 Leave me! Betray me! I can see your drift!
 A lie that walks, and eats, and drinks!

(p. 369)

Yet, her accusations do not affect Sebald and he reasserts that she is an empty shell of a person:

My God!
 Those morbid, olive, faultless shoulderblades--
 I should have known there was no blood beneath!

(p. 369)

²⁷King, p. 50.

²⁸King, p. 51.

²⁹Korg, p. 12.

Sebald's revelation has come too fast for him to grasp everything at once. He realizes that his conscience and will were numbed, but he feels good just to know moral right from moral wrong³⁰:

That little peasant's voice
Has righted all again. Though I be lost,
I know which is the better, never fear,
Of vice or virtue, purity or lust,
Nature, or trick! I see what I have done,
Entirely now! Oh, I am proud to feel
Such torments--let the world take credit thence--
I, having done my deed, pay too its price!
I hate, hate--curse you! God's in His heaven!
(p. 369)

He gives Pippa credit for freeing him from the paralysis to act. Further, he is thankful to know good from evil and how he must pay for his sins. Ottima is suddenly transformed and repentant when she sees Sebald about to commit suicide. She accepts all the guilt and in so doing, becomes a whole person again. To her credit, she asks Sebald to continue to think of her as an object as they both prepare to die³¹:

--Me!
Me! no, no, Sebald, not yourself--kill me!
Mine is the whole crime--do but kill me--then
Yourself--then--presently--first hear me speak--
I always meant to kill myself--wait, you!
Lean on my breast--not as a breast; don't love me
The more because you lean on me, my own
Heart's Sebald! There--there--both deaths presently!
(p. 369)

Sebald speaks once more before he dies. His last speech is a powerful image of destruction³²:

³⁰King, p. 51.

³¹Korg, p. 12.

³²King, p. 51.

My brain is drowned now--quite drowned: all I feel
 Is . . . is, at swift-recurring intervals,
 A hurrying-down within me, as of waters
 Loosened to smother up some ghastly pit:
 There they go--whirls from a black, fiery sea!
 (p. 369)

He does not think of Ottima and, apparently, does not feel redeemed.

Yet, Ottima finally becomes a pitiable figure with her final words being a plea for someone else, "Not to me, God--to him be merciful!" (p. 369)

Though neither Ottima nor Sebald is admirable or deserving, Pippa's song may well have saved both of them from eternal damnation.³³

In a letter to J. Milsand, Browning said that the object of art in poetry was the description of a soul: "little else is worth study. I, at least, always thought so . . . others may one day think so."³⁴ Apparently Browning had developed this philosophy even during his early period, for he has masterfully portrayed three unique individuals, each abnormal in some way. Ottima is a selfish, callous, passionate spirit, redeemed at the last moment only because she accepted all the blame for the adulterous relationship with Sebald and her husband's murder. Sebald is weak and lustful, but, after Luca's murder, he is almost constantly guilt-ridden until Pippa's song takes away his moral paralysis. Free to act, he repents his evil deeds by rejecting Ottima and killing himself. Porphyria's lover is the third abnormal individual in Browning's early collection. He, too, is weak, but addition-

ally, his mind has distorted reality. He has committed murder at the command of an inner voice and felt that God sanctioned his act because throughout the night he has waited, and "God has not said a word."(p. 189)

CHAPTER III

THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH: RED COTTON NIGHT-CAP COUNTRY

In the thirty years between the publication of Pippa Passes and Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, Robert Browning abandoned his treatment of tormented men and women in distorted love relationships except for his discovery in 1860 of an old Roman murder case and his subsequent poem The Ring and the Book. This poem, which occupied his time between 1864 and 1869, explored the souls of the saintly Pompilia and her beastly husband, Guido Franceschini.¹ Browning spent eight years thinking about this poem, and "it is certain that Browning never wrote better or with more point and vigour than in this case, and never after longer or profounder meditation."²

After publishing The Ring and the Book, Browning occupied his writing time with Balaustion's Adventure, Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, and Fifine at the Fair before finding another true story involving a deranged lover to

¹Griffin and Minchin, pp. 234-235.

²Griffin and Minchin, p. 233.

put into verse. In these later years Browning's style as well as some of his interests changed. He became a public defender of sorts and tried to reveal the stories of characters who were "condemned by the world."³ Indeed, as G. A. Simcox commented, Browning seemed less disinterested than in earlier poems and "was preoccupied with some didactic purpose."⁴ Critics such as William Dean Howells did not, however, look very diligently for Browning's purpose and considered Red Cotton Night-Cap Country only a "horrible and revolting story."⁵ However, one discerning American, J. R. Dennett, said correctly, "Mr. Browning's latest poem tells with rather less than his usual convolutions a story which has to the full the quality of psychological subtlety in which he so much delights."⁶

Delight aptly described Browning's response to the details which were to become the Miranda biographical poem, Red Cotton Night-Cap Country. Having first heard Leonce Miranda's sordid story from his friend Milsand while vacationing in Normandy, Browning curiously pursued further

³Donald Smalley, "Special Pleading in the Laboratory," The Browning Critics (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), pp. 197-198.

⁴A review of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country reprinted in Browning: The Critical Heritage, editors Body Litzinger and Donald Smalley (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970), p. 380.

⁵A review of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country reprinted in Browning: The Critical Heritage, p. 381.

⁶A review of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country reprinted in Browning: The Critical Heritage, p. 384.

information on his next visit. After learning all the facts available and conducting an investigation of his own, Browning decided, against local opinion, that Miranda had not intended to commit suicide. He then wrote his arguments in over four thousand lines of blank verse.⁷

Instead of spending eight years in planning and writing as he had done for The Ring and the Book, Browning spent only seven weeks penning Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, which was published in May of 1873.⁸ His central purpose in this poem was to expose the motives which caused Leonce Miranda to jump to his death from the tower of his country estate.⁹ Rather than directly revealing the feelings and motives of the tormented lover as he had revealed them in earlier poems, Browning chose to use a narrator to explore all aspects of the life of Leonce Miranda.

Red Cotton Night-Cap Country begins like an occasional poem written for Anne Thackeray. It assumes an easy conversational tone which contrasts sharply with the serious subject.¹⁰ Yet, typically, Browning foreshadows the revelation of Miranda's tragic story with shifts in imagery and subtly suggestive terms. He introduces Miranda's name and occupation in lines ten and eleven as he casually mentions places other than the tiny seacoast village in Normandy

⁷ DeVane, p. 370-371.

⁸ Griffin and Minchin, p. 251.

⁹ Smalley, p. 214

¹⁰ Duffin, p. 156.

where he might have encountered Miss Thackeray. When the narrator, presumably Browning, meets and converses with Miss Thackeray about St. Rambert and the surrounding countryside, she proposes to call this sleepy section of France "White Cotton Night-Cap Country."¹¹ However, the narrator proposes the Red cotton night-cap as opposed to the White, suggesting that the country is not as innocent and serene as it appears.

Within the poem Browning's narrator first uses the red night-cap to represent Thomas Carlyle as an extremely original Victorian writer after he has catalogued other noted Victorians:

The object that shall close review may be . . .

Well, it is French, and here are we in France:
It is historic, and we live to learn,
And try to learn by reading story-books.
It is an incident of 'Ninety-two,
And, twelve months since, the Commune had the sway.
Therefore resolve that, after all the Whites
Presented you, a solitary Red¹²

Next, Browning's narrator refers to the French king wearing a red "cap of Freedom" (ll. 308-314) just before being deposed in the French Revolution. In Carlyle's book The French Revolution, the red night-cap consistently symbolizes

¹¹Edward Berdoo, The Browning Cyclopedica: A Guide to the Study of the Works of Robert Browning (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1949), p. 377.

¹²Robert Browning, The Works of Robert Browning (New York: Ams Press, Inc., 1966), VII, 290, ll. 300-303. (Hereafter cited by line numbers in the text.)

rebellion and change brought about by revolution. This symbol seems useful to the narrator, and he adopts it for use throughout his biography of Leonce Miranda.

Throughout the conversation about the red night-cap, Browning's narrator and Miss Thackery are walking through St. Rambert and they jokingly argue over the appropriate name for their vacation spot. While exploring the village and its surroundings, the narrator carefully describes the shrine of La Ravissante where miracles supposedly occur daily. It is famed for two gold crowns, one each for Mother and Babe. The Virgin's crown has been made and donated by Miranda, the Parisian goldsmith, whose estate is only two miles from the church. It is here at Miranda's country home that the narrator proposes to prove the appropriateness of "Red, not White" night-caps (ll. 550-555). The narrator also describes Miranda's estate as elegant, but finishes:

Just so, a sense that something is amiss,
 Something is out of sorts in the display,
 Affects us, past denial, everywhere.
 (ll. 710-712)

Then, like a master teller of suspenseful tales, the narrator reveals that Miranda is dead (l. 724) but does not at once explain how he died. He playfully digresses for another two hundred lines before suddenly saying:

No, sit and stay!
 Now comes my moment, with the thrilling throw
 Of curtain from each side a shrouded case.
 Don't the rings shriek an ominous "Ha! ha!
So you take Human Nature upon trust?"
List but with like trust to an incident
 Which speedily shall make quite Red enough
 Burn out of yonder spotless napery!
 Sit on the little mound here, whence you seize
 The whole of the gay front sun-satisfied,
 One laugh of colour and embellishment!
 Because it was there,--past those laurustines,
 On that smooth gravel-sweep 'twixt flowers and sward,--
 There tragic death befell . . .
 (11. 1010-1023)

In the first part of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, Browning has cleverly described the setting, introduced and given some information about his main characters, and displayed one of the two sets of contrasting metaphors which unify the poem and build suspense for the story he wants to tell.

At the beginning of Part Two "the narrator compares nineteenth-century society to some historic building 'gnawn hollow by time's tooth,' the interior a mass of rubble and the exterior walls standing uncertainly."¹³ This image as well as the contrasting metaphors "turf" and "towers" Browning owes to Carlyle, who first used this architectural imagery to represent the tearing-down of the old and the rebuilding of a new age.¹⁴ With the meaning of "turf" and "towers" clear, Monsieur Leonce Miranda's story thus becomes an allegory of

¹³Charlotte Crawford Watkins, "Browning's 'Red Cotton Night-Cap Country' and Carlyle," Victorian Studies, 7 (June, 1964), 363-364.

¹⁴Watkins, p. 367.

man's search for truth.¹⁵ Miranda, "In his adventure to walk straight through life/The partial ruin," (ll. 1107-1108) has no one who can tell him how. The narrator explains:

Keep this same
Notion of outside mound and inside mash,
Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness,
Symbolic partial-ravage,--keep in mind!
(ll. 1144-1147)

Throughout the remainder of the poem, towers, walls, rocks, stones, or the ridge symbolize faith and righteous living, whereas turf, grass, or flowers represent youthful dissipation. The tent, too, is important symbolically in Miranda's life. It represents a temporary screen by which Miranda hides shameful parts of his life.¹⁶

After considering the setting and the symbolism, the central question remains: What events, feelings, and motives affected the life of Leonce Miranda? The narrator first considers Miranda's heredity to be a major influence and perhaps the cause of all the problems of his life; for he was the only son of a passionate Spanish father and a shrewd, unfeeling French mother:

This son and heir then of the jeweller,
Monsieur Leonce Miranda, at his birth,
Mixed the Castilian passionate blind blood
With answerable gush, his mother's gift,
Of spirit, French and critical and cold.
Such mixture makes a battle in the brain.
(ll. 1150-1156)

¹⁵Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. 54.

¹⁶Philip Drew, The Poetry of Browning: A Critical Introduction (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1970), pp. 323-324.

Miranda does indeed vacillate between faith in his church and desire for earthly pleasures. He has been "bulwarked" (l. 1169) with the Catholic faith and remains so until the age of "two and twenty years" (l. 1238).

Then he is tempted to enjoy the life of the Parisian boulevards while he is young and to "pace the stony platform afterward" (l. 1252). By the age of twenty-five, he works hard as a jeweller during the week but keeps five mistresses and enjoys himself on the weekends (ll. 1349-1356). He sprawls "upon the turf" and lets "strange creatures make his mouth their home" (ll. 1366-1368). Taking these lines literally and symbolically, one realizes that Miranda is leading a dissipated, far-from-Christian life on the streets of Paris. The narrator explains metaphorically that Miranda makes some efforts to hide his life of pleasure:

Outside the turf, the towers: but round the turf,
A tent may rise, a temporary shroud,
Mock-faith to suit a mimic dwelling-place
(ll. 1371-1373)

Miranda even brags that he knows women so well that with his mistresses he pretends to be a poor artist or musician so that he will not waste any money on them (ll. 1412-1432). It is thus apparent that he is not just a free-spender, but that he takes seriously the advantages and responsibilities of material wealth.

Unknown to him, his carefree life is at an end one new year when he goes to a play hoping to find another young girlfriend. He notices a young beauty and falls in love

with her at first sight (ll. 1446-1466). After the play, he follows her home, offers her his love and is accepted. The narrator comments, "Truth I say, truth I mean: This love was true,/And the rest happened by due consequence" (ll. 1487-1494):

. . . Miranda is torn by guilt and indecision. His heart tells him that his love, because true, is holy; but his received social and religious convictions war against his heart; and he is not strong enough to find in human love the evidence of divine sanction which he seeks or to renounce the liaison and find peace within the grace of the church. In short, he cannot choose between turf, the symbol of earth, the flesh, and mortal love; and tower, the complex symbol of man's spiritual aspirations, the Virgin, and the yearning for the Absolute.¹⁷

Miranda compares Clara to a primrose, but the narrator qualifies the flower image with the proposal that Clara may not legally be Miranda's flower (ll. 1498-1499). He simultaneously remarks that Miranda also mistakenly considers belief in Catholicism to be Christianity (ll. 1500-1501).

At first Miranda is deceived by Clara, but soon she tells him her sordid past: she has been married to a tailor, Ulysse Muhlhausen, is now separated from him, and has been supported by a man who recently deserted her (ll. 1657-1701). Miranda claims to love Clara even more after the truth is told, and he lives happily with her in Paris until her husband comes to demand a divorce (ll. 1902-1920). All three individuals are happy with the divorce, but Leonce and Clara leave the city to avoid further unfavorable publicity.

¹⁷Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. 57.

In the meantime, Miranda's father has died, leaving him sole heir to the business and to Clairvaux, his country estate. Surprisingly, Miranda's mother, though an exemplary daughter of the Church, accepts Clara and even offers the couple advice about the best room to occupy at Clairvaux during the winter (ll. 1937-1963). They not only spend the winter but decide to make it their permanent home. Immediately, they set about making improvements on the "relic half and ruin whole" (l. 1981). Meanwhile, Miranda has dabbled in art, music, and literature to pass his time (ll. 2117-2125) and has only succeeded in delaying the resolution of his conflict between faith and earthly passion.

At the beginning of Part Three, Miranda is, after five wonderful years in the country, called to Paris by his mother. Even the season of the year seems to reflect that time is running out, for it is autumn (ll. 2165-2189). Unfortunately, Miranda has left the jewelry shop in another person's charge, and that individual together with his mother charges him with recklessly spending too much money (ll. 2189-2194). Moreover, his mother reminds him of his sinful affair with Clara and asks if he intends to "soar to heaven" from the new belvedere he has built on Clairvaux (ll. 2215-2230). These lines hold much irony for the reader since, in effect, this is what Miranda tries to do, but instead of commanding him to choose between Clara and herself, his mother merely increases his inner conflict by telling him to keep both but not to harm either one (ll. 2238-2246).

Inflamed with inner turmoil, Miranda leaves his mother's house and, obeying the command of an inner voice, flings himself into the cold waters of the Seine just outside his mother's door (ll. 2264-2276). He somehow manages to get back to his mother's house and into bed where he stays "raving" for a month (ll. 2277-2279).

At month's end, Miranda somehow gets home to Clairvaux, but his mood is permanently changed. The images of the scenery reflect his melancholy mood:

Clairvaux looked greyer than a month ago.
 Unglossed was shrubbery, unglorified
 Each copse, so wealthy once; the garden-plots,
 The orchard-walks showed dearth and dreariness.
 The sea lay out at distance crammed by cloud
 Into a leaden wedge; and sorrowful
 Sulked field and pasture with persistent rain.
 (ll. 2307-2313)

Clara tries her best to cheer him and seems to succeed somewhat when Miranda is urgently summoned by wire to Paris again (ll. 2350-2358). He starts the trip "one fear from head to foot" (l. 2359). When he arrives at his mother's house, he finds her dead. Ironically, a priest of the faith he so desperately wants to believe in accuses him of breaking his mother's heart and thus of being the cause of her death: (ll.

"Dead, through Leonce Miranda! stricken down
 Without a minute's warning, yesterday!
 What did she say to you, and you to her,
 Two months ago? This is the consequence!
 The doctors have their name for the disease;
 I, you, and God say--heart-break, nothing more!"
 (ll. 2372-2377)

However, Browning's narrator does not blame the priest entirely; instead he accuses Miranda's kin of telling the

priest what to say. The narrator then "contrives a substitute for the dramatic monologue by employing a pervasive irony, deliverately using the Cousins' own terms, which are designed to present their actions in the most favourable light, yet making his own reservations perfectly plain."¹⁸

The Cousinry, indeed, have planned well in their own behalf. Already in a weakened condition, Miranda faints upon hearing himself blamed for his mother's death:

You hardly wonder if down fell at once
The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical,
Poetical, besprent with hearts and darts;
Its cobweb-work, betinseled stitchery,
Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
And showed the outer towers distinct and dread.
(11. 2433-2438)

Miranda's earthly world is destroyed as his guilt reminds him that living within the faith is the only way to avoid the dreaded damnation. After he recovers from fainting, Miranda cries out in anguish, but as his cries subside " . . . a sudden resolution chilled/His blood and changed his swimming eyes to stone" (11. 2449-2450). He becomes cold, detached and businesslike, planning a complete change in his life, for Miranda proposes to give his goldsmith business to his cousins; he will reserve only a small pension for himself. He asks, too, that something be paid to Clara to ease his conscience and keep her from continuing a life

¹⁸Drew, *op.*, 326. *Arctura* 3001, p. 54.

of sin:

As for that woman--they would understand!
 This was a step must take her by surprise.
 It were too cruel did he snatch away
 Decent subsistence. She was young, and fair,
 And . . . and attractive! Means must be supplied
 To save her from herself, and from the world,
 And . . . from anxieties might haunt him else
 When he were fain have other thoughts in mind.
 (11. 2482-2489)

With his new plans, Miranda seems to have assumed a new personality.

At the funeral of his mother, Miranda again breaks emotionally and is forceably dragged from the snow beside the grave:

How the poor fellow, in his misery,
 Buried hot face and bosom, where heaped snow
 Offered assistance, at the grave's black edge,
 And there lay, till uprooted by main force
 From where he prayed to grow and ne'er again
 Walk earth unworthily as heretofore.
 (11. 2511-2516)

In but three days' time, the cousins come to Miranda's house to make some decision about when and how to see Clara and pay her off. They wait for Leonce to join them, but by and by, screams cause them to rush into the former death chamber. There they find that Leonce has read Clara's love letters, replaced them in their coffer, and plunged the coffer and both his hands into the fire:

Monsieur Leonce Miranda, one by one,
 Had read the letters and the love they held,
 And, that task finished, had required his soul
 To answer frankly what the prospect seemed
 Of his own love's departure--pledged to part!
 Then, answer being unmistakable,
 He had replaced the letters quietly,
 Shut coffer, and so, grasping either side

By its convenient handle, plunged the whole--
 Letters and coffer and both hands to boot,
 Into the burning grate and held them there.
 "Burn, burn and purify my past!" said he,
 Calmly, as if he felt no pain at all.

(11. 2579-2591)

As Philip Drew writes, "This ghastly incident has been preceded by certain dramatic hints--he has felt 'worn to rags, nay tinder,' and has told Clara 'I shall refuse no fuel that may blaze'; one of the family, 'warming his own hands by the fire,' hopes Clara will not come for a 'parting touch of hand'."¹⁹ Perhaps ever since his meeting with his mother, Leonce Miranda has subconsciously wanted to destroy himself by fire to purify his sins of the flesh, since he cries for his hands to "burn and purify my past" (1. 2590). After the cousins pull him away from the fire, he breaks away and again plunges his hands into the fire until nothing is left but charred stumps. His purification by fire loses him both his hands, but "his hideous atonement brings no cure and no peace, for his mania to seize absolute truth through divine revelation continues."²⁰

After the doctor has attended him for three months, Miranda leaves his sick bed and unexpectedly goes to the quarters of his beloved Clara. He seemingly has solved the conflict between his earthly love and his Catholic faith. However, when he returns to his residence, he brings Clara with him and announces his new plans to his cousins. (11. 2712-2744). On arriving, he first thanks the two nuns and the

¹⁹Duffin, p. 159.

²⁰Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. 61.

priest for their attentions to him and bids them goodby. Next he dismisses his cousins, saying he will let them run his business but that Clara, who has now become his "Brother," will now care for him when he leaves the city to recover his health (ll. 2745-2770).

Furthermore, instead of giving his jewelry business away, Miranda sells it to his cousins at a fair price and retires to Clairvaux, promising never to leave it or Clara again. Miranda has discovered the reality of human experience:

That what was, was:--that turf, his feet had touched,
Felt solid just as much as yonder towers
He saw with eyes, but did not stand upon,
And could not, if he would, reach in a leap.
People had told him flowery turf was false
To footstep, tired the traveller soon, beside:
That was untrue. They told him "One fair stride
Plants on safe platform and secures man rest."
That was untrue . . .

(ll. 2822-2830)

In his search for truth, Miranda has tested religious faith and human love and found them both necessary to life:

Don't tell me that my earthly love is sham,
My heavenly fear a clever counterfeit!
Each may oppose each, yet be true alike!
(ll. 2842-2844)

He proposes now to build a tunnel to connect "turf" and "tower," to reconcile love and duty. His tunnel will be created by giving away his "worldly wealth."²¹

For two years Miranda seems cured of his mental anguish. Upon returning to Clairvaux he turns to the neigh-

²¹Duffin, pp. 160-161, p. 61.

boring Catholic church, La Ravissante, for answers in his search for truth. Miranda asks the parish priest and mother of the convent:

--May a man, living in illicit tie,
Continue, by connivance of the Church,
No matter what amends he please to make
Short of forthwith relinquishing the sin?
Physicians, what do you propose for cure?
(11. 3042-3046)

Whereupon Miranda and his Clara, according to the narrator, are urged by the Church to part from one another. They, however, do not have the strength to separate, and instead of being turned from the Church until they renounce their life of sin, they bestow many gifts on the Church and its poor:

Gift followed upon gift, at all events.
Good counsel was rejected, on one part:
Hard money, on the other--may we hope
Was unreflectingly consigned to purse?

Two years did this experiment engage
Monsieur Leonce Miranda: how, by gifts
To God and to God's poor, a man might stay
In sin and yet stave off sin's punishment.
No salve could be conceived more nicely mixed
For this man's nature: generosity.--
(11. 3121-3130)

Very stoically, Miranda sets out to learn to paint, write, and play piano again, substituting other parts of his body to supply the needed movements. In time he becomes accomplished in spite of his handicap (11. 3189-3215); his life seemingly is returning to normal.

Yet, one April morning, Leonce Miranda leaps to his death from the belvedere of his restored estate. One wonders what forces compel him to do such a thing. However, even before Miranda's thoughts are revealed, one feels that the

Church must somehow be the cause, and the name of Miranda's church, La Ravissante, even connotes the abuser or violator. Ironically, Miranda thought the name derived from the words rare vision, but obviously the name came to have negative meanings. In fact, throughout the poem representatives of the church have been presented as cruel or greedy. One remembers the unfeeling priest who blamed Miranda for his mother's death, and the priest and nun who willingly took Miranda's money without giving him peace of mind.

Indeed, at the beginning of Part Four, Miranda's final delusion involves the Ravissante which "smiles" at him as he gazes out from his belvedere (ll. 3271-3275). His previous two attempts to purge himself have happened after severely stressful events. Just before he jumps from the tower, his thoughts reveal his intense inner conflict as he addresses the Virgin at the shrine two miles in the distance. He explains that he has been trapped between earthly love which he calls the enchantress and desire for heaven represented by La Ravissante. Recounting that religion "spoke first, promised best, and threatened most," (l. 3327) he asks what he has received. He reminds the Virgin of his hands and all the material wealth he has given to her, and yet, he has received nothing in return. He explains that his enchantress has provided "gain" (l. 3353) which he could not do without. He begs for a sign that he is religiously acceptable. He knows She wants his whole life, but he cannot give it because he lacks faith (ll. 3375-3377). Moreover, he argues that the Church

would gain so much more from him if he only had a sign of acceptance. He knows that She cures insignificant ailments all the time, but the priests tell him that, in these times, he cannot expect great miracles and a doctor has scoffed at the power of religion (ll. 3386-3429). Baring heart and soul, he pleads to know what he can do to show his faith. His inner voice tells him the answer:

"Therefore, to prove indubitable faith,
 Those angels that acknowledge you their queen,
 I summon them to bear me to your feet
 From Clairvaux through the air, an easy trip!
 Faith without flaw! I trust your potency,
 Benevolence, your will to save the world--
 By such a simplest of procedures, too!
 Not even by affording angel help,
 Unless it please you: there 's a simpler mode:
 Only suspend the law of gravity,
 And, while at back, permitted to propel,
 The air helps onward, let the air in front
 Cease to oppose my passage through the midst!
 (ll. 3517-3529)

Before he leaps, he fantasizes the impact of his flight. It will cause changes in the French government, and the people will once more have a king; his past will be forgotten, Clara will regain her innocence, and they can be married. In ecstasy, he sees the Virgin smile and hears her call to him:

. . . See, She smiles,
 She beckons, She bids 'Hither, both of you!'
 And may we kneel? And will you bless us both?
 And may I worship you, and yet love her?
 Then!
 (ll. 3587-3591)

Afterward, Miranda lies "stone-dead" on the turf. Thereupon a gardener, the narrator, the Cousinry, and Clara react to the scene. The gardener thinks Miranda was crazy; the narrator reflects that, considering Miranda's life, this

supreme test of faith is not illogical or insane (ll. 3595-3609). The Cousinry, true to their previous character, rush to Clairvaux to pronounce Miranda insane and claim all his wealth for themselves. From their speech to Clara, one sees that they cared nothing for Leonce or his interests and are now only concerned with getting his property for themselves (ll. 3731-3808).

Clara, on the other hand, seemingly has only had Miranda's interests at heart. In considering his life and death, she feels that she did everything for him that a lover could do. She thinks that if he had just told her of his plans to fly from the belvedere, she might have held him to keep him from harming himself (ll. 3665-3709). Moreover, she had even encouraged Leonce to prepare a will leaving his wealth and property to the Church so that his greedy cousins could not inherit them. Then cleverly and admirably, Clara defends herself and her dead lover from the cousins who came immediately to claim Clairvaux (ll. 3811-3970).

Browning's narrator surprisingly renders a harsh final judgment on Clara as well as on the Cousinry and the nun and priest of La Ravissante. Using insect imagery, he reminds the reader of the young Miranda who lay on the ground and let "strange creatures" crawl in his mouth (l. 1366). Of the nun and priest, he comments that they are like scarab beetles "persistently a-trundling dung on earth" (l. 4129). He equates dung with Miranda's money and implies the vileness of a re-

ligion which places such importance on jewels and money.²² The Cousinry are compared to "earwig and blackbeetle" whom Clara, as caterpillar, prevented from taking anything from Miranda's estate (ll. 4105-4109). Using the caterpillar image for Clara, he insists that she "fed" on Miranda until she consumed him (ll. 4103-4105), for Clara had gained much from her twenty-year affair with Miranda, and instead of forcing Leonce to face the truth, she had shielded him too much to love him truly:

But--loved him?" Friend, I do not praise her love!
True love works never for the loved one so,
Nor spares skin-surface, smoothening truth away.
Loves bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace
Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself.
(ll. 4114-4118)

In a final analysis, Leonce Miranda was a "simple, kindly man" (l. 4203) who tried to compromise a conflict between fleshly love and spiritual love and failed. Though the narrator pronounces Miranda "sane," he has plainly described a man disposed to schizophrenia, for the preschizophrenic, according to James C. Coleman, tends to exhibit a specific pattern of behavior. He depends on loved ones more than he should and is especially "vulnerable to disturbances in interpersonal relationships."²³ Miranda relies on his

²²Barbara Melchiori, "Dark Gold or Devil's Dung," Browning's Mind and Art (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1968), p. 113.

²³Coleman, p. 330.

mother and is deeply affected by her rejection of his relationship with Clara. He exhibits his feelings by literally jumping in the river. Typically, the preschizophrenic is concerned with the meaning of life and what the future holds. Miranda always is thinking of what his life should be even though, during certain periods such as his first five years with Clara, he is able to push his concern to the back of his mind. Furthermore, just prior to a schizophrenic breakdown the mentally ill person usually feels overcome by guilt and fear of the future. He feels intense inner conflict.²⁴ Miranda displays his feelings of guilt, remorse, and his inner conflict just before flinging himself in the river and also before plunging his hands into the fire. Just before he jumps from the tower, he seems basically frustrated over the unresolved conflict with the Church. However, he does not reveal his severe inner stress until his soliloquy on the tower.

Another characteristic preceding a mental breakdown is a marked increase in awareness accompanied by a distortion of information. In Miranda's case, each harmful act seems brought on by an inner voice telling him how to assuage his guilt. Even after burning off his hands, he never seems aware that he has done a senseless thing. He considers his hands, instead, a necessary sacrifice to his religion. In addition, a third sign of an imminent breakdown is a loss of a sense of identity which leads "to dramatic and bizarre behavior."²⁵

²⁴Coleman, p. 330.

²⁵Coleman, pp. 301-302.

Miranda exhibits his dissociation with himself most profoundly when he does not seem to feel the pain of his burning hands. And earlier, just after learning of his mother's death, Miranda seems to assume a new personality when he plans to give the business to his cousins and pension Clara off.

Finally, the mentally ill individual usually develops delusions. Miranda's final conversation with the Virgin from his tower is clearly his own fantasy. Imagining that She smiles and beckons to him exhibits the serious state of his mentality just before he leaps to his death. Nevertheless, the narrator states that Miranda could not totally commit himself because he was lacking in intellect.²⁶ His condition, however, is far more severe than that of one lacking intelligence. Yet, in Miranda's very illness lies Browning's fascination with him. It prompts the analysis which reveals Browning's skill as a psychologist and his inclination toward subjects such as that in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.

²⁶Crowell, The Convex Glass, pp. 12-13

CHAPTER IV
WICKEDNESS AND VIRTUE:
THE INN ALBUM.

Only two years after Red Cotton Night-Cap Country was published, Browning again returned to the subject of distorted love with the writing of The Inn Album. This poem, too, was based on an actual incident which happened during the 1840's and which involved Lord de Ros.¹ In The Inn Album Browning chose Victorian England as the setting, and, as a result, the work was received with interest by many Englishmen who had heretofore rejected his recent narratives because of foreign settings. Some critics had favorable comments about the poem, calling it a powerfully told tragedy.² Conversely, several critics charged it with vulgarity, and many mentioned Browning's eccentricities of style, such as his use of brackets, apostrophes, and a rugged meter. Yet, mingled with comments about Browning's form, one unnamed critic recorded Browning's strongest qualities inherent in The Inn Album:

The force of his new poem, which is appalling in the swift convergence of three histories of tragic passion, is little marred by any wandering into the realms of the speculative reflection that takes a reader's attention away from the characters put before him. The four chief personages of the narrative, and even 'the obsequious landlord', are brought

¹Griffin and Minchin, p. 257.

²"Greater than The Ring and the Book," an unsigned review reprinted in Browning: The Critical Heritage, p. 406.

into distinct life, and with but few exceptions retain their individuality clearly throughout. . . . But the vague presentment of a coming terror, suggested in some indefinable manner from the first, the suddenness and completeness of its descent upon its victims, and the compression of a vast extent of passion into the speech and action of a few hours, are common to The Inn Album.³

After considering the critics' reviews, one must examine the emotional lives of three of the four major characters and the qualities within the poem which foreshadow and intensify the violent incident around which The Inn Album revolves. The first quality which intensifies and unifies the poem is the narrative form which, though in blank verse, moves faster than that of Red Cotton Night-Cap Country because it reflects the conversational patterns of men of the world.⁴ The poem's form is reminiscent of Browning's early dramas; this fact is not surprising since the poem was first intended to be a play before Browning learned that Tennyson was himself writing a tragedy at that time. Indeed, like a drama, the poem includes "the inevitable distortions of events" which Browning makes "a source of strength and interest."⁵ Furthermore, The Inn Album is unified as to place and time, and the action is rapidly revealed by the dialogue so that the reader learns of changes in circumstances at the same time as the other characters.

³An unsigned review of The Inn Album reprinted in Browning: The Critical Heritage, p. 408.

⁴Drew, p. 332.

⁵Ibid.

As the poem opens, one realizes that Part One takes place in the parlor of an inn where two men, one young and one middle-aged, have been gambling all night. In the dialogue of the older man, one reads of the inn album, a book which records reflections of previous guests: "page on page of gratitude/For breakfast, dinner, supper, and the view!"⁶ Reflecting a bit of humor, the older man reads a passage from the album and comments:

'If a fellow can dine On Rump-steaks and port wine,
He needs not despair Of dining well here'--
That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form:
But ah, the sense, ye gods, the weighty sense!
(p. 949)

Though the older man injects some humor into the situation, he is, for the most part, very practical, and one soon learns that he has been the loser in the night's endeavor:

Three little columns hold the whole account:
Ecarte, after which Blind Hookey, then
Cutting-the-Pack, five hundred pounds the cut.
'Tis easy reckoning: I have lost, I think.
(p. 949)

Next, the narrator briefly describes the inn parlor in words which evoke unpleasant, if not violent, images and foreshadow circumstances to come:

Shabby-genteel, that's parlor to the inn
.....
On a sprig-pattern-papered wall there brays
Complaint to sky Sir Edwin's dripping stag;
His couchant coast-guard creature corresponds;
They face the Huguenot and Light o' the World.
Grim o'er the mirror on the mantelpiece,

⁶The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning (New York: Modern Library, 1934), p. 949. Hereafter cited in the text.

Varnished and confined, Salmo ferox glares,
 --Possibly at the List of Wines which, framed
 And glazed, hangs somewhat prominent on peg.
 (p. 949)

One envisions the violence and death to come from words and phrases like "brays complaint," "dripping stag," "grim" and "coffined." In startling contrast is the view of the quiet, picturesque countryside as seen by the younger gentleman from the window (pp. 949-950).

Finally, the older man finishes his figuring, puts the album aside, and laughs. With an answering laugh, the younger man asks how much money the older man has lost (p. 950). From a short narrator's comment, one learns something about the younger man: "The youth, the good strong fellow, rough perhaps" (p. 950). He is young, good, and strong though not, perhaps, as mature and wise as he will one day be. The youth then reveals that within a month he will own the surrounding countryside and that he has won ten thousand pounds from the older man. His comments prompt the narrator to label him a "polished snot" and, at the same time, to characterize the older man as "refinement every inch/From brow to boot end. . ." (p. 950). The younger man next reveals his pride in his friendship with the older man, but, simultaneously, he asserts that he is not a fool and knew all along that the older man had tried to trick him into gambling one last time in the hope of winning a large sum from him:

Old fellow, if you gancy--(to begin--)
 I failed to penetrate your scheme last week,
 You wrong your poor disciple. Oh, no airs!
 Because you happen to be twice my age
 And twenty times my master, must perforce
 No blink of daylight struggle through the web
 There's no unwinding? You entoil my legs,
 And welcome, for I like it: blind me,--no!
 A very pretty piece of shuttle-work
 Was that--your mere chance question at the club--

 Said I to you; said I to mine own self:
 'Does he believe I fail to comprehend
 He wants just one more final friendly snack
 At friend's exchequer ere friend runs to earth,
 Marries, renounces yielding friends such sport?'
 (pp. 950-951)

However, he brags that he followed the older man's pattern
 and agreed to gamble, thinking that he would probably lose.
 He is amazed at the coolness of the older man and asks to
 learn how the older man takes such a large loss so calmly
 (p. 951).

At this point the younger man appears a novice in
 ways of the world. He admires the older man greatly and
 desires to pattern himself after his friend. Nevertheless,
 the older man misconstrues the younger man's comments, shows
 that he is not such a good loser, and reveals that he cannot
 pay his gambling debt until the end of the month (pp. 951-952).
 His speech also points out that the younger man's wealth
 comes not from a family of advance social position, but in-
 stead, from a father who was very successful in the ware-
 housing business, and that, though his brother is a Duke,
 the older man is not as wealthy as his title would indicate.

The younger man next presents an impassioned, lengthy speech in which he assures the older man of his admiration, his indebtedness to the older man, and his wish to cancel the gambline debt (pp. 952-953). He reveals that until he met the older man a year ago, he had not in all twenty-five years of his life, including his college years, met a wise man. He claims, too, that the older man has taught him how to be "a snot and a millionaire" (p. 952), and, using bird imagery, he explains the knowledge he has gained from the older man:

. . .how a snot and millionaire
 May lead his life and let the Duke's alone,
 Clap wings, free jackdaw, on his steepleperch,
 Burnish his black to gold in sun and air,
 Nor pick up stray plumes, strive to match in strut
 Regular peacocks who can't fly an inch
 Over the courtyard-paling. . . .
 (p. 952)

Displaying the fallacy of the Victorian idea that a man is not really worthwhile unless he has a title and owns an estate, the young man compares himself to a crow and the titled aristocrats to peacocks which are really exhibitionists with little ability. He next insists that the older man has saved him from becoming a scientist alone in a tower:

. . . so expend my days
 Pursuing chemistry or botany
 Or, very like, astronomy because
 I noticed stars shone when I passed the place.

'And here you spend life's prime in gaining
flesh
And giving science one more asteroid?'

(p. 952)

Interestingly, this image is indicative of the dullness of a life solely dedicated to science.⁷ The older man is, therefore, a heroic figure who rescues the young man from a meaningless life. Furthermore, on the advice of the older man he is about to marry well and lead an idyllic life (p. 953). The young man considers all these lessons worth ten thousand pounds and claims that in another month he will have forgotten the money anyway. Urging the older man to disregard the debt, he begs him to think instead of the morning's activities (p. 953).

Revealing his cynical nature, the older man refuses to cancel the debt, explaining that people would soon be gossiping that he did not pay his gambling debts. He tells his young acquaintance that, though he might promise not to tell, the temptation would soon be too strong and everyone would know about the situation. He reaffirms that he will pay the ten thousand pounds (p. 953). The older man then explains that he is not befriending the younger man for benevolent reasons and deserves no credit at all for his interest. Moreover, he relates that the social expertise of

⁷Crowell, The Triple Soul, p. 63

the younger man makes him look skilled as a teacher and, therefore, important for something. He has never made any significant contributions to the world. Furthermore, he even admits that he is without virtue as he advises:

. . . have no scruple, pray,
But, as I hoped to pocket yours, pouch mine
--When you are able!

(p. 954)

Curious, the younger man asks how his older friend will get the money, but the older man refuses to tell him and quickly changes the subject by proposing that they walk to the train station. There the younger man goes to meet his cousin while the older man prepares to catch a train out of town.

Part Two begins as the two men leave the inn and walk down the road:

So, they ring bell, give orders, pay, depart
Amid profuse acknowledgment from host
Who well knows what may bring the younger back.
They light cigar, descend in twenty steps
The "calm acclivity," inhale--beyond
Tobacco's balm--the better smoke of turf
And wood fire,--cottage at cookery
I' the morning,--reach the main road straighten-
ing on

'Twixt wood and wood, two black walls full of
night

Slow to disperse, though mists thin fast before
The advancing foot, and leave the flint-dust fine
Each speck with its fire-sparkle. Presently
The road's end with the sky's beginning mix
In one magnificence of glare, due East,
So high the sun rides,--May's the merry month.

(p. 954)

The beauty of the scene contrasted with the ugly reality of the inn parlor suggests that the two men are moving into an illusory world, and indeed, before they reach the station they stop to converse and share bits of their past lives. With his concern for the older man's financial problems, the younger man reveals his own innate virtue:

. . . . I hate
 Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
 To strychnine some poor devil of a lord
 Licked at Unlimited Loo. I had the cash
 To lose--you knew that!--lose and none the less
 Whistle to-morrow: it's not every chap
 Affords to take his punishment so well!
 (p. 954)

Then he expresses his adoration of the older man and his mystification over the fact that the older man has not taken his own advice and made a marriage for money:

. . . . The puzzle's past my power,
 How you have managed--with such stuff, such
 means--
 Not to be rich nor great nor happy man:
 Of which three good things where's a sign at
 all?
 (p. 955)

He concludes that the older man's bachelorhood undoubtedly stems from an unrequited love. In answer, the older man first claims that his age has hindered his making an advantageous marriage. Soon both he and the younger man admit that at one time each has been deeply in love. The older man, however, claims that he now hates the woman he once loved, whereas the younger man reveals that he cannot hate:

OLDER MAN "Ah, if you love your love still!
 I hate mine."

YOUNG MAN "I can't hate."

(p. 955)

Peevishly, the older man refuses to reveal the story of his heartbreak. Noticing that time grows short, they prepare to resume their walk to the train station. The younger man sees a possible short cut through the woods and proposes that way. The older man suddenly compares their lives to the woods. Furthermore, in an extended simile, he relates that all men have similar life experiences. He concludes by explaining that four years previously he failed in a love and consequently developed a hatred for the woman (p. 956). The younger man guesses that the woman did not love him because of his aged appearance, but the older man quickly takes affront and denies that his age influenced the woman's decision. He blames love for a younger man for the break in their relationship. Subsequently, after boasts of the conquests of many young women, he describes the love of his life:

She's dead: at least you never heard her name;
 She was no courtly creature, had nor birth
 Nor breeding--mere fine-lady-breeding; but
 Oh, such a wonder of a woman! Grand
 As a Greek statue! Stick fine clothes on that,
 Style that a Duchess or a Queen,--you know,
 Artists would make an outcry: all the more,
 That she had just a statue's sleepy grace
 Which brooks o'er its own beauty. Nay, her fault
 (Don't laugh!) was just perfection. . . .
 . . . country-parson's daughter, mother-less
 Brotherless, sisterless, for eighteen years
 She had been vegetating lily-like.

Her father was my brother's tutor, got
 The living that way: him I chanced to see--
 Her I saw--her the world would grow one eye
 To see, I felt no sort of doubt at all!

(pp. 956-957)

Claiming the devil influenced him to seduce her, the older man continues to relate the circumstances of his parting with the girl he thought he loved. He describes her further as devoted, faithful, and trusting, with strength of character and acuteness of mind (p. 957). Confessing that they had an affair, the older man explains that when the girl asked when they would be married, he hesitated long enough for her to realize that his intentions were not honorable. When he did propose, he recounts that it was too late and that her pride reacted with an indignant refusal. Later, he learned that she had, within a month, married a parson, who he conjectures was young and self-assured (pp. 957-958).

The younger man interrupts this story several times with questions suggesting they might have loved the same girl. Yet, when he learns the older man did not marry her, he feels assured that the similarities are coincidences. Yet he puzzles as to why the older man now hates the woman so much. Earnestly, the older man explains that the loss of this woman was the turning point of his whole life and that her image obtrudes upon his every endeavor. Because of her, he now hates himself and his fortunes are sliding down-hill (pp. 958-959). At the conclusion of the older man's story,

the younger man realizes that they have missed the train; he proposes that the older man wait at the inn until he can persuade his aunt to accept the older man as a house guest. Before he leaves his friend, however, he reveals the incident of his lost love. He relates that he was just twenty-one when he found the woman of his dreams and proposed to her. Sadly, he remembers that she refused him, saying she was promised to another. Though he did not inquire further, he explains that he heard at a dance that she had settled upon an older man, whose description parallels that of his friend. Both men then consider the similarities of their "perfect" woman, but since the older man has not married, they conclude that they could not both have loved the same woman (pp. 960-961). Ironically, the younger man wishes that he had challenged the woman's lover, As he speculates, he might have won her love, but now the opportunity is lost. Nevertheless, they decide to carry on the plans of the day; the younger man goes to his cousin's while the older man saunters toward the appointed meeting place in the inn parlor (pp. 961-962).

Meanwhile, two women are admitted to the parlor of the inn. The younger woman is the young man's cousin, and the older woman has been summoned to pass judgment on the young man. Eagerly, the younger woman begins the conversation; she wonders why the older woman did not see the young man, as they were to arrive on the same train. Then she

thanks her friend for coming, and the friend accepts her thanks, for, in making this trip, she claims to have broken a promise to herself (p. 962). One wonders immediately what the promise was; the young girl assumes that her friend's vow was not to leave her husband even for a short time. Yet, the girl claims the need of her friend's counsel, for she is not at all sure she loves her cousin enough to give up her present life-style for him.

While her young friend speaks, the older woman has been staring at a magnificent, beautiful elm tree outside. She finally speaks to the tree:

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs and silences,
Sun-warmth, dew-coolness,--squirrel, bee and bird,
High, higher, highest, till the blue proclaims
'Leave earth, there's nothing better till next step
Heavenward!'--so, off flies what has wings to help!"
(p. 963)

The romantic younger girl misconstrues several of her friend's statements and assumes that her friend's unfailing beauty means that she is happy as the wife of a country parson. She compares her friend's married life to a perfect interval under a fairy marriage-tree:

"If I had seen no other tree but this
My life long, while yourself came straight, you said,
From tree which overstretched you and was just
One fairy tent with pitcher-leaves that held
Wine, and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,
And magic fruits whereon the angels feed--
I looking out of window on a tree
Like yonder--otherwise well-known, much liked,
Yet just an English ordinary elm--
What marvel if you cured me of conceit
My elm's bird-bee-and-squirrel tenantry
Was quite the proud possession I supposed?

And there is evidence you tell me true.
 The fairy marriage-tree reports itself
 Good guardian of the perfect face and form,
 Fruits of four years' protection! Married friend,
 You are more beautiful than ever!"
 (p. 963)

By speaking in this manner, the young girl indicates that at this point she feels her cousin is not worthy of her, but believing that her friend has chosen happily, she thinks the friend will choose equally as well for her. She compares her older friend to a "prize flower" which has remained beautiful because of true love. Later she learns that her friend lives a miserable married life, but she then realizes that by using the unpleasant experience as a guide, her friend can still judge the suitability of the young man (pp. 964-965). Thereupon, the older woman entitles her soul "Inferno!" Suddenly the intense irony of the young girl's preceding metaphors becomes apparent, and at the same time the remark seems to intensify the unhappiness of the older woman. It now becomes clear to the young girl that she believes what she previously attributed to the sky - that she will find no happiness in this world. Lacking time for more conversation, the older woman sends the younger away to meet the young man and she waits, still preoccupied with the tree.

As Part Four begins, the older man, unaware that anyone else is present, enters the inn parlor. He reads aloud from the inn album; the woman turns from the window. Recognizing her immediately and remembering his shameful treatment of her, he merely stares. She, too, recalls his infa-

mous behavior and her past four unhappy years as she rages:

"You here! I felt, I knew it would befall!
 Knew, by some subtle undividable
 Trick of the trickster, I should, silly-sooth,
 Late or soon, somehow be allured to leave
 Safe hiding and come take of him arrears,
 My torment due on four years' respite! Time
 To pluck the bird's healed breast of down o'er wound!
 Have your success! Be satisfied this sole
 Seeing you has undone all heaven could do
 These four years, puts me back to you and hell!
 What will next trick be, next success? No doubt
 When I shall think to glide into the grave,
 There will you wait disguised as beckoning Death,
 And catch and capture me forevermore!
 But, God, though I am nothing, be thou all!
 Contest him for me! Strive, for he is strong!"
 (p. 966)

Even though she compares him to the devil, he counters her charges with accusations of his own:

Down and down, see where you have dragged me to,
 You and your malice! I was, four years since,
 --Well, a poor creature! I became a knave.
 I squandered my own pence: I plump my purse
 With other people's pounds. I practised play
 Because I liked it: play turns labor now
 Because there's profit also in the sport.
 I gamed with men of equal age and craft:
 I steal here with a boy as green as grass
 Whom I have tightened hold on slow and sure
 This long while, just to bring about to-day
 When the boy beats me hollow, buries me
 In ruin who was sure to beggar him.
 Oh, time indeed I should look up and laugh
 'Surely she closes on me!' Here you stand!"
 (p. 966)

After telling her what he has become because of her, he re-counts that she is still as beautiful as ever, and accordingly, seeing her so unchanged, that she has caused him to lose the guilt he felt over shaming her. He explains that he had worried lest she should harm herself because of her shame. But

he now feels that she is evil and has caused him to lose even a prospective bride, whereas she has married a fine young pastor who forgave her love affair. He imagines that she has the powers of a witch and begs her to let him "slink/ Into dark safety!" (p. 967). In replying, she compares herself to a tree, uprooted by sin. She asserts that she is still glad that she "hurled contempt" at him and that she was saved from falling deeper into sin by a rock, her husband. Her old lover misinterprets her situation and smirks at her good fortune, but she goes on to tell him exactly what her situation is:

. . . These four years I have died away
 In village-life. The village? Ugliness
 At best and filthiness at worst, inside.
 Outside, sterility--earth sown with salt
 Or what keeps even grass from growing fresh.
 The life? I teach the poor and learn, myself,
 That commonplace to such stupidity
 Is all-recondite. Being brutalized
 Their true need is brute-language, cheery grunts
 And kindly cluckings, no articulate
 Nonsense that's elsewhere knowledge. Tend the sick,
 Sickened myself at pig-perversity,
 Cat-craft, dog-snarling--maybe, snapping."
 (p. 969)

Cynically, he taunts her but she goes on to tell him of her husband's character. She reveals that her husband amply describes the horrors of hell but leaves heaven to his congregation's imagination. In spite of her husband's good intentions, she reveals that his flock pays little attention to him and that her husband and she both lead sterile lives:

. . . All the harm is done
 Ourselves--done my good husband who in youth

Perhaps read Dickens, done myself who still
 Could play both Bach and Brahms. Such life I lead--
 Thanks to you, Knave! You learn its quality--
 Thanks to me, fool!"

(p. 970)

Continuing, she claims that this visit with her friend has given her new life; she has come back from the walking-dead and started noticing the beauties of nature. His appearance, however, breaks the illusion. She labels her soul a "failure" and vows not to look for love again until she dies. Finally, she asserts:

. . . there is
 Heaven, since there is Heaven's simulation--earth.
 I sit possessed in patience; prison-roof
 Shall break one day and Heaven beam overhead."
 (p. 971)

Clearly neither character is admirable in this scene because of the venomous accusations they hurl at one another. If their hatred is this intense, one wonders if the love they once had for one another might not also have been extremely strong.

After hearing her explanations, the older man again blames her for their situation, charging her with having never really loved him. He claims that he made her "the standard of all right, all fair" (p. 971) and that her vision haunted him as he faithfully believed in her goodness until he saw that she had utterly turned against him. Yet, with his next words, he asks her to forgive him and not to judge him merely by his shameful treatment of her. In an extensive entreaty, he begs her to redeem him, for seeing her now, he forgets

evil plans. Telling her of "A certain refuge, solitary home" (p. 972) he has, he pleads with her to leave her husband and go away with him. Further, he asserts that she can be his salvation if she will just remember the real love she once had for him. After his impassioned speech, she looks at him and then laughs bitterly and unbelievably. Comparing him to a fisherman, she charges that through trickery he is trying to lure her into trusting him again. Bitterly she tells him his tricks will not work on her this time, and she asks him to leave (pp. 973-974).

He agrees to leave but before he can act, the young man enters the room. Not understanding the situation but realizing that his friend is known to his former sweetheart, the young man becomes angry. He accuses his friend and the lady of being accomplices in some plot to swindle him of his wealth. He asks for some explanation from the lady because she appears even more deceitful than the older man, whom he now claims he hates (pp. 974-975). Clearly the young man wishes to hear the woman he has loved declare herself free of any duplicity with the older man.

The woman calmly explains the situation. First, she insists that he has every right to question her, but she claims that she is superior to both men. Furthermore, she asserts that she has judged the young man pure and innocent of any scheme to force shame on her again. Next she defends her first refusal of the young man's love:

While your truth was truth: and I knew at once
 My power was just my beauty--bear the word--
 As I must bear, of all my qualities,
 To name the poorest one that serves my soul
 And simulates myself! So much in me
 You loved, I know: the something that's beneath
 Heard not your call,--uncalled, no answer comes!
 For, since in every love, or soon or late,
 Soul must awake and seek out soul for soul,
 Yours, overlooking mine then, would, some day,
 Take flight to find some other.

(p. 975)

After explaining her view of true love, the lady advises the young man to "renounce this rag-and-feather hero-sham" (p. 975). She tells him that she came to judge his fitness for marriage to his cousin and that she recommends that the young girl marry him and let her "pure hand" (p. 976) guide him to honesty. Using snake imagery, she advises the younger man to let his older friend slither away, but they find that the "snake" is not yet ready to go.

The older man inquires about the reason the lady's husband has done nothing about his wife's violator. To his pleasant surprise, he learns she has not told her husband as she feels only God should reveal such secrets. The older man then proposes that he speak privately with the young man before he leaves and asks the woman to step into the next room for a moment. She, at first, refuses; thereat the older man threatens her, writes some lines in the inn album, and hands it to her as she leaves the room.

The older man's abusive actions are not ignored by the younger man, who orders him not to bully the lady in his presence again. Further, the young man is suddenly enlight-

ened, and remembering the gossip concerning the wickedness of the older man, he suddenly believes the stories he has heretofore doubted. The lady has served as a catalyst to break down the young man's false convictions about his former friend, and he now tells the older man to pay the gambling debts on time or face public ridicule and a whipping (p. 977).

Despite the young man's threats, the older man speaks again, but this time, losing his usual wry humor, he speaks plainly. First, the older man calls the younger one an ungrateful fool, and then, he reminds him that it was the younger man's desire to accompany and emulate the older, not the other way around. He, next, claims that he has taught the younger man how to live properly in a world of men and argues that the younger man should take advantage of the woman. He devilishly suggests that she planned the meeting in order to see the young man again, and he proposes that the lady will be more receptive "With an instructed man, no longer boy/Who blushes like a booby" (p. 980). The older man ends his argument by urging the younger to use the lady as he pleases and when tired of her to return once more to the rich cousin for marriage (p. 980). When the lady returns to the room, the older man changes his villainous demeanor to one of utmost politeness and leaves the lady and the young man alone together (pp. 980-981).

Once alone, the lady calmly asks if the young man knows of the wicked proposal of the older man. Judging from

his blushing face, she realizes that he does know. She then persuasively urges the younger man to "Break from beneath this icy premature/Captivity of wickedness" (p. 982). She claims to be "past sin now" (p. 982) and asserts that he can also be. Confidently, she prophesies that the young man will not dare to carry out his evil fantasy as he cries and then blushes before he speaks. Claiming his ignorance of what the older man had written and blaming himself for being such a blunderer, the young man relates the arguments of the older man. He tells the lady that the older man misrepresented her past and also encouraged him to believe that the lady had come to the village to make the young man love her again. Earnestly, the young man then tells the lady his true feelings:

What I am, what I am not, in the eye
Of the world, is what I never cared for much.
Fool then or no fool, not one single word
In the whole string of lies did I believe,
But this--this only--if I choke, who cares?--
I believe somehow in your purity
Perfect as ever! . . .

(p. 982)

Afterwards, he pledges himself to her service; he vows to give his whole life to her and offers her his hand. She takes it quickly as she hears the older man returning to the parlor. The older man, surprised to see the pair holding hands, asks the lady if she has accepted the younger man's proposition. Ironically, she answers "'Till us death do part!'" (p. 983). Since the older man has no concept of virtue, he readily misinterprets the situation and assumes

that the virtuous lady and the rough young man have only been pretending and are now going to show their true personalities (p. 983). Paternally, he bids them to depart to some clandestine hideaway for a month of pleasure. Then, he prophesies, they will both successfully resume the lives they left. He boasts of his expert guidance in working out their situation and insists that they all write in the inn album before they depart. The lady, however, asserts that the older man has already composed a masterpiece, and for the young man's benefit, she reads it aloud:

"One against two--and two that urge their odds
 To uttermost--I needs must try resource!
 Madam, I laid me prostrate, bade you spurn
 Body and soul: you spurned and safely spurned
 So you had spared me the superfluous taunt
 'Prostration means no power to stand erect,
 Stand, trampling on who trampled--prostrate now!'
 So with my other fool-foe: I was fain
 Let the boy touch me with the buttoned foil,
 And him the infection gains, he too must needs
 Catch up the butcher's cleaver. Be it so!
 Since play turns earnest, here's my serious fence.
 He loves you; he demands your love: both know
 What love means in my language. Love him then!
 Pursuant to a pact, love pays my debt:
 Therefore, deliver me from him, thereby
 Likewise delivering from me yourself!
 For, hesitate--much more, refuse consent--
 I tell the whole truth to your husband. Flat
 Cards lie on table, in our gamester-phrase!
 Consent--you stop my mouth, the only way."
 (p. 985).

The lady then reaffirms her faith in the goodness of the young man. She next hints strongly that she has taken action to keep the older man from shaming her further, but that she has left no opportunity for the young man to collect his winnings. She returns to snake imagery:

Conquer who can, the cunning of the snake!
 Stamp out his slimy strength from tail to head,
 And still you leave vibration of the tongue.
 His malice had redoubled--not on me
 Who, myself, choose my own refining fire--
 But on poor unsuspecting innocence;
 And,--victim,--to turn executioner
 Also--that feat effected, forky tongue
 Had done indeed its office! Once snake's 'mouth'
 Thus 'open'--how could mortal 'stop it'?"
 (p. 985)

She realizes that the older man's knowledge of her secret will be a threat to her indefinitely, for the older man has no standard of morality. Her logical revelations enlighten the younger man beyond endurance, and, consequently, he springs at his former friend and strangles him. The lady speaks approvingly, but she states that his death was unnecessary since she is about to die, possibly of self-inflicted poison. Before her death, however, she writes in the inn album to clear the younger man of blame:

"I die now through the villain who lies dead,
 Righteously slain. He would have outraged me,
 So, my defender slew him. God protect
 The right! Where wrong lay, I bear witness now.
 Let man believe me, whose last breath is spent
 In blessing my defender from my soul!"
 (p. 986)

Clearly, the lady had suffered from guilt and shame for loving an unworthy man four years previously. Her depression was unrelenting, and she had determined that an ideal love could only be found in heaven. Her suicide was undoubtedly the logical result of her constant inner stress.

As the lady dies, from outside is heard the innocent voice of the young cousin. As she prepares to enter the inn

parlor, the poem ends. In retrospect, three lives have been graphically revealed. The older man, according to Ruth Chapman, is a vivid picture of profound, intense hate.⁸ He reflects, almost unrelieved, "greed of money, cold, deliberate lust, refinements in hatred and cruelty towards things weaker in any way."⁹ Yet, the older man, too, has signs of unused goodness. He knows evil to be just that, and he is aware of the blessings in life which he has given up.¹⁰ Since he sees the woman as a symbol of the good things he has forfeited, he is not totally unredeeming, but like Ottima he attains some small measure of goodness. His last passionate appeal and the lady's misunderstanding of it create an intensely dramatic situation. In this same situation, and equally as tragic a figure, is the lady whose life has been paralyzed as a result of a single mistake. She suffers from not being able to forgive herself or others. Considering that she had only had a father to rear her, one speculates that she grew up with an idealized view of the world and therefore was easy prey for an experienced older man. Though physically she is still as beautiful as ever, her soul has changed, and she has

⁸Ruth Rimmer Chapman, "Browning's Penchant for the Abnormal," an unpublished M. A. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1951, p. 47.

⁹E. D. West, "One Aspect of Browning's Villains," Browning Studies (London: George Allen, 1895), p. 116.

¹⁰Ibid.

needlessly yoked herself to a "soulless husband."¹¹ Consequently, as King points out, "She reveals, in her address to the tree, that the ideal is not attainable in this world and she carries this conviction with her even into death."¹²

The young man, on the other hand, is presented as youthful and foolish; mistakenly he patterns himself after the older man. However, though he has become a competent gambler and is planning to marry for money, his transformation into a rouse is an "illusion not yet challenged by reality,"¹³ which is represented by the inn parlor where the three characters become morally committed. In contrast, the countryside represents a realm in which people "move unaware and imperceptive."¹⁴ In the reality of the inn parlor, the young man's inherent finer qualities become dominant, and without the older man's influence, he apparently will choose to live a morally righteous life.

From another point of view, The Inn Album becomes an allegory. The young man represents "the Soul" for which the wicked man and the virtuous lady contest. The man proposes worldly arguments while the lady urges virtue. When both contestants die, the youth is then free to choose his style of life. The cousin represents neutrality. If the youth

¹¹Arthur Symonds, An Introduction to the Study of Browning (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1906), p. 193.

¹²King, p. 197.

¹³King, p. 196.

¹⁴Ibid.

marries her for virtuous reasons, she will represent innocence, but if he marries her for self-gain, she will be only "one of the Prizes of Worldliness."¹⁵

Though Browning continued his interest in people in later poems, The Inn Album marks the end of his use of true criminal cases as subjects of his poems, and The Inn Album includes three of the seven abnormal characters whose love affairs proved so intolerable that they sought to end their anguish through suicide or murder. Of the seven, Porphyria's lover and Leonce Miranda were pushed over the edge of sanity by love. Though their situations were unbearable, they chose different means of solving their problems; Porphyria's lover murdered Porphyria to preserve their love forever, and Leonce Miranda jumped to his death while seeking heavenly sanction for his illicit love affair. On the other hand, Ottima and Sebald and the older man and the lady were first paralyzed spiritually because of their love for each other. When they finally did act, Sebald and the lady chose death over a life of infamy, and Ottima, not wanting to live without Sebald, redeemed herself by focusing her dying prayers on Sebald rather than upon herself. The older man, though not choosing death, was too corrupt to live and was murdered to rid the world of such wickedness. Interestingly, four of the deaths - Sebald, Ottima, Leonce, the lady - were caused by unresolved

¹⁵Drew, p. 335.

feelings of guilt. Paradoxically, the older man died because of a lack of guilt over his abominable actions and, too, because of a misunderstanding of human nature. Though scarred, the young man alone emerged with some hope for a normal life.

Through these various persons, Browning true to his artistic objective, reveals the psychological complexities in the souls of seven tormented lovers, and it is for his acute analysis of motives and his penetrating knowledge of the workings of men's minds that Browning merits acclaim.¹⁶

¹⁶F. R. G. Duckworth, Browning: Background and Conflict (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1931), p. 123.

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