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ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING: ARGUMENTATIVE DISCOURSE
IN SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late father, Ulyses Pearson--the grandson of slaves--whose own school days totaled about eight years, but who labored for nearly half a century in a textile plant to ensure that his ten offspring were afforded the opportunity to achieve their personal best. It is his struggle and his example which inform my value system. I hope that he has a choice seat up there today so he can see me.

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ABSTRACT

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The poetry of Barrett Browning has yet to be made assessable to a wide audience. We have scarcely begun to number the poems, let alone offer any substantive and intellectual avenue into them. Barrett Browning's current literary marginality is informed by the pervasive imperative that the poetic voice is male and that women must consign their concerns to the pages of fiction. This study attempts to give credence to my notion that Barrett Browning's poetry deserves another hearing, particularly the Sonnets from the Portuguese. This sonnet cycle demands definitive treatment as argument because it is informed by Aristotelian and classical rhetorical strategy. These poems' very tough-mindedness lays to rest the critics' complaint that Barrett Browning practiced a confused and directionless rhetoric in them.

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Chapter I

Introduction: "What other pretty book is this?"

When the reviewer at Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine posed the question "What other pretty book is this?" in his review of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Seraphim and Other Poems (1838), his patronizing attitude toward the poet's work proved prophetic. He echoed not only the critical assessment of some nineteenth-century readers but also that of many modern critics as well. The sense of this rhetorical question casts Barrett Browning as a pale, delicate, and inept invalid who retreated to "sofa and silence" (Radley 8) more often than she effected quality poetry. Such critical condescension is in part responsible for Barrett Browning's current assignment to the basement in the "mansion of literature" (Woolf 148).

When in the nineteenth century Barrett Browning was the most highly esteemed female poet in England and Robert Browning had not yet emerged from the shadow of Sordello, there were few to foresee the day when an estimate of her achievement would constitute a short appendage to an extended account of his career. The story of Barrett Browning's rise to fame is familiar to thousands of people

who never read her poems (Woolf 14). She began to write under the influence of Byron (The Seraphim and Other Poems [1839]) and passed thence to the company of the "Spasmodic" poets (A Drama of Exile [1845]). The so-called Spasmodic School of poets engendered derisive remarks because of their hyperbole, their subjectivism, their lack of discipline, and for what was seen as their inveterate wildness and exaggeration in technique. The general "spasmodic" tendency is said to appear in the early verse of Elizabeth Barrett Browning (Holman 504).

Even the older school of writers with whom Barrett Browning overlapped was inclined to criticize her for obscurity. And none of the more than 400 poems and letters that she wrote has been more praised and blamed than her famous Sonnets from the Portuguese. The publication of Sonnets from the Portuguese (1850) and of Aurora Leigh (1856) provoked rapturous acclamations, particularly from other writers and poets. Sonnets was eagerly and favorably compared to sonnet sequences of Petrarch and Shakespeare, for example, and Aurora Leigh with the epics of Homer and Milton (Leighton 3).

Although the work of Barrett Browning was read and admired in her own time by many, including both the very young and her own peers, she received mixed reviews from her fellow writers. Indeed, William Wordsworth and many of

his circle had disparaging evaluations of the sonnet sequence. Wordsworth, according to Crabbe Robinson, found Barrett Browning's sonnets too ideal, too obscure, a sentiment epitomized by his famous comment on her marriage:

So Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett have gone off together! Well, I hope they understand each other--nobody else could. (Robinson 87)

But Leigh Hunt admired her "divine" sonnets; he obviously understood that obscure language was the birthright of Barrett Browning's generation (Baker 157). Although Tennyson found her lacking in harmony (Tennyson, Letters 303), Edgar Allan Poe thought her worth a dozen of Milton and equal in original genius to Shelley and Keats. Yet Poe considered her careless in her art (Poe, Letters 13).

Ruskin completely ignores Sonnets in his assessment of Barrett Browning's poetics. He did allow, however, that Aurora Leigh was the greatest poem in the English language (Ruskin, Letters 247). W. S. Landor proclaimed her the greatest poet since Milton (Landor, Letters 87). However, Sydney Dobell, in an uncharitable tribute to Barrett Browning, held that she wrote as Shakespeare's sister might have written, but he added that no woman would ever be able to write a good poem (91). Dobell is particularly interested in Sonnets. He correctly points out that Barrett Browning's amatory sequence is in large part autobiographical. But in his inveterate condescension to

the poet's work, Dobell argues that the sequence cannot be examined except as a record of the poet's love and courtship of Browning.

Such a narrow evaluation of Sonnets ignores in at least several ways the didactic purposes of the sequence. For example, Dobell assigns no attention to the process of self-discovery and rebellion which the sonnets record. His views are in line with the poet's contemporaries who are also unwilling to see any imaginative genesis for the poems except that of Robert Browning. Edward Fitzgerald echoes Dobell's evaluation of the sonnet sequence. In what appears to be a critical assessment steeped in morbidity, he looks at the corpus of her work, and recognizing neither the purpose nor the importance of the sequence, he offers a backhanded compliment to the poet:

Mrs. Browning's Death is rather a relief to me, I must say: no more Aurora Leighs, thank God! A woman of real genius, I know: but what is the upshot of it all? She and her Sex had better mind the Kitchen and the Children; and perhaps the Door: except in such things as little Novels, they only devote themselves to what Men do much better, leaving that which Men do worse or not at all. (Ricks 25)

While surely one cannot take seriously such a blatantly narrow and outrageously unabashed sexist remark, Fitzgerald's comments do, however, underscore the Blackwood's reviewer's shallow question cited above.

Charlotte Bronte, whose views were certainly not in line with those of Fitzgerald, did second the motion to assign Barrett Browning to the Spasmodic School of poets. Her tart refusal to be "rapturous over a certain wordy, intricate, obscure style of poetry [such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning writes]" (68) reveals a failure to recognize the scope of Sonnets and its import.

A Barrett Browning contemporary who dismissed Sonnets and did not see in them any abiding poetic worth was Robert Southey, who accuses the poet of an incoherent construction. He sees Sonnets not as a unified whole but rather as scattered testimonials by which "an ailing thirty-nine-year-old succeeds in wearing her feelings on her shirt sleeves" (43).

A similar response to Sonnets shows in a host of Barrett Browning biographies which tend to stress biography or the life of the poet, not the poetry itself. The publication of Barrett Browning's letters at the end of the nineteenth century gave impetus and encouragement to a personalized, biographical, and sexually partisan literary criticism (Leighton 4). Indeed, it was not until some sixty years after her death that any attempt at a critical biography of Barrett Browning was made (Taplin 13). The poet's earliest biographer, Lilian Whiting, claims to be the definitive biographer because her work is informed by

extensive conversations with Robert Pennini Browning, the poet's son. However, the value of the work is marginal not only because the biography is dated (1899), but also because despite its promising title (A Study of Elizabeth Barrett Browning), the work is a decidedly uncritical assessment. Whiting merely recounts the essential data regarding Barrett Browning's family, her early introduction to poetry, her invalidism, and her courtship with and marriage to Robert Browning. Hence, an idealized image of the woman gradually supplants the figure of the poet in the critics' imagination, and Barrett Browning passes thence to the heroine of a love story. "To love," Aurora Leigh laments, "is a more womanly calling than to write" (59). Since there is no bibliography, much of Whiting's material cannot be documented. Although the significance of the Whiting book is mixed, the work does give a sense of the sympathetic criticism accorded the poet during her own lifetime. The biography also helps us to chart the decline of a poet who received mail from as far away as America, mail simply addressed to

Elizabeth Barrett,

Poetess,

London.

She did, in fact, receive these letters (Hayter 156). On the other hand, the Whiting work stands at the forefront of

a long line of biographies which pay no critical attention to Barrett Browning's vocation as a writer. These biographies inform the view that the life supersedes the content of her poetic output. In other words, these so-called critical biographies advance the legend of the personality and eclipse the poetry.

Beginning with Oliver Elton's The Brownings (1924), subsequent biographies for twenty-five years present a sympathetic, romantic but uncritical bent. Elton's The Brownings devotes only the last thirteen pages to Barrett Browning, and these are largely a personal eulogy of the woman. He ignores the poetry in general and Sonnets in particular. His is a maudlin commentary on the poet's personality. Despite his good intentions, Elton cannot avoid a patronizing tone:

Altogether we leave Mrs. Browning with a mixture of admiration and discomfort; faults of form and phrase are never the faults of smallness; it would have been an honor to have known her. Often we feel we would rather have known her than read her. (76)

Since Elton's study is offered as a critical biography of both poets, his decision to dispense with Barrett Browning in a dozen or so pages defines his own estimate of her worth as a poet.

Osbert Burdette in 1931 does recognize that Sonnets chronicles an evolution, but he could not be more

inaccurate in his estimation of what constitutes this evolution. He argues that Sonnets "rehearse the tale of her rescue, her conquest, her admiration, her scruples, her surrender" (214). He is partly correct. But Burdette fails to discern the fact that Robert Browning, not Barrett Browning, is the object of the lover's gaze and pursuit. Burdette does not see that Barrett Browning does no surrendering during the course of the amatory sequence. On the contrary, she employs dialectic to cause the Beloved, or Browning, to surrender to her wishes. In his strictly male perceptions, Burdette is incapable of seeing Barrett Browning as anything other than the "Other," the object of male gaze and narrative rather than as the subject of her own discourse and experience.

Indeed, Burdette deprecates the sequence in particular and Barrett Browning's poetry in general when he declares that "one of the crowning defects of love-poetry written by women is their unreal habit of writing as if they were men" (214). He does not know, cannot accept the fact of the advertent role-reversal that constitutes the very fabric of the sequence. Burdette's evaluation of Barrett Browning's poetic worth relies upon the extent of the latter's influence upon the intellectual development of Robert Browning:

Only a remarkable woman could have held and maintained this central place in a life of such splendid energy. She was as nearly his religion as one person can be to another. (331)

He concludes that Barrett Browning was an "individualist in a wayward feminine fashion" (333). The problem with Burdette's evaluation of Sonnets is that he is uncomfortable with Barrett Browning's having seized the initiative with her own tone of urgency as she woos, courts, and wins the Beloved as the sequence unfolds. From women, Burdette wishes to hear only the response to such courting. He is unwilling and hence unable to see Barrett Browning as the real instigator of the rites of courtship which Sonnets rehearses. So he deliberately reverses the didactic intent of Sonnets. He jumps to the ridiculous conclusion that it is the woman's response that Sonnets from the Portuguese reveals. Yet, he offers not a shred of evidence to support this stance. He, of course, is on less than firm ground.

In Immortal Lovers (1950), Frances Winwar appears to echo Burdette's views on gender, women, and poetry. Of her reading of Sonnets, Winwar makes the apparently irrelevant statement that "she [Barrett Browning] possessed the intellect of a man and the courage of ten" (106). The thinking of Burdette and Winwar subscribes to the "sofa and silence" (Radley 53) mindset, a mindset which indicates a

discomfort with a woman poet who demonstrated individualist ideas. It is difficult to decide which sort of biographical study is more denigrating to the poet--those which take issue with the poet's toppling of male positions or those which are merely sympathetic exercises in idolatry, as is Dormer Creston's Andromeda in Wimpole Street (1956). The book is little more than a review of Barrett Browning's letters. Indeed, 253 pages of the biography are devoted to generous reproductions of patches of selected letters. The biography recounts the famous tale of courtship, but does not even attempt a critical evaluation of the poetry. It is well written and entertaining if one is solely interested in the personality and the legacy of the famous romance.

Even Barrett Browning's most recent and most comprehensive biographer, Gardner Taplin, is hard on Sonnets. In his Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1957), Taplin charges that

. . . the freshness of Sonnets has faded. . . .
with all their singing angels, floods of tears,
chrisms, lutes, and golden thrones, they are very
much in the idiom of the period. (15)

Just as the biographies illuminate the woman at the expense of the poetry, so does recent criticism celebrate the legend of the poet's personality over the quality of the poetry. At the beginning of the twentieth century, one

can detect two distinct changes of attitudes in the critics. There was, first of all, a new preoccupation with stylistic smoothness and correctness. "She is one of the most irregular of poets," Hugh Walker complained in 1910 (9). Secondly, and perhaps more unfortunate, there was a new preoccupation among the critics with the criterion of womanliness. One sees in Sonnets criticism during the first half of the century an inability to divorce the poet's sex from a just appraisal of her poetics.

Undeniably, the reputation of the poet has been damaged by Edmund Gosse's false story published in Critical Kitkats (1907) regarding the genesis of the sequence. Gosse's supposedly apocryphal version of episodes has followed Sonnets through many printings and still appears in the reprinted Cambridge Edition of 1974 (Radley 359). Gosse's is an emblematic tale of coyness, self-dramatization, and shame. His account transfers the reader's embarrassment to the poet herself. Gosse insists upon referencing the forged Reading Edition (1847) of Sonnets. According to his version of the genesis of the poems, Barrett Browning was too embarrassed by the poems to bear to remain in the room while Browning read them (Radley 91).

Gosse's misdeeds have engendered an array of critics who constitute the "embarrassed school" of criticism.

Barrett Browning's most sympathetic critic, Aletha Hayter, stands at the forefront of a group of twentieth-century critics who avert their eyes in embarrassment from Sonnets. Indeed, Virginia Woolf, Gardner Taplin, and Hayter's critiques of the sequence merge. Woolf and Hayter hold that Barrett Browning's mind and reactions are irredeemably circumscribed by her isolation, forced into channels alien to themselves. Both Taplin and Hayter criticize what they label the dated and idiosyncratic imagery with which the poet expresses her perceptions. All three admire her effort and the integrity of her craftsmanship (Hayter 88, Woolf 17, and Taplin 253).

Hayter is embarrassed by Sonnets because she feels that the poet is dealing with an emotion too new for the poet:

To me the much-praised Sonnets from the Portuguese are not her best work because in them she is dealing with an emotion too new and powerful for her to transmute it into universally valid terms. Psychologically, as a woman's analysis of states of love, they are absorbing, but poetically, the utmost poignancy of happy love is not there, as the poignancy of happy love is in Modern Love. They are not enough removed from personal relationship to be universal communication. They are hardly sensual at all, but emotionally they are naked--wonderful for the lover to whom they are addressed, but in some way uncomfortable for the rest of us. (105)

Miroslava Wein Dow agrees with those who regard Sonnets with a disconcerting embarrassment. She argues that the

poems lack controlled passion and the "truth of poetry rooted in human experience" (93). Wein Dow defends her evaluation of the poems by accusing Barrett Browning of being imitative and derivative in content and in technique. In Wein Dow's view, the poet's dependence upon her literary grandfathers--Petrarch, Shakespeare, Wordsworth--has left Sonnets sterile and morbid (97). Sonnets does consciously rehearse the form but certainly not the content utilized by these male poets. Further, it must be recognized that Barrett Browning has no literary grandmothers. Indeed, she sought and failed to locate these grandmothers:

The divine breath . . . why did it never pass,
even in the lyrical form, over the lips of a
woman? How strange! And can we deny that it was
so? I look everywhere for grandmothers and see
none. It is not in the filial spirit I am
deficient, I do assure you--witness my reverent
love of grandfathers! (Letters 51)

While countering Hayter and the others who feel embarrassed by the sequence, Dorothy Mermin locates the source of the ridicule:

The extraordinary accuracy with which the poems depict its female speaker violates the decorum of the sonnet sequence almost as much as the sex of the speaker does. . . . The real problem is that the female speaker produces painful dislocations in the conventions of amatory poetry and thus in the response of sophisticated twentieth century readers, whose first overwhelming impression of the poems is that they are awkward, mawkish, and indecently personal--in short, embarrassing.
(353)

Readers are uncomfortable because Barrett Browning does not define herself within the terms set by male poets. On the other hand, Christina Rossetti's speaker in Monna Innominata does define herself within those terms, each sonnet in the sequence being preceded by epigraphs from Dante and Petrarch. By contrast, the speaker in Sonnets from the Portuguese initiates and writes her own poems--does not elect merely to respond to her lover's words, to be silent, to be abandoned, or to die.

To exorcise the embarrassment, Mermin calls for a closer reading which peels back the multitudinous levels on which the poems can be read. If read this way, Mermin argues, readers will not experience this obnoxious embarrassment which Hayter and her circle insist upon experiencing (360).

In defending Sonnets against the charge of an inveterate embarrassment, Angela Leighton goes a step further than Mermin. Leighton observes:

To write a sonnet sequence is, of course, to trespass on a male domain. Dante, Petrarch, Sidney, and Shakespeare are the eminent grandfathers of this predominantly male line, and Barrett Browning is one of the first granddaughters. She thus enters a tradition in which the roles are sexually delineated: there is the man who speaks, there is the woman who is admired, described, cajoled, and pleaded with from a distance. (98)

Ervin Goffman argues that this embarrassment can arise from the "clashing of incompatible roles" (352). What Mermin, Leighton, and Goffman suggest is that the poems enact for the speaker the process by which she resolves the tension inherent in being both poet and object of another's narrative. They seem to be suggesting that the reader's embarrassment is informed by an inherent, albeit, sexual bias. In short, the reader's embarrassment is his own, not that of Barrett Browning.

Lorraine Gray's study of Sonnets moves in another direction since she compares the structures within the poems with characteristic structures of love sequences. Gray views the entire sequence as a linguistic unit, or as a sentence. Gray's work looks at the compositional arrangement of the sequence into three crowns, and hence, the organizing principle of Sonnets. Although Gray's premise moves into a consideration of linguistics, in terms of content, her views on what the poems mean are aligned with those of many of her fellow critics. Not unlike Hayter, Gray does not see the sequence as great poetry since the poems do not express the universal wisdom of Dante, Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Meredith (3). Gray does, however, credit Barrett Browning with having revitalized the tradition of the amatory sequence--hence,

her contribution to literary history. But even this laudatory remark is inserted as an afterthought and constitutes a limited evaluation of Barrett Browning's poetics.

Perhaps the most serious error of analysis which Gray commits is her dismissal of the important Sonnet I as inconsequential to the sequence. Her evaluation of the structure of the sonnets should surely yield a more valid reading of the entire sequence, but most assuredly a more valid reading of the first poem is in order. This initial sonnet announces the enthymemic premise and the direction of the poems. Further, Gray not only does not recognize the structural function of Sonnet I, but she also fails to discover the didactic purpose of the final sonnet as well. "The silence that follows Sonnet 43," she pronounces, "is the silence of artistic failure" (88). She leaps to the less than logical conclusion that both the first and last sonnets are, as she terms them, "clasp-end poems." In her view, these two poems serve neither a structural nor a thematic function. Although her work is offered as a study of the structure of the sequence, Gray does not, in fact, present a credible structural explication of Sonnets. She does not do so because her work muddles Barrett Browning's purpose in the amatory sequence. Gray holds that many of the poems are marked by a lack of purpose, of direction.

She, in fact, cannot discern the forest from the trees. Gray does not see the inherent cohesion which characterizes both the structure and the thematics of the sequence.

Further, Gray misreads the plethora of rhetorical questions posed in Sonnets by Barrett Browning. Gray sees the technique as confusing since, she points out, the queries are never answered. Gray cannot see the specific function of the sequence as a unit, a mechanism through which the poet performs several didactic aims. To propose rhetorical questions is not to answer them; there, of course, is no need to do so.

Melvin Goldstein looks at the amatory sequence in light of the Petrarchan tradition. The strength of this study is that it examines the sequence as an independent and complete unit, a reading which is the only way in which to evaluate the poems. But like Gray, Goldstein accuses Barrett Browning of muddled thinking and of a confused purpose. He insists that the sequence embraces a thesis and an antithesis, but no synthesis (184). He is in error in this assertion. In fact, the structural and thematic direction of the cycle is informed by this tripartite paradigm. Goldstein also points to the poet's tendency to vacillate between certainty and uncertainty. And he is absolutely correct in this observation. But it is contradictory to praise at once the cohesiveness of the

sequence and decry its lack of purpose. He does not give credence to Barrett Browning's technique of creating unity and purpose by the alternation between certainty and uncertainty. Barrett Browning's technique, by its very nature, affords unity by creating a tension between two disparate poles, certainty of her position and the uncertainty of the same, simultaneously.

Of the much maligned Sonnets from the Portuguese, Elaine Harrington takes a different approach. She begins by charting the pattern and the unity of images in the sequence. She sees in the poems a movement from the material to the spiritual, a reading that is central to Barrett Browning's overall purpose (188). Indeed, Harrington does a comprehensive job of charting the poet's use of technique to realize her larger goal, that being, to effect, via the poetry, an evolution of and a certification of self. But Harrington stops short of the other, more important aspect of the sequence. She does not recognize the intrinsic persuasive force of the poems, the mechanism by which Barrett Browning achieves and locates the at-oneness to which Harrington alludes.

Similarly, in focusing on the mind instead of the myth, William S. Peterson examines Barrett Browning's poetic theory as these are expressed in Sonnets. In his careful study, Peterson examines the role of the sequence

in the poet's move from the semi-invalid who writes at the pleasure of her domineering father to the poet who achieves selfhood as both poet and as woman (158) via Sonnets from the Portuguese.

While Virginia Steinmetz does discern a dramatic and a persuasive purpose in Aurora Leigh, Barrett Browning's last mature work, she gives no credence to the role of Sonnets in the larger process of discovery which it records. Steinmetz recognizes that the poet wrote "to create, through form, a cohesive balanced self" (12). But to ignore the sonnet sequence as part and parcel of this search for self is to leave spaces unaccounted for in the process of rebellion which much of the poetry records.

Also, Hoxie Fairchild's critique of Barrett Browning does little to remedy the state of general neglect of Sonnets as poetry. His disparaging comments underscore the view that the poet does not know her rhetoric:

In religious no less than in secular verse her considerable gift for making warmly emotionalized rhetoric move to incantatory rhythms is largely vitiated by her diffuseness, messiness, sentimentality, and lack of organic relation between thought and image. (217)

Because he has not read Sonnets as a unified entity, Fairchild does not see any relation between content and technique demonstrated therein. He does not recognize the

poet's charting of images to support her own process of discovery demonstrated in the sequence.

An equally denigrating review of these poems is offered by Dolores Bald in her essay on the poet's craft. The essay is divided into two parts, one decidedly negative, the other underhandedly positive. Indicative of the former is the following passage:

It is difficult to write of Mrs. Browning with justice or temperance. She has been so foolishly and extravagantly praised that it is easy from sheer contra-suggestion to descend to folly and extravagance to blame. At the very outset it must be confessed that Mrs. Browning's poetry was feeble. This was inevitable as the case of a woman feeble in spirit as well as body. (273)

The positive approach is put forth in the following manner:

It is good to feel how blind he [Robert Browning] was to his own superiority; and it is to his wife's credit that she never took herself at this estimate. She wishes to serve rather than to be served. . . . "How Dearest, Wilt thou have me for most use?" (273)

Bald's inappropriate quoting of the final line of Sonnet 17 out of context constitutes an ignorance of the content of this particular poem. Barrett Browning's rhetorical question does not want answering. In her role as pursuer and as lover, the woman poet is merely conforming to standard tradition and practice for amatory sequences. She is asking questions not unlike those put forth by male lover-personas in male sequences. Obviously, the sense of her question cannot be taken literally as Bald insists upon

doing. It might have been better had Bald stopped at her "negative" approach to Barrett Browning criticism.

This narrow and uncharitable view of the poet's craftsmanship is underscored by Edith Batho and Bonamy Dobree's evaluation in 1938:

Of Mrs. Browning it is not necessary to speak at length. Highly applauded in her day, suggested for the laureateship together with Tennyson after Wordsworth's death in 1850, there is little of her that can be read with more than vague suggestions of pleasure, even the more famous lyrics [Sonnets from the Portuguese]. (273)

Dierdre David, G. K. Chesterton, and Jacques Pattee all accuse the poems of being shallow exercises in lyricizing. In their view, Barrett Browning does not address specific concerns in Sonnets (David 81, Chesterton 98, and Pattee 43). It is unfortunate that these otherwise careful scholars turn a blind eye toward the various levels of meaning on which the poems can be read. Each does, however, concede that each poem seems to be preoccupied with the image of ascension for the speaker-self (149). To see in Sonnets an avenue through which the poet reaches her ultimate aims is to at least see some of the significance of the love sequence.

Those who accuse Barrett Browning of not knowing her rhetoric are too numerous to completely recount. Hugh Walker saw her work, particularly Sonnets, as irregular and uneven (81); G. K. Chesterton applauded Barrett Browning's

"hot wit," but assigned hard names to her "high-coloured language" and to her "love of quaint and obscure similes" (210).

In a more graphic and denigrating portrait of the poet's handling of matters of rhetoric, Virginia Woolf, writing in 1932, perhaps summarizes the prevailing critical reception of the poet in the twentieth century. Woolf does not see Sonnets as a major achievement. Like Hayter, she comes away from the sequence uncomfortable and embarrassed by its intimacy. Woolf's portrait of the uncouth scullery maid who has managed to wrangle an invitation to dinner but does not know how to dine with dignity represents the definitive statement on Barrett Browning's alleged lack of craftsmanship. The work of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Woolf asserts, is glanced at perhaps by two professors in American universities once a year:

But fate has not been kind to Mrs. Browning as a writer. Nobody reads her, nobody discusses her, nobody bothers to put her in her place. . . . In short, the only place in the mansion of literature that is assigned to her is downstairs in the servants' quarters, where in company with Mrs. Hemans, Eliza Cook, Jean Ingelow, Alexander Smith, Edwin Arnold, and Robert Montgomery, she bangs the crockery about and eats vast handfuls of peas on the point of her knife. (218-19)

Aletha Hayter concurs with Woolf in assigning Barrett Browning to the servants' quarters. Like Woolf, Hayter

holds that Barrett Browning practiced a confused, directionless, and inept rhetoric:

She seems like a very powerful transmitting station broadcasting on an unusual wave-length; some listeners hear only reverberating booms and clangs--others nothing but urgent signals in an unknown code--others a garble of foreign languages--others receive it deafeningly loud, or perpetually fading and then swelling. (244)

Pattee concurs with Hayter. After studying Sonnets Pattee ignores completely poetic content and expression and imposes a narrow view on, of all things, her rhyming technique, or as he contends, her lack of technique. She was not consciously in rebellion, he flatly states:

Rhyme [to Barrett Browning] was always secondary to thought. . . . Rather than modify her original flash of poetic expression she would allow slovenly rhyming. . . . (356)

To read Sonnets from the Portuguese and find in them nothing to praise or blame but a few instances of off-rhyme is to miss the point.

Barrett Browning was aware that her experimentations were likely to be misunderstood by the critics. Writing to R. H. Horne in 1857, she indicates what she intends by way of technique:

A great deal of attention--far more than it would take to rhyme with conventional accuracy--have I given to the subject of rhymes, and have determined in cold blood to hazard some experiments. (Letters 264)

Regarding her meter, she wrote to H. S. Boyd, her blind tutor:

You will find me a little lax perhaps in meter--freedom which is the result not of carelessness but of conviction and indeed of much patient study of the great fathers of English literature. (Letters 47)

It is obvious that modern critics repeat Victorian criticism of Barrett Browning's rhymes. No credence is afforded to the fact that a rhyming revolt developed in the nineteenth century, a revolt led by the likes of Emerson, Holmes, and Dickinson (Baker 19). Because the Victorians cared more for imitation, convention, and tradition, they disparaged Barrett Browning's attempts at originality and experimentation (Smith 18).

In addition to the critics who accuse Barrett Browning of not knowing her rhetoric and those who are embarrassed by the intimacy of Sonnets, in recent years a group of critics led by Virginia Steinmetz, Angela Leighton, Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar constitute a new direction in Barrett Browning criticism. These feminist writers attempt a psychobiographical approach to evaluating the poetry. The focus of each of these writers is to examine the Barrett Browning corpus in light of the influence of psychobiography and psycho-sociology, considerations governed by what Gubar calls "gynocritics." A term which implies an historical orientation, gynocritics looks at

women's writing as it has actually occurred and tries to define its specific characteristics of language, genre, and literary influence within a cultural network that includes variables of race, class, and nationality (Gubar 41). These feminist critics of Barrett Browning's writing make intriguing reading, but one soon grows weary from the frequent intrusion of the jargon of psychology and Freudian interpretations which are imposed upon the readings of Aurora Leigh in particular and of Sonnets of the Portuguese in general. Typical of this kind of treatment is Angela Leighton's study of the poetry. Leighton unites woman and poet by charting the process through which Barrett Browning writes her way into literary independence and into selfhood. Leighton begins by examining the role of Mr. Barrett in his daughter's development as a poet and as a woman; she then moves to the poet's disaffiliation from her deceased mother; and finally Leighton describes the process through which Barrett Browning becomes a poet in her own right, having shed the last vestiges of what Leighton calls her "woman's silence" (91). While the story of Barrett Browning's move to a manumission of self makes interesting reading, Leighton et al. make claims too absurd to embrace wholly.

To cast Barrett Browning in the role of the uncouth scullery maid who is assigned to the cellar with minor

poets, to read Sonnets as strictly autobiographical and hence as embarrassing to the reader, to dismiss the poet as an inept practitioner of rhetoric, and to impose so strict a reading of the poet as feminist writers propose are failures to recognize the rich complexity of the poetry in general and the sonnet sequence in particular. Such failures to view the poetry in its wholeness may well account for Barrett Browning's loss of poetic stature. Not to be dismissed is the Modernist reaction against the eminent Victorians in the 1920s and 1930s. Another factor may have been the intellectual reaction against that seamy and sentimental interest in Barrett Browning's life which started with publication of the letters at the end of the nineteenth century and was encouraged in the early decades of the century by such popularizing biographical works as Rudolph Bessier's The Barretts of Wimpole Street. One other reason may have been the steep rise in Robert Browning's reputation at this time, against which his wife's was often disparagingly measured. At any rate, Barrett Browning's fame as a poet declined steadily in the early twentieth century and has only in the 1970s begun to revive.

While Barrett Browning may never be seated on the first floor in Woolf's "mansion of literature," she appears to be well on her way up out of the kitchen. With the

growth of feminist publishing and criticism in the late 1970s, the tide is turning. Barrett Browning's poetry is being read again, discussed, and put into its place (Leighton 154). Not only have recent critical studies attempted to put her in her "place," but in so doing, they have largely ignored the legend of personality which has often eclipsed the poetry. Most recent is Helen Cooper's Elizabeth Barrett Browning: Woman and Artist (1988). The work poses and offers responses to specific questions about the corpus of Barrett Browning's work:

- a) What is the nature of the daughter poet's engagement with her father poet's?
- b) Does she locate literary and cultural grandmothers?
- c) How does she form a mature poetic voice of her own?

The central issue which Cooper explores is "how does a woman poet empower herself to speak?" (76)

Cooper recognizes that Barrett Browning's Sonnets from the Portuguese does not privilege the male voice, but in fact, initiates a challenge to that privilege by Barrett Browning's becoming the "grandmother" poet she herself lacked (7). For Cooper, the poems record the stages of

the rebellion which transform woman from her role as "muse/helpmeet/object" into "poet/creator/subject" (15).

But none of the critics, early or recent, has given serious attention to a structural and a thematic reading of Sonnets which shows the poet's argumentative stance. When read as argument the poems demonstrate both a structural and thematic integrity which heretofore has not been reflected in the criticism. Not to examine the sequence as a group of poems to be read singly is to miss an inherent aim of the poetry.

I propose in this study to take issue with those critics who contend that Barrett Browning did not know her rhetoric, with those who hold that Sonnets lack cohesive direction; further, I will offer a reading of Sonnets from the Portuguese which illustrates that the sequence conforms to the classical schemata of argumentative arrangement, or what Aristotle called dispositio: exordium, which comprises the initial three sonnets in the sequence; confirmatio, or the poet's setting out her own arguments; the confutatio, or the presentation of opposing arguments and the rebuttal of the same; the epilogue, in which the poet restates her premises. Further, I will show that Barrett Browning gave careful consideration to her purpose; to her audience, both private and public; and to the circumstances which occasioned the sonnet sequence.

Barrett Browning's is a tripartite purpose. On the most basic level she undertakes the task of erecting a literary memorial to Robert Browning, the Beloved in the poems. But her aim is certainly a more complex one. She also sheds the "old clothes" and traditions of her literary grandfathers by recasting the sex roles in her sequence. In Sonnets from the Portuguese, the traditional "Other" becomes not female, but male. It is the man to whom Barrett Browning pays court, a decided departure from the traditional sex role designations in such a sequence. Additionally, and most important is the poet's ultimate aim. She charts the course of her own literary rebellion and her own assertion of self as she comes into her womanhood and her poethood. The halves of self are tardily realized and unified through the technique of argumentation which she consciously implements in the sonnet sequence.

Barrett Browning realizes both a specific and a universal audience. Of course, Robert Browning is the specific audience, but there is evidence in the content of the poems that the universal audience (self and general reader) is seriously considered and taken into account. Hence, the reading of Sonnets from the Portuguese which I am offering casts Barrett Browning as a persuasive,

convincing, and didactic artist who wrote herself into selfhood rather than as the semi-invalid who practiced her pedantic and clumsy art in the cellar of the "mansion of literature."

Chapter II

The Case for Suasory in the Lyric Tradition

In any successful discourse, there must be a requisite marriage between content and technique. That Barrett Browning was fully cognizant of this requirement and that she consciously implemented argumentative techniques in Sonnets from the Portuguese appear evident. Admittedly, her surface purpose is to erect a literary memorial to Robert Browning, but her aim is larger than merely to compose a love letter. Indeed, the sequence is generated by and grows out of Barrett Browning's conscious quest for her own literary independence as she charts her struggle to shed the clothing of the traditional female "other" in love sequences and, hence, to wear the apparel of the creator, maker, and instigator of her own discourse and experience.

Since the premise of this study is that Barrett Browning was working within a tradition which had already been established, a tradition which had for centuries united persuasive techniques and the lyric as an art form; that Barrett Browning constructed her series of lyric poems via specific techniques of argumentation; and that she did indeed know her rhetoric, it is well at this point to

present the lyric as an art form; to trace the development of the sonnet within the lyric tradition; and to explore the line of descent from fourth-century Greek to nineteenth-century English literature as this lineage concerns the interrelatedness of suasory, or convincing or persuading, and the lyric, or a brief subjective poem strongly marked by imagination, melody, and emotion, creating for the reader a single unified impression. Further, evidence attests that Barrett Browning had studied not only classical rhetoric and argumentative techniques, but that she also stands at one end of a long line of practitioners of lyric poetry with didactic and persuasive intent. She descends from Sappho and Alcaeus, through Anacreon, and Pindar, in her employment of persuasive and specific argumentative devices within the frame of the lyric.

A curious but lively debate has flourished in recent years regarding argumentation in the lyric. Lyric, of all poetry, is currently regarded as the most antithetical to reason, logic, and science (J. V. Cunningham 33). Logic and lyric are generally seen as opposites if not altogether contradictory terms. Although few modern rhetoricians have been willing to recognize the role of argumentation as the provenance of the lyric tradition, there is justification for such an assertion, a justification rooted in Aristotle.

Jeffrey Walker, together with Yvor Winters and Gerald Graff, have successfully argued for such an assertion. Walker points out that the dominant doxology for lyric predates the Aristotelian lyric and that a lyric can be read as versified argument (13). Yvor Winters holds that lyric poetry, or any other poetry, "intends not only representation or embodiment of an act or state of mind but also judgment or evaluation of human experience and thus is necessarily suasive and involved with argumentation" (5). Similarly, Graff argues that the logos and the pathos projected by a poem are necessarily related as premises and conclusions (5).

Dissenting from these views, Richard von Mises, in 1951, declares that "poetry and logic have nothing to do with each other, that they are even opposed to one another." "Poetry," he continues, "strives for a conviction begotten of the emotions rather than of the reason" (289). In refuting the premises advanced by von Mises, J. V. Cunningham proposes and explores these questions:

- a) May the principal structure of a poem be of a logical rather than an alogical sort?
- b) May a lyric be solely or predominantly the exposition of a syllogism?

- c) May the propositions of the lyric, one by one, be of the sort to be found in a logical syllogism?

Cunningham argues successfully for the premise that there is an inherent interrelatedness between the lyric and logic. Further, he offers cogent arguments for the inclusion of enthymemes (thesis statement or a condensed claim in poetry) within the lyric which are syllogistic in nature (81). But Harold Wally does not discern a similar aim of the lyric. Writing in 1938, Wally declares that "the approach of poetry is indirect. It proceeds by means of suggesting implications and reflection. Its method is largely symbolical. It is more interested in connotations than denotations" (33). Hence, Wally's views are in line with those of von Mises, who at times reverses himself on his own self-avowed "commonplace":

Every poem, except in rare extreme cases, contains judgments and implicit propositions, and thus becomes subject to logical analysis. (24-27)

But this current lively debate over whether there is a role for suasy in poetry has not always been the case. In the eighth century a scholiast of the school of Alcuin regarded not only grammar and rhetoric but also dialectic or logic as the disciplines that nourish and form a poet (Cunningham 33). In medieval and Renaissance commentaries

on Aristotle's logic, poetic is sometimes regarded as a subdivision of logic (Cunningham 60). In the eighteenth century David Hume argued in his Of Standards of Taste that

. . . every kind of composition, even the most poetical, is nothing but a chain of propositions and reasonings; not always indeed the justest and most exact, but still plausible and specious, however disguised by the coloring of the imagination. (264)

It is appropriate at this point to recall the fact that in early Greek lyric there was no debate, no question as to the intrinsic discursive aspect of poetry. Indeed, the sketch of the lyric as discourse (description and deliberation) rather than as expression offers some correction to romantic notions of lyric poetry as "premeditated warblings" (Johnson 31). The task of the lyric poet is neither to report accurately, in the false sense of mimesis, an actual event and the emotions it gave rise to, nor is it his task to invent emotions that he has never experienced. Indeed what distinguishes the lyric poet from people who are not lyric poets, argues W. R. Johnson,

is perhaps, in part, his extreme sensitivity to emotions; his ability to arrange his perceptions of emotions into clear patterns by means of precise language. . . . It is the rhetorical situation and the rhetorical purpose of lyric that allow, that require this marriage, and it is when the poet chooses to submit his private feelings. (31)

Further, the essential element of Greek lyric, of the Latin lyric that continued and refined the Greek tradition, and of the medieval and early modern European lyric that inherited and further refined the Graeco-Roman lyric tradition is what Johnson calls the rhetorical lyrical triangle of speaker, discourse, and hearer (34). A recognition of the validity of this communication triangle is crucial to a comprehension of the argumentative stance of the lyric voice.

In any effort to chronicle the argumentative stance of the lyric voice, one must begin with Sappho. Although Archilochus predates Sappho in Greek lyric chronology, Sappho is regarded as the first great lyrical voice and hence stands at the beginning of an illustrious line of poetic seers in antiquity. Sappho gives the lyric verse a plethora of "firsts." Her subtlety of observation, delicacy of contemplation, musical form, her natural self-assertion, and her dynamic form predicted upon the situation and occasion of her discourse constitute the origin of the lyric moment (Johnson 38). Both W. R. Johnson and Richard Chase discern that the poems of Sappho are offered as "private songs cast as pieces of public argumentation" (Johnson 18, Chase 93). Her rhetorical strategy in the poetry, argues Johnson, is one colored by "wit, indirection, and understatement, a way of insuring

that the passion will not burst its proper limits and then dwindle into unintelligibility and into crude shapelessness" (26):

Johnson holds that while Sappho's range is narrow, "lyric poetry cares very little for breadth and width, everything for depth and height" (48). Sappho, then, set the pattern and the standard of monody, a tradition inherited and carried on by her successor, Anacreon. Coming at the end of the tradition of monody, Anacreon created the ideal mask of hedonism, a mask which evolved in the last quarter of the sixth century. Anacreon also gave to Greek lyric the single view. As in the lyrics of Sappho, one finds in the lyrics of Anacreon the single lyrical voice engaged in introspective debate with itself, hence the seeds of discursiveness, the seeds of argumentation. Anacreon employed dialectical rhythm and a dialectical voice to enjoin the reader's participation and to force the reader to ask and to answer questions for himself (Johnson 56). Of course, this essentially Socratic mode of reasoning is by its nature predicted upon the discursive elements of argumentation.

With Simonides, Anacreon's successor, comes the advent of choral poetry, which was essentially religious and ceremonial, and an interest in dirges. But the paramount contribution of Simonides to lyric was his development of

the dialectical mode of lyricism (Johnson 59). Hence, Simonides perfected the dialectical voice already made current by Anacreon.

Pindar, the next great voice in Greek lyric, is credited with recovering the original function and meaning of lyric poethood, or the vates--seer, bard, shaman, or prophet. In addition to making choral poetry supreme in lyric forms, Pindar also invented the vatic personality (Johnson 59).

Vatic personality aside, Pindar also, via his epideictic oratory, anticipates the later prose-tradition of rhetor-sophists such as Georgias and Isocrates. The Pindaric odes, for example, are characterized by the three-strophe division--the strophe and the antistrophe, alike in form, and the epode which is different from the other two. The meter and verse lengths may vary within any one strophe of the ode, but when the movement is repeated the metrical scheme for corresponding divisions should be similar though accompanied by new rhymes (Walker 67). The three-strophe division employed by Pindar in the odes constitutes a paradigm for the argumentative structure of the poems. The sections function as the thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, respectively. In Jeffrey Walker's call for a "re-imagining of the lyric," he points out that typically the arguments of Pindar's

epinikia (victory odes) seek to read a particular moment of kairos (opportunity) analogically, or in terms of mythico-religious precedents and premises, which are amplified in the longer odes by means of extensive narrative digressions in order to "persuasively demonstrate the grounds upon which the victor is to be judged and praised" (87). "Narratives," states Johnson, in The Idea of Lyric, "build up premises, and premises combine enthymemically to generate persuasion" (57). Thus, since the structure of narration invites the employment of persuasive techniques, the victory odes of Pindar are then, by their very nature, argumentative. "These ancient lyrics," Walker argues, "offer epideictic argument intending praise, creation of belief, argument in which overt, rational persuasion is paramount" (67). Hence, the Greek lyric becomes recognizable as argument because of the inherent element of appeal which is used as a form of suatory (Walker 57).

After the first flowering of persuasive, didactic Greek lyric from Sappho to Pindar, the lyric declined into an exercise in elegance and feeling. Not until Meleager did the lyric regain its argumentative import. In Meleager's hands, the lyric employs a discursive element of deliberation. Johnson must have had Meleager in mind when he asserted that "What a lyric poet does is to imagine for

us a certain state of mind and soul and then to invite us into that imagined (recreated, refined) inwardness for our contemplation" (74). "What mattered in ancient rhetoric and in Greek lyric [that is rhetorical in its central strategy]," declares Johnson, "was not the need to express something, but the desire, the choice, to conduct lyrical discourse" (72). And the Greek lyricists--Archilochus, Sappho, Anacreon, Simonides, Pindar, and Meleager--did indeed undertake in their art to "conduct lyrical discourse," a thing that is inherently the business of logic, reason, and discursiveness.

Yvor Winters sees Greek lyric as a peculiar fusion of forms of epideictic oratory and of something like drama, or the dramatic moment of rhetorical encounter between addresser and addressee (42). The genius of Greek lyric, argues Johnson, is to have "seen the essential possible forms of the union between ethiopoeia and rhetoric and then to have distilled these forms to their purest clarities" (73). A central element in this process, asserts Johnson, "is the lyric poet's tone of didacticism, his arrogating to himself the role of teacher" (74). Although there is no clear indication as to when epideictic lyric began to embrace suasive elements, it is evident that lyric at some point did so. If we accept Chaim Perelman's definition of epideictic as "argument directed toward the establishment,

reconfirmation, or revision of general values and beliefs" (89), a clearer line of descent in the suasive elements of the lyric may be seen in the ancient theories of Syrianus Hemogenes of Tarsus, and Isocrates (Walker 54). "Epideictic," Walker holds, "belongs to the domain of theory, and it invites its listener--spectator to an act of contemplation, evaluation, and judgment" (8). From Archilochus to Pindar, then, the poets seem "sometimes like [essayists]" (Walker 9). Walker implies then that the early lyricist focused less on the elements of display (elocutio) and more on deliberative elements in the poetry. Walker employs the term "essay" in the sense that Greek lyric may be read as an argument wherein the essential five segments of the classical oration are evident.

If, as Walker believes, epideictic argument in verse is the first and truest paradigm for Western lyric, Poetics then contributed to the demise of this paradigm (14). While this twenty-century-old document offers a way of looking at art as an object of rational inquiry and ideal expectations (Else 40), Aristotle held that versification is not the defining element for poetic discourse; thus, he ignores the potential in verse for persuasion. The consequence of Aristotle's denial and dismissal of the role of suasive in lyric has resulted

in a similar stance adopted by subsequent twentieth-century theorists.

In any case, a general weakening of the lyric tradition after Pindar is evident, a situation brought on by the rise of literacy and epideictic prose (Walker 8). Epideictic prose writers and prosodic structure continued through the first century A.D. with Demetrius and Phalaros' On Style and the second century with Hermogenes of Tarsus' On Types of Style. What then, was the dominant classical conception of epideictic? John Jay William Hay Atkins calls Gorgias of Leontini the founder of artistic prose and considers Gorgias' emphasis upon style or *elocutio* instrumental as a separate class of oratory (Oxford Classical Dictionary 391, 766). One might speculate about Gorgias' predecessors, but his followers are legion. Gorgias was influential in making epideictic oratory one of display. Historically, epideictic as a term was primarily etymological. It was the oratory of display, the approach of the non-citizen. This view of epideictic persisted until the introduction of Aristotle's Rhetoric, but prior to Gorgias, Isocrates, and Quintilian (Chase 293).

The term epideictic designates and describes an oratory of praise and blame which embraces all non-deliberative, non-forensic oratory such as occasional poetry; hence, the term appears to be synonymous with

display (Chase 293). Epideictic premises are open to debate wherein narration revealed the credibility, nature, and importance of an act; and amplification was offered as a form of proof (Chase 293). The term came to suggest a conflict of ideas. If epideictic is a form of display, just what is displayed? Chase argues that the orator's virtuosity in style and his content are displayed. Two German rhetoricians, Oskar Kraus and F. J. Schwaab, have advanced the latter view. Schwaab asserts that Aristotle derived the term epideiklikon from the active epideiknusthal. Such reasoning makes epideictic the setting forth or "logical demonstration of noble ideas" (Chase 302).

Kraus then interprets Aristotle's dunamis as the force or power of the content rather than the speaker's rhetorical power (88). As these two rhetoricians point out, rhetorical ability can be manifest in any or all facets of the art: invention, disposition, style, delivery, or memory (97).

But beginning in the first Christian century the two-dimensional definition of epideictic begins to break down, after which it became no longer the principal avenue of display by theorists (Chase 298). Quintilian reveals the effect this trend had upon oratory:

There is one kind concerned with praise and blame, which however, derives its name from the better of its functions and is called laudatory [laudatio]; others, however, call it demonstrative [demonstratio]. Both names are believed to be derived from the Greek in which the corresponding terms are encomiastic [engkomiaastikon] and epideictic [epideiktikon]. (iii. 4. 12)

Quintilian admits that epideictic is not the exclusive vehicle of ostentation (iii. 4. 12). Aristotle invented epideiklikon with the rhetorical function of praise and blame (to identify his third class of oratory). The term stood primarily for praise and blame, secondarily for display (Chase 287). As a result, Aristotle's anchoring of epideictic to the firmer ground of rhetorical functions was a forward step in speech classifications (Johnson 81).

In light of the fusion of the rhetorical premises of epideictic, lyric, and argumentation, Chase insists that "interpretation and usage that indiscriminately employ epideictic as a covering term for all non-deliberative and non-forensic oratory, or for general oratory of display, is without adequate classical foundation" (300).

Renaissance, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century lyrics, particularly the sonnets, embraced many of these suasive elements. The sonnets of Spenser, Sidney, Shakespeare, Donne, and Wordsworth illustrate the capacity to utilize the elements of argumentation. The

significance of this literary lineage to the poetics of Barrett Browning, who read voluminously, is that

- a) she too knew the rhetorical treatises of Plato and Aristotle;
- b) she read the classical lyricists;
- c) she consciously implemented what she borrowed from the tradition;
- d) and she created a new sonnet tradition by at once maintaining elements from the classical tradition while discarding traditional sex roles imposed on amatory sequences by her literary grandfathers.

The correspondence of Barrett Browning attests to her having at least a reading knowledge of the Greeks and Romans, both rhetoricians and lyricists. In letters to Hugh Boyd, her blind tutor and Greek scholar, the poet discusses her reading and her reactions to these, ranging from the dialogues of Plato to the lyricizing of Sappho and Pindar. In 1827 at the age of 21, Barrett Browning began a correspondence with Hugh Boyd who nurtured in her a love of the Greek language and literature, a love which manifested itself when the twenty-five-year-old Barrett Browning attempted what she later admitted was a most ambitious effort to offer a translation of Greek poetry (The Greek Poets, 1832). Her letters to Boyd (Letters 11, 15, 24) as

well as those to Robert Browning (Letters 18, 91, 107) reveal a wide reading of the Greek theorists and poets. With this background in the classics, it is little wonder that Sonnets from the Portuguese embraces the three branches of classical rhetoric: deliberative, or hortatory; forensic, or judicial, as well as epideictic. The poet distills these three modes and molds these to suit her argumentative and didactic aims. Hence, all three modes of rhetoric which contain varying degrees of argumentative elements become for her technical tools and practice as the sequence unfolds. As a rhetorician, Barrett Browning is concerned with three tasks:

- a) finding in a subject proofs or reasons cogent to the audience (inventio);
- b) arranging these proofs in effective order (dispositio);
- c) and with expressing proofs as forcefully as her command of language will permit (elocutio).

The sonnet sequence also evidences three classical modes of appeal:

- a) ethos;
- b) pathos;
- c) logos.

These appeals she effectively uses in the deliberative discourse which comprises the very fabric of the poems. As Martin J. Svaglic holds,

The Victorians were all indisputably rhetoricians; they could not help illustrating the types and observing the principles of rhetoric, whether they did so consciously or intuitively. (35)

Svaglic, by implication, then, paints Barrett Browning as a rhetorician at heart, whether she was cognizant of this or not (41). "The sign of right performance," concurs Thomas Carlyle, "is unconscious" (96). Whether, as this study argues, Barrett Browning engaged in conscious rhetorical artistry in an unconscious "right performance," it is clear that Sonnets from the Portuguese is informed by an adherence to argumentation as it derives from the Greek lyric.

Chapter III

"The Bird Pecks Through the Shell":

Sonnets from the Portuguese, 1-22

Like Tennyson, Barrett Browning gave much consideration to the relationships of genius to suffering and to self-sacrifice. She knew that knowledge is power; implicit in this consideration is the idea that suffering is also power (Mermin 363). In the sonnet sequence she enters into a self-analysis of her own knowledge and her own poetic powers using the principles of argumentation. In Sonnets from the Portuguese, Barrett Browning embarks upon a quest which embraces many aims. She composes a love testimonial to Robert Browning, a surface purpose which allows her, via the sequence, to locate her own authoritative "I" as she chronicles her journey toward twin selfhood and poethood, a journey epitomized in the final Sonnets 43 and 44. Additionally, Sonnets records a wide range of emotional responses to a single identity crisis for Barrett Browning. Inherent in this crisis is the poet's search for the well-spring of her own poetic powers; Melvin Goldstein argues that the nucleus of this crisis is an exploration of a series of questions:

- a) What is man's place in the world?
- b) What is the correct response of lovers, one to the other?
- c) Will lovers live together on earth or in heaven? (88)

Indeed, Barrett Browning does consider each of these questions as the sequence unfolds. At the outset of the sequence, the speaker-self speaks of viewing a gradual vision; this vision will not become a complete image until the sequence ends. The construction and the "fleshing out" of this "gradual vision" are part and parcel of the poet's quest in Sonnets. The reader witnesses a retelling of an experience already past. Not only is the sonnet sequence a retelling of events, but it is a record of experiences already thought about. It is a literary confessional in the sense that the speaker-self already knows that what defies death, that what supports life, is love. In this sense, the purpose of the work is confessional.

Melvin Goldstein sees many similarities as well as dissimilarities between the sonnet sequence of Petrarch and that of Barrett Browning. Both poets belong to the tradition of confessional literature rooted in St. Augustine's work, and both are Christian. But there is a difference in the direction of the pilgrimage which the soul in each work takes. Petrarch's path was direct: from

earth heavenward. Barrett Browning's path moved from false heaven, one to which she never really belonged, to the reality of earth. Petrarch's age was one of faith, while Barrett Browning's was one in which faith was on the wane. Whereas Petrarch belonged to an era which had a prepared network of attitudes and responses, Barrett Browning belonged to an era which called into account the old established order. In Petrarch's Rime, interspersed relationships between a man and his God are enlarged. In Sonnets this relationship remains singular between a woman and a man who find one another on earth and elect to stay there together (88). Of course, a central difference in the two sequences is the re-adaptation of sex roles framed by argument in Sonnets.

The question arises as to why argumentation within the lyric frame suited Barrett Browning's purpose. Barrett Browning worked in many ways to generalize and to distance her experience. The use of the sonnet sequence offered a way to subsume her own experience into a wider tradition, to curb liberties with rhyme and meter, to deviate from the Petrarchan structure to suit her own intent, to create a great variety of tone, to break up lines in new ways, and to write poems, not mere love letters. She, in short, had something to say and wished to do so assertively. She wanted to convince the unconvinced (herself) that she did

indeed possess the mettle to counteract death and to embrace "Not Death, but Love," and hence, life. Further, she wanted to persuade Browning to acquiesce to her wishes and to allow her to love, not just him, but herself as well. By freeing herself to offer love to him she, conversely, frees her own will to love and to accept herself as woman and poet.

Additionally, Barrett Browning chose the technique of argumentation in order to unite content, or premise, to technique, or rhetorical practice. The result is a unification of a plethora of techniques to effect the goal of the poet's insurrection and hence resurrection or to effect her own "working into light," (65) to borrow Helen Cooper's phrase. Argumentative discourse suited Barrett Browning's purpose as she worked out the identity crisis which the poems rehearse, a concept accorded credence in W. R. Johnson's The Idea of Lyric:

In a sense, the act of discourse clarifies the speaker's personality; he learns who and what he is by yielding himself wholly to the act of discourse; in performing his proper function, by discoursing, describing, deliberating, he becomes himself. (31)

Sonnets from the Portuguese represents a central place in the process of rebellion which Barrett Browning's poetics record, a transformation of woman from her role as "muse/helpmeet/object" into "poet/creator/subject" of her

own discourse and experience (Cooper 7). Sonnets was published in 1850, but if one looks back to a work from Barrett Browning's juvenilia, "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" (1848), and then ahead to Aurora Leigh (1856), one can discern a paradigm for the evolutionary crisis of identity, indeed, the rebellion, insurrection, and resurrection through which Barrett Browning, via the poems, particularly Sonnets, bring into harmony the "I," a woman, and the "I," a poet. Importantly, at the end of this process, the poet claims the authoritative "I" which she so steadfastly sought in her work.

"The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point," Sonnets from the Portuguese, and Aurora Leigh symbolize three points of anchor of Barrett Browning's struggle for personal and artistic identity, a "risorgimento" (to borrow Sandra Gilbert's term describing what Barrett Browning attempts in "Casa Guidi Windows") (61) that was both an insurrection and a resurrection. More than any others of her work, these pieces allowed Barrett Browning to locate herself figuratively in a

re-creative female poetic tradition that descends from Sappho and Christine de Pizan through the Brontes, Christina Rossetti, Margaret Fuller, and Emily Dickinson to Renee Vivien, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, H.D., and Adrienne Rich.
(Gilbert 195)

Despite Gardner Taplin's complaint that "The Runaway Slave at Pilgrim's Point" is "too blunt and shocking . . . only a curl . . . uninspiring" (71), the poem does represent a turning point in Barrett Browning's poetic insurrection as she struggles to reject and to shed what Cooper labels "Eve's allotted grief" (7). Prior to its publication, Barrett Browning's work (Poems, 1844) does not show a strong lyric voice. But this neophyte poem exposes the victimization inherent in the racism and sexism in the treatment of the American slave, and it attacks the evil in the slave trade across the Atlantic. This evil and victimization are articulated by a black slave woman who is being flogged to death. The strident, angry, and demanding voice of the slave woman to her oppressors constitutes a superimposition of Barrett Browning's own voice raised in protest and in sympathy with the downtrodden of the world. While the work does suffer from deficiencies in structure and character, the assertive nature of Barrett Browning's protagonist not these apparent faults, is the issue. The strong direct articulation of the protagonist as she speaks for her own rights as a human being and by implication for the rights of women everywhere accord the work the promise of greatness realized in Sonnets from the Portuguese and in Aurora Leigh.

With Aurora Leigh, her last mature work, Barrett Browning rectifies and clarifies her own art and herself. This epic seeks to resolve a crucial issue, one given great consideration by the poet. She grapples with the question of how to unite the concerns of the woman and the poet. Virginia Steinmetz holds that the juvenilia and Aurora Leigh tell the story of personal development:

Elizabeth's juvenile images are the embryonic nucleus of the more complex adult images in which a lifetime of associations converges. (8)

Aurora Leigh is the tale of a woman whose frustration with a strictly enforced code causes her to lament that

To love is a more womanly calling
Than to write. (8. 75)

This final novel-poem performs at last the curative task which Barrett Browning's poetic career dramatizes. Through suffering the protagonist discovers the process through which the woman and the artist unite their divided selves. Hence, these three works ("Slave," Sonnets, and Aurora Leigh) give Barrett Browning an avenue to artistic rejuvenation and personal atonement. Central to this exercise is the sonnet cycle.

Barrett Browning wrote forty-four sonnets in the sequence, and while no sonnet is dated, "the progression is logical and easy to see" (Ratchford 97). Virginia Radley, Helen Cooper, Angela Leighton, and Aletha Hayter all concur

that Sonnets narrates an experience. Cooper, in particular, holds that the poems

demonstrate how the poet's refusal of her father's authority enabled her to appropriate male literary authority to her purposes. (100)

Edward Barrett often praised his daughter for "avoiding that certain class of feelings," or the love which exists between a man and a woman (Taplin 79). Hence, his complete disaffiliation with Barrett Browning after her elopement indicates his displeasure at his daughter's no longer avoiding male companionship. Barrett Browning's disobedience in electing "Not Death, but Love" with Browning, Cooper argues,

defies her father's edict and echoes Eve's transgressions: eating of the Tree of Knowledge is identified as Eve's sexually assertive act. . . . Not until she disobeyed the paternal edict against passion and self-determination was she able to realize an authoritative protagonist and a confident poetic "I." (100)

This defiance resulted in a sonnet sequence which employs argumentation as a vehicle to move the poet out of the objective stance in male poetics and into the subjective and creative one in her own discourse. The compositional arrangement of the sequence is informed by several organizing principles. On the most basic level the sequence adheres to the Aristotelian schemata of argumentation set out in Rhetoric. But it is important to note that the ordering of Aristotle's schemata is not

prescriptive; rather, it is protean, or readily assumes different shapes or forms. The schemata can be exceedingly variable. Recognizing this fact, Barrett Browning proceeds to reamplify Aristotle's paradigm, or dispositio. She does not adhere strictly to the five-part schemata in a linear manner. In other words, Barrett Browning alternates between confirming and confuting her own positions as she deliberates her issues in these poems. Among the internal linking devices within the sequence are image progressions, patterns of symbols, and a series of disparate psychological states of the speaker-self. Hence, many principles of organization inform Sonnets from the Portuguese.

This chapter will consider Sonnets 1-22 in their role in the argumentative debate in which the speaker engages. It will be shown that in the poems, the poet announces the enthymemic premise of her debate, deliberates with herself and the Beloved on the strengths and weaknesses of her stated premise, leads the reader from thought of the past dead to comment upon her own sad life, all of which prefigures the final note of affirmation and hope at the denouncement of the sonnet sequence.

Sonnets from the Portuguese adheres to the rhetorical imperative of locating all of the available means of persuasion set out by the ancient rhetoricians of whom she

had a thorough knowledge. Argumentation was treated by the ancients under the first of five "offices" of rhetoric--inventio or invention, in the sense of "discovery" or "finding." The second "office" of rhetoric in the classical schemata was dispositio or arrangement, which was concerned with the selection of arguments discovered through invention and their organization in the most effective order. Arrangement was commonly dealt with in terms of the parts of an oration:

1. the exordium or introduction, in which the speaker oriented, conciliated, gained the attention of his audience;
2. the narratio or statement of the issue to be argued;
3. the confirmatio or proof, the main body of the discourse, in which the addresser presented his positive arguments for his thesis;
4. the confutatio or refutation of the opposing arguments;
5. the epilogue or conclusion, in which the speaker recapitulated his ethical appeal and perhaps made a final pitch to the addressee.

The third "office" of traditional rhetoric was elocutio or style, an element concerned with the actual

expression or verbalization of the arguments that had been discovered and judiciously selected and organized. The fourth and fifth "offices" of rhetoric were memoria or memorization and pronunciatio or delivery. While it is evident that Barrett Browning had a thorough knowledge of the five "offices" of rhetoric, the focus of this study is upon that of dispositio, or arrangement. Barrett Browning adhered to the classical schemata of arrangement in persuasively setting forth and chronicling her own literary and personal independence. Her line of argument in the sequence hinges upon her employment of enthymemes, examples, variations of quatrains, presentation of a universal idea or truth, and a universal language. She relies upon past fact as she examines the possible and the impossible, one of the commonplaces in Aristotle's *topoi*. Throughout the sequence, she ruminates about and then deliberates upon the possible (love and achieving her own poetic and authoritative voice) and the impossible (not achieving her own insurrection and hence, resurrection).

Barrett Browning relies upon both artistic and inartistic proofs to make her case. The sonnets present the artistic proofs of reasons as well as the inartistic proof of evidence as the speaker-self makes her case. Further, the poet offers ethical, pathetic, and logical proofs. The ethical proof is supported by Barrett

Browning's presentation of the speaker-self as a woman of intelligence, character, and goodwill. By drawing conclusions from admitted propositions (demonstratio), the poet achieves logical proof. She also often reverses herself by using the contrary premise to argue both sides of her case, and hence, invents her own refutatio. In her reliance upon pathetic proof, Barrett Browning presents herself as both bold and timid in order to gain the sympathy and the adherence of her audience. She both arouses and allays her audience, and she does both at once. The gamut of emotions is evident in the poems as the speaker-self establishes pathetic proof. Barrett Browning must arouse in her audience a number of "philosophical pairs" (Perelman 97). These juxtapositions of love/hate, anger/mildness, fear/boldness, and shame/shamelessness solidify the pathetic appeals by involving the various audiences (Beloved, self, universal) in the struggle which the sequence reveals.

Written during Barrett Browning's courtship with Robert Browning (1845-46), Sonnets from the Portuguese is informed by many argumentative principles. This argumentative frame is classified and divided into thematic and structural subsets. Sonnets 1 and 2 portray the woman speaker as object of man, as a woman poet who is yet to become speaker and creator of her own discourse and

experience. Sonnets 4-22 record the speaker's wavering between objectifying herself and claiming her own creative and sexual subjectivity. With one exception (Sonnet 35), Sonnets 23-44 displace the poet's allegiance to conventions of male traditions and reveal her confidence in the voice which that subjectivity elicits. Within the second cluster of poems, the final two poems, Sonnets 43-44, present the epilogue, or restatement, wherein the poet culminates the sequence with quintessential statement of her own new confidence, the right to speak of love, and a "clincher" poem to underscore the hard-won struggle, respectively. Significantly, the imperatives of reality and art struggle for dominion in these 44 sonnets. Beneath the various layers of meaning is a speaker-self clamoring for union with the disparate entities of her own being: artist, gender, and personal.

Sonnets from the Portuguese opens on a spiritual plane, with the speaker-self struggling to make out the outlines of a "mystic Shape." The tone of contemplation of past sorrows pervades the initial sonnet. The reference to Theocritus calls back to the people who had expressed loneliness before and suggests that many will be lonely in the future, too, unless the "silver answer" rings for them:

I thought once how Theocritus had sung
Of the sweet years, the dear and wished-for
years,

Who each one in a gracious hand appears
 To bear a gift for mortals, old and young:
 And, as I mused it in his antique tongue,
 I saw a gradual vision through my tears,
 The sweet, sad years, the melancholy years,
 Those of my own life, who by turns had flung
 A shadow across me. (I. 1-9)

Barrett Browning achieves ethical appeal by establishing emotional ties to her audience via literary allusions to Theocritus and to Homer. These references to the past cast a deeper pall over the contemplative self in self-examination. Supporting the surface images of the past is the tense marking of the verbs. By locating the poem in the past tense, Barrett Browning announces the reflective core of the sequence. A string of past tense verbs informs the tone of reflection, of grief in death: thought, mused, saw, had flung, drew (Sonnet 1).

Dorothy Mermin argues that the speaker-self in Sonnet I has analogues to characters in Tennyson. She likens the speaker to the Lady of Shalott, who is shut up in her ivory tower and is an observer rather than a participant in the sea of human activity just outside of her window; to the "soul" in "The Palace of Art," a "soul" that has lived with visions, not people, for company. Interestingly enough, the lover-speaker makes the same lament in a later sonnet in the sequence:

I lived with visions for my company
 Instead of men and women, years ago,

And found them gentle mates, nor thought to know
 A sweeter music than they played to me.
 (26. 1-4)

Mermin also sees in Sonnet 1 a correlation to Mariana in Tennyson's poem of the same name. Like Mariana, the lover awaits a love and a unification with life that she thinks may not indeed materialize. Like the Tennysonian characters, the speaker in Sonnets from the Portuguese must ponder the question of whether she will vacate the ivory tower and wander down the road to Camelot, to life and involvement in the human world of the "here and now."

Sonnet 1 constitutes the keynote to set the tone and to prefigure the action of the entire sequence. The poet-scholar speaks, looks back over her life, and reviews events that have flung a shadow across her life. The change in life is stated in the opening sonnet wherein the interplay or struggle between love and death previews the struggle which will unfold in the sequence. The enthymeme, or compressed premise of the sonnet sequence, is explicitly stated in this poem and implicitly stated throughout the sequence. The explicit statement of the issue to be deliberated comes in the final line of the sonnet. In response to the speaker-self's query as to who holds her, the "mystic Shape" answers, "Not Death, but Love" (l. 14). After this initial announcement of the narratio,

Barrett Browning will imply the premise as she makes her case in the sequence.

The sestet begins with an adverb indicative of a change of time, of a move away from the retrospective and contemplative stance which characterizes the octave, and a move toward the future. The poet-persona becomes aware of a supernatural presence behind her:

Straightway I was 'ware,
So weeping, how a mystic Shape did move
Behind me, and drew me backward by the hair.
(l. 9-11)

The violence depicted in these lines presents an image of the speaker's being forcefully moved back from death and into the mainstay of life and human activity. The speaker is governed, indeed, is overcome by a voice in mastery. Immediately, the argument of the sonnet is set out. Wayne Brockreide, in "Where is Argument?" offers evidence on how to locate an argument. He holds that some tension must exist in order for an argument to exist. Further, Brockreide believes that one prepares himself for argument by acknowledging this tension. "Arguments," he declares, "are not in statements, but inside of people" (43). Hence, in Sonnet 1, although the lover is not yet taking charge of her own experience, is still very much under the dominion of men, personified by this "mystic Shape," she has set

herself up for argument by giving credence to two disparate entities, one within, the other without. The tension within constitutes her own recognition that she must at last attempt to speak not of death, but of love. The tension without is an external struggle to locate her poetic voice via the act of composing. The argument, or condensed thesis of Sonnet 1, is that the poet is forcefully being pulled away from the merely contemplative life and is violently being shoved into a more active life; there is an attempt to rescue her from the grip of death and to give her over to love, to life. The statement of the issue to be deliberated, substantiated, and defended in the sequence is announced in the epigrammatic couplet:

"Guess now who holds thee?"--"Death," I said.
 But, there,
 The silver answer rang,--"Not Death, but Love."

One might restate the enthymeme of the sonnet and the entire sequence: opting for the merely contemplative life is to embrace spiritual death because a life devoid of love and action is an undesirable one. If the reader grants the assumption or warrant that an active and love-based life is a desirable one, then he will grant the poet her argument.

Angela Leighton recognizes in the last two lines of the sonnet the place of Bro being supplanted by this new figure. Barrett Browning's beloved brother and soul mate, Edward, was drowned in a boating accident at Torquay during

a visit to her bedside in 1844. She describes the mental sterility which she experiences after his untimely death:

Afterward [hearing of his death], I lay in an unconscious-like state for upwards of three months. I could not sleep, and I did not eat. It seemed my very entrails had been excised, not of my free will. (Diary. Item 67)

In the initial poem as well as in the entire sequence, the memory of Barrett Browning's alter ego, Bro, runs through like an alternative inspiration that rivals the new inspiration personified by Browning, the Beloved in the poems. Additionally, Leighton holds that the harsh superimposition of love on grief in Sonnets betrays the extent to which the role of these two men in Barrett Browning's life (Bro and Browning) is the same (67). These men, then, epitomize objects of her imaginative desire to write. The initial sonnet is one of three which announce the revitalization of Barrett Browning's waning life through the efficacy of love. The poem expresses one of the strongest strains in the sequence. Death has been the compelling force for years, but the sestet of the poem uses imagery--violence in grabbing speaker-self's hair--to propel the speaker toward the "silver answer." That the color of silver connotes value substantiates the poet's aim to use the sequence as a vehicle to achieve, to assert, her right to write about love. But she does not come to this realization without a struggle (grabbing of hair). She

wants to acquiesce to the masterful voice of love, a voice which responds to her query with a "silver answer."

Barrett Browning employs pathetic proof in the poem by adapting herself to the emotional traits of her audience. For example, references to a particular idyllic time of one's life, to youth, and to the verities of good fortune both promote the emotional well-being of the tripartite audience (self, Beloved, universal). And, of course, she is fully cognizant that if she is indeed going to be convincing, she must promote that which moves her audience.

Death, darkness, and heaviness are the principal ideas in Sonnet 2. The male domination which figures so strongly in the initial sonnet continues in the second poem. As stated above, the speaker wants to write her way out of this subjectivity, and she seeks the power to do so through the principles of argumentation. If she can locate the illusive authoritative "I," she can succeed in this quest to elect love over death, the central enthymemic premise of the sequence. At this stage in her argument, there is little fluency, little inspiration to create, to initiate, or to instigate. She is object rather than subject of her own narrative. But the need and the desire to do these things are strong. Mermin offers an explanation for the writer's block which the speaker-self is experiencing:

The speaker has qualities . . . both of the male Victorian poet as introverted, self-doubting lover and of the female figures in which Tennyson embodies passive, withdrawn, and isolated aspects of the poetic character. (362)

A wave of uncertainty seizes the lover-persona in the octave when she announces that only three have heard the declaration from the "mystic Shape":

But only three in all God's universe
Have heard this word thou hast said,--Himself,
beside
Thee speaking, and me listening! (2. 1-3)

The poet reamplifies the trinity in an attempt to convince herself that she can indeed embrace the prerogatives of love and that she can indeed assert her right to speak of love. The rhetorical voice in the opening sonnets is weak, hesitant, and faltering. But there is ever the anticipation of gathering force and power as the addresser gains an awareness of her auditors and of her goal. It is relevant that she is learning as she writes; indeed, the revitalization grows out of the writing itself. The sestet almost achieves an unequivocal and assertive rhetorical voice as the speaker struggles to gain the power which she seeks, a search indicated by the repetition of the conjunction nor:

Men could not part us with their worldly jars,
Nor the seas change us, nor the tempests bend.
(2. 10-11)

The ethical proof of intelligence, character, and goodwill are interwoven in these lines. The addressee is attracted

to the addresser's lyrical voice because it appears to be asserting and arguing from experience, or past fact, an argumentative technique intended to gain audience trust. Further, Barrett Browning creates emotional appeal through her selection of examples and through word choice, metaphors, and analogies.

With Sonnet 3 Barrett Browning moves to the final poem of the exordium through which she states the principal ideas of the sequence. The argument of this poem is a deliberation between the two sides of the addresser's mind. The reluctance to accept the imperative of the "mystic Shape" causes the speaker to be encased in darkness and to try to silence the "silver answer." The poem is marked by contrasts since the speaker employs enumeratio to generate a list of essential differences between the two opposing personas in the poems, but importantly, the poem moves the sequence out of the past tense and into the present, a condition of time marked by Barrett Browning's employment of present-tense verbs. A change is brewing in the tone of the lyrical voice. The poet enlarges the complexity of her deliberations by arguing and reasoning with both herself and the Beloved. The speaker tries to resist this new stability objectified by Robert Browning, and she equivocates as she weighs the strengths and weaknesses involved in embracing "Not Death, but Love." The octave

opens with a declaration of the lovers' inherent dissimilarities:

Unlike are we, unlike, O princely Heart!
 Unlike our uses and our destinies.
 Our ministering two angels look surprise
 On one another, as they strike athwart
 Their wings in passing. (3. 1-6)

Virginia Radley points to these lines in recognition of the poet's hard line of thought which the speaker-self's metaphors cloak in the poem (93). One of the ministering angels is assigned to Barrett Browning, one to the Beloved. Images of light and dark underscore their innate dissimilarities. On the one hand, the Beloved looks from "lattice-lights" at the speaker, while the speaker gazes from the darkness, descriptions encased in the death image of the cypress tree:

A poor, tired, wandering singer, singing through
 The dark, and leaning up a cypress tree?
 (3. 10-12)

The Beloved is represented in terms which are all "sweetness and light," while the speaker, as she argues with herself, retrieves from the first two sonnets the shadow cast by death, a gloomy presentiment played out in the final lines of Sonnet 3:

The chrism is on thine head,--on mine, the dew,--
 And death must dig the level where these agree.
 (3. 13-14)

At this stage in her argument, the speaker is neither confident of herself, nor of the Beloved. She speaks in

halting terms as she attempts to "peck through the shell" (Raymond 65) into confidence and security. This portrait of the speaker in the throes of an inferiority complex is an attempt to sway the auditor to her line of reasoning, to enjoin the audience to identify with her, and hence, to empathize with her. The speaker-self reaches different levels of identity as the amatory sequence progresses. She gravitates from seeking identity with herself, then with Browning, and then with her universal audience. She becomes what Kenneth Burke calls "consubstantial" with her audience (79). In other words, as she achieved identity, that identity is shared by her audience, an instance of pathetic proof as Barrett Browning practices her conscious rhetorical artistry. Through her becoming "consubstantial" with her audience, the audience and the speaker are aligned on one accord, a factor crucial to the speaker's success in the argument.

Sonnets records a struggle with and an ultimate, hard-won victory over despair, self-doubt, and fear. The struggle is only clearly over in the last sonnet. These poems, Cooper maintains, "were the testing ground for the female 'I'" (100). The female "I" is authoritative once she no longer allows the male poet's "divinest Art" to compete with, appropriate, or trivialize her own voice. The speaker-self, then, as the sequence develops, will

silence the male voice of the opening sonnets as the Beloved becomes the object of her realized subjectivity.

It must be underscored that while the major premise of this study is that while Barrett Browning does conform to the classical schemata of argumentation in the sequence, that she does incorporate these elements, the very nature of her argumentative quest for her own voice cannot be documented via a linear configuration. As she deliberates with, persuades, and convinces the various segments of her tripartite audience (self, Beloved, universal), she moves in contraspection, and thus, not always in a straight line. Hence, this sojourn for self-determination cannot be charted by adhering strictly to the order of the classical oration. As Aristotle points out in Rhetoric, order is not a prescriptive but a protean element in the dispositio of argumentation (109). Further, through the poet's reamplification of Aristotle's arrangement, the speaker-self achieves audience identity and, thus becomes "consubstantial" with her audience (Burke 78). The nature of the reasoning process dictates that she move now forward, now backward, now to the left, then right, of her position or her destination. The struggle is more important than any consideration of whether she moves in a straight line toward her goal. The argumentative enterprise does carry the speaker through each phase of the

dispositio as she works out the requirements of her search for the well-springs of her poetic voice.

Sonnet 4 opens the body of the argument in which the speaker deliberates the major issues. The poem develops images from the preceding poem. It recognizes a rift between the head and the heart and continues the internal debate also introduced in Sonnet 3. The dancing festivities, the Beloved presented in Christ-like terms, the thread of music--all of these reiterate the speaker's own demerits juxtaposed against the merits of the Beloved. The lover contrasts images of decay with images of gold. The Beloved is pleaded with from afar as he stands upon the pedestal constructed by the lover. The structure of this poem enlarges or amplifies its content because the octave opposes the sestet:

Thou hast thy calling to some palace-floor,
 Most gracious singer of high poems! where
 The dancers will break footing, from the care
 Of watching up thy pregnant lips for more.
 And dost thou loft this house's latch too poor
 For hand of thine? and canst thou think and bear
 To let thy music drop here unaware
 In folds of golden fulness at my door?
 Look up and see the casement broken in,
 The bats and owlets builders in the roof!
 My cricket chirps against thy mandolin.
 Hush, call no echo up in further proof
 Of desolation! there's a voice within
 That weeps . . . as thou must sing . . . alone,
 aloof. (4. 1-14)

While the octave presents the Beloved via images of ideality, the sestet describes the speaker from the vantage

point of an ugly reality. The octave enumerates images of palace floors, gracious singers, and golden doors; the sestet allows the speaker to invent her own refutatio as she presents herself as less than ideal. The sestet offers a contrary premise of the preceding octave in which the speaker envisions herself as capable of only "cricket chirps" in the face of the Beloved's "mandolin." She draws conclusions from the admitted proposition that the Beloved, a man, necessarily holds a dominant position in her world. And she uses demonstratio (images of life opposed to those of decay) to substantiate her claims. Hence, the speaker persists in avoiding love as she resists union and looks back to death. She acts out her own refutatio; it is herself struggling against herself.

Sonnets 5 and 6 are linked by repetition. In both we hear angry commanding voices, see similar unifying images, and discern an advancement of the introspective nucleus of the sonnet sequence. The brisk commands and argumentative linguistic structures of juxtaposed sonnets--

Stand farther off then! go. (5)
Go from me. (6)--

are part and process of moving toward a confidently assertive female "I" and toward the establishment of the male as object of her attention. The sense of Sonnets 4-22 then, record the speaker's wavering between objectifying

herself and claiming her own creative and sexual subjectivity. Whereas the speaker in the first three poems is portrayed as an object of man's desire, the fourth sonnet moves the speaker out of the objective mode and toward her goal of achieving her own subjectivity. The final poems displace her allegiance to conventions of male traditions and reveal her confidence in a voice which that subjectivity elicits.

The differences between the speaker's personality and that of Browning, expressed in Sonnets 3 and 4, weigh heavily upon her. Finally, the culmination of this emotional tension comes in Sonnet 5, one of the most successful of the sonnets because its central image is a unifying one. The controlling image in this poem is a familiar one, that of ashes from an "unextinguished hearth." Percy Shelley had expressed a similar set of latent thoughts by employing the image of burned elements in the great "Ode to the West Wind." Barrett Browning's heart is likened to Electra's sepulcher urn:

I lift my heavy heart up solemnly,
As once Electra her sepulcher urn,
And, looking in thine eyes, I overturn
The ashes at thy feet. Behold and see
What a great heap of grief lay hid in me,
And how the red wild sparkles dimly burn
Through the ashen greyness. (5. 1-7)

Aletha Hayter complains that this sonnet, fine though it is, is somewhat ruined for her because Electra's urn did

not, in fact, contain the ashes of Orestes. "She [Electra] only thought it did," writes Hayter in her study of Barrett Browning's poetry (63). For Barrett Browning, however, thought holds the kind of reality that transcends the mundane. For her, thought is reality (Radley 94). Besides, Hayter is nitpicking, and Electra's empty urn is beside the poetic point which the speaker is trying to make in Sonnet 5. The didactic intent of these poems is to allow the speaker to point up the differences between the two lovers. Early in the first year of courtship, Barrett Browning poignantly alludes to the differences between the two lovers in a letter to Browning dated March 20, 1845:

And what you say of society draws me on to many comparative thoughts of your life and mine. You seem to have drunken of the cup of life full, with the sun shining on it. I have lived only inwardly; or with sorrow for a strong emotion. . . . I grew up in the country--had no social opportunities, had my heart in books and poetry, and my experience in reveries. My sympathies drooped towards the ground like an untrained honeysuckle and but for one, in my own house--but of this I cannot speak. It was a lonely life, growing green like the grass around it. Books and dreams were what I lived in--and domestic life only seemed to buzz gently around, like bees about the grass. (Letters 21)

And a little later she writes to him that he will be disappointed when he meets her:

There is nothing in me to see; nor to hear in me--I never learnt to talk as you do in London; altogether I can admire that brightness of carved speech in Mr. Kenyon and others. If my poetry is worth anything to any eye, it is the flower in

me. I have lived most and been most happy in it,
and so it has all my colours the rest of me is
nothing but a root, fit for the ground and the
dark. (Letters 18)

These allusions to the differences in them in the letters are given fuller treatment in the sequence, particularly Sonnet 5.

In Sonnet 6 the speaker continues the dialectic between her head and her heart. Psychologically, she recognizes the rift between head and heart: the first rift [head] makes her realistic and results in sonnets devoted to the truth as others may see it; the second rift [heart], however, involves her in a dialogue with her innermost being because she knows that she ought not feel as she does, but she cannot bring herself to conquer her heart. This struggle between passion and reason comprises a major debate to be arbitrated in the sonnet sequence. Further, the struggle portends a reticence or tension in the speaker, ingredients necessary for the "inferential leap" which Kenneth Brockreide insists must be present in order for argument to exist (53). The "inferential leap" constitutes a pathetic proof in that the audience infers the establishment of an argument, shares the tension, and adapts to the emotional traits of the speaker. Thus, Barrett Browning continues to introduce her audience to her deliberations with herself. She succeeds in arousing and

allaying them in a particular way. She has henceforth aroused in her audience emotions which Chaim Perelman calls the "philosophical pairs" (97). Because she comprehends the nature of both emotions inherent in the pairs (love/hate, anger/mildness, fear/boldness, and shame/shamelessness), she is better able to arouse and allay these emotions in her audience. Sonnets 4-6 are instances wherein she makes use of the "philosophical pairs."

When she prays, in Sonnet 6, to God for herself, she also prays for the Beloved. In her eyes are seen tears for two. The deliberation herein is between the two sides of her own nature, those of reason and passion. To reiterate Brockreide, "Arguments are not in statements; they are inside of people" (67). The speaker-self argues herself into a sort of unification in the final lines of the sonnet:

And when I sue
God for myself, He hears that name of thine,
And sees within my eyes the tears of two.
(6. 12-14)

The embracing of the cares and concerns of two lovers, two selves, advances the reluctant yet overpowering response to

"Not Death, but Love."

By accepting responsibility for the well-being of the Beloved (represented by the passionate side of her nature)

as well as for herself (reason), the speaker moves toward accepting the narratio announced in the initial sonnet, the governing idea of the entire sequence. This idea is that a life devoid of love and action is tantamount to spiritual death. The lover is convinced that the Beloved, the imaginative object in the sequence, has brought love into her life, and this love has literally saved her from what she thought was her destiny of death. And the love letters, like the sonnet sequence, consistently support and reaffirm this point. Telling are the pathos-centered arguments in Sonnet 7, arguments which rely upon metaphors which enlist the senses and strike the imagination. Love is presented as an overwhelming but nurturing river, while the lover is imaged as a helpless swimmer who surrenders herself to the healing waters:

The face of all the world is changed, I think,
 Since first I heard the footsteps of thy soul
 Move still, oh, still, beside me, as they stole
 Betwixt me and the dreadful outer brink
 Of obvious death, where I, who thought to sink,
 Was caught up in love, and taught the whole
 Of life in a new rhythm. The cup of dole
 God gave for baptism, I am fain to drink.
 (7. 1-8)

A positive response to proffered love causes the whole world to change for the speaker. Love saves her from spiritual death and from an attendant obligatory misery.

Sonnet 8 proceeds from a contrary premise since the speaker creates her own refutatio. She lapses into doubt

as she refutes the newly assertive voice which she has struggled to achieve in the preceding sonnets. There is both avoidance and uncertainty of her own position. This poem validates the traditional role of woman as "other," the role which the sequence ultimately invalidates. The speaker-self is presented as unworthy and wonders what it is that she can offer to the Beloved:

What can I give thee back, O liberal
And princely giver, who has brought gold
And purple of thine heart, unstained, untold
And laid them on the outside of the wall
For such as I take or leave withal. (8. 1-5)

She reminds the Beloved that it is not coldness which stops her from pursuing love, but that the colors of her life have been run into "pale stuff" by her tears and are fit only for his footsteps to tread upon. Barrett Browning relies upon logical proof as she reverses her own line of reasoning and re-establishes her own refutation. In extending the clothes imagery from his royal colors to her own vestments, pale and dim, she achieves again the central effect in pointing out the dissimilarities between lover and Beloved. By deliberating about her own denigration in the face of the Beloved's elevation, the speaker-self subsumes and refutes the compressed thesis, or the enthymeme announced in Sonnet 1. She denounces her own enthymemic premise that love will move her out of her present sterile and contemplative existence.

Sonnet 9 extends the contrary premise of the argument introduced in Sonnet 8. The Beloved's colors are still the royal purple she associates with him; but her being is dust that might sully his vibrant shades, and her essential self is poisonous to him. They are not equals. She is in the throes of self-denial, and, hence, she confutes her own independence and her own barely realized goal of self-determination. The nucleus of Barrett Browning's rhetoric in these poems is an alternation between doubt and promise, between certainty of her own worth and uncertainty of the same. At this juncture in her clarification exercise, the lover has more questions than answers:

Can it be right to give what I can give?
 To let thee sit beneath the fall of tears
 As salt as mine, and here the sighing years
 Re-sighing on my lips renunciative
 Through those infrequent smiles which fail to
 live
 For all thy adjurations? O my fears,
 That this can scarce be right! We are not peers,
 So to be lovers; and I own and grieve,
 That givers of such gifts as mine are, must
 Be counted with the ungenerous. Out, alas!
 I will not soil thy purple with my dust,
 Nor breathe my poison on thy Venice-glass,
 Nor give thee any love--which were unjust.
 Beloved, I only love thee! let it pass.
 (9. 1-14)

Sonnet 10 momentarily rescues the speaker from the doubt which pervades the preceding poem. Using the rhetorical procedure of pathetic proof, the lover offers examples and metaphors to carry the argument of the sonnet.

Barrett Browning rallies in Sonnet 10 to contrast what she feels with what she is. The image patterns in the sonnet constitute descriptive phrases that invite the reader to project a sensory construction:

And what I feel, across the inferior features
Of what I am, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature.
(10. 12-14)

She argues that feeling is superior to sense, or reality, and appears ready to abandon thought for passion. Contemplation of this line of argument makes her respond to love. She offers her proposition:

Yet, love, mere love, is beautiful indeed
And worthy of acceptance. (10. 1-2)

Next, she investigates the probabilities set forth by the enthymeme of lines 1-2: Love is worthy of acceptance because it is beautiful and connotes life, not death. If indeed "love is fire," then to love is to cleanse and to make whole and healthy. The exploration of this line of reasoning momentarily confirms what she is coming to know: love is fire, a healing and cleansing agent, and she is in need of both if indeed she hopes to successfully negotiate her way out of poetic sterility and into poetic confidence, poetic virility. She must traverse many levels of her own psyche before discovering the well-springs of poetic creativity, a concept given concretion by Dorothy Mermin who insists that while Sonnet 1 takes place on a horizontal

plane, future movements in the sequence run the gamut of vertical motion--downward, deep falls, abrupt drops beneath the speaker-self's consciousness (Mermin 362). Hence, by traversing and navigating the plethora of levels of mental states which Sonnets reveals, the poet-persona will achieve that which she seeks, a life wherein the psychological grounding is "Not Death, but Love." This enthymemic premise may be restated: One should not embrace the inactive life because love alone fosters the active life and spiritual fulfillment. For Barrett Browning, loving Robert Browning brought a concretion to the concept⁶ of love. In a Platonic sense, loving Browning gave form to formlessness. For that reason Barrett Browning feels equally at home, where love is concerned, with either Robert Browning or with God. As she summarizes,

There's nothing low
In love, when love the lowest: meanest creatures
Who love God, God accepts while loving so.
And what I feel, across inferior features
Of what I am, doth flash itself, and show
How that great work of Love enhances Nature's.
(10. 9-14)

Sonnets 11 and 12 amplify the enthymemic premise of Sonnet 10: the speaker does have something to offer to the Beloved, to herself, and to the world. She employs in these poems rhetorical induction. By drawing parallels from history, she invents her own parallels. The poet

asserts herself by arguing that she can be and do as much as the Beloved:

And therefore if to love can be desert,
I am not unworthy. (ll. 1-2)

By referring in line 6 to climbing Aornus, she draws a parallel between her own powers and those of the Greek gods:

This weary minstrel-life that once was girt
To climb Aornus. (ll. 5-6)

Hence, she invents a parallel and an illustration of her argument. By arguing in the next sonnet from a contrary premise the lover gives credence to Dorothy Mermin's notion that the coherence of the sequence is grounded in horizontal and vertical movements. In the case of Sonnet 13, the movement is abruptly downward. The speaker-self is plunged yet again into doubt and self-denigration:

I drop it at thy feet. I cannot teach
My hand to hold my spirit so far off
From myself--me--that I should bring thee proof
In words, of love hid in me out of reach.
Nay, let the silence of my womanhood
Commend my woman-love to thy belief. (13. 5-10)

Throughout the first segment of the sequence, the poet-persona wavers between objectifying herself as "other" and subjectifying herself as maker of her discourse and experience. Thus, the rhetorical stance in the first twenty-two poems alternates between the rhetorical

"offices" of confirmatio and confutatio as the speaker reamplifies for her own aims Aristotle's dispositio, or arrangement. Barrett Browning records the doubt and uncertainty which she experiences as she moves toward self-realization. While she often foreshadows the outcome of this internal duel and this external struggle, the struggle itself will not be clearly over until she closes the sequence in the epilogue and clincher poems, Sonnets 43 and 44.

In the well-known Sonnet 14, Barrett Browning employs artistic proofs or reasons to sway the Beloved. She does not wish to be a part of a love that is superficial or contrived. She does not want the Beloved to love her for her smile, for her manner of speaking, or, for that manner, for her manner of thinking. All of these things are, she argues, subject to alteration and to change. Virginia Radley sees analogues in this sonnet to Shakespeare's Sonnet 116 (98). Perhaps Shakespeare's sonnet was in Barrett Browning's mind when she wrote Sonnet 14. For the poet, as for Shakespeare, love must be constant and must not be changed or altered for light and transient reasons:

Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove
O no, it is an ever-fixed marke
That looks on tempests and is never shaken.
(116. 1-5)

In order to assure this brand of permanence, Barrett Browning makes a similar eloquent plea in Sonnet 14. The rhetorical voice soars in oratorical grandeur. There is not the slightest hint of timidity or uncertainty:

If thou must love me, let it be for nought
 Except for love's sake only. Do not say
 "I love her for her smile. . . her look. . . her
 way
 Of speaking gently, . . . for a trick of thought
 That falls in well with mine, and certes brought
 A sense of pleasant ease on such a day
 For these things in themselves, Beloved, may
 Be changed, or change for thee,--and love,
 so wrought,
 May be unwrought so. Neither love me for
 Thine own dear Pity's wiping my cheeks dry,
 A creature might forget to weep, who bore
 Thy comfort long, and lose thy love thereby!
 But love me for love's sake, that evermore
 Thou may'st love on, through love's eternity.
 (14. 1-14)

This sonnet, coming one-fourth of the way into the sequence advances the argument of Sonnets from the Portuguese in several ways. By relying upon psychology and philosophy as modes of proof, the poet adheres to what Kenneth Burke in The Grammar of Motives insists constitutes the strongest line of reasoning (47). In addition, the appeal to ethics in the sonnet is in line with H. Ross Winterowd's argument in Rhetoric: A Synthesis that if one is to convince an audience, he cannot afford to omit ethics as a line of reasoning. The central philosophy of Sonnet 14 is that only the highest ethical conduct and behavior can nourish true love. The gathering force of the argument is

underscored by the employment of an implicit anaphora, or a repetition of substantive terms within the structure of the sonnet: Do not love me for----- . Absent from the lyrical voice is the wavering between assertiveness and equivocation which haunts the deliberation of many of the previous sonnets. Absent also is the tone of uncertainty and inadequacy in the very fabric of many of the prior poems. Everywhere in this sonnet is evidence of a flight of power which transcends the mundane. The assurance of the permanence sought is inherent in the mature voice that comes through. The lyric voice examines past fact, examines the possible and the impossible, and employs ethical, logical, and pathetic proof in presenting the argument of the sonnet. The poem's central idea presents the concept of change as a counterpoint to permanence, a literary device which reaches back to unify the sequence by repeating and developing these ideas from previous sonnets. The rhetorical voice is one of character and intelligence, as well as obvious goodwill. Also, the speaker offers logical proof by drawing conclusions from admitted propositions or demonstratio. Finally, the speaker-self arouses and allays the audience by asserting herself in what Lorraine Gray calls a "manly way" (89). Barrett Browning is clearly in control in this sonnet. The

confidence informing the lyric voice will be examined in Sonnet 15.

The poet uses Sonnet 15 for a testing ground for her own hard-won positions in her campaign for selfhood and for a confident poetic "I." Although on the surface she appears to give up ground, she, in fact, evaluates her own propositions. What one sees in this poem is a mind engaged in introspective debate with itself. She draws a line of demarcation between her own territory and that belonging to the Beloved. Her own position is akin to a "bee shut in crystalline" that "gazes over to the bitter sea." She presents the self-examination in a dialectic between the introspective self and the extrospective one. The Beloved seems to have disappeared altogether in the sonnet as the argument is taken up by the speaker-self's head and heart, or reason and passion. The submerging of the Beloved allows the speaker to confront, via dialectic, the two sides of her own nature:

Accuse me not, beseech thee, that I wear
 Too calm and sad a face in front of thine;
 For we two look two ways, and cannot shine
 With the same sunlight on our brow and hair.
 On me thou lookest with no doubting care,
 As on a bee shut in a crystalline;
 Since sorrow hath shut me safe in love's divine
 care,
 And to spread wing and fly in the outer air
 Were most possible failure, if I strove
 To fail so. But I look on thee--on thee--
 Beholding, besides love, the end of love,

The submerged Beloved is now symbol of the lover's soon-to-be-realized mastery of the art of poesy. Further, the images support the view that the speaker has established a dialogue between two entities, both a part of herself. A central feature of the sequence is that the Beloved is often presented as the speaker-poet's "other" self. Hence, the acquiescing image in the sestet is not that of an embattled Barrett Browning surrendering to the Beloved, but rather that of the former offering herself to love and to life:

And as a vanquished soldier yields his sword
To one who lifts him from the bloody earth,
Even so, Beloved, I at last record,
Here ends my strife. (l6. 11-14)

The argument has given way to a solution to the poet-persona's predicament: "Here ends my strife." This poem accords to Sonnets a forward movement, a vertical one that carries the sequence into the last five poems of the twenty-two poems which do not close on an affirmative note. With one exception (Sonnet 35), 23-44 offer confirmation of the argument of Sonnets from the Portuguese.

Sonnet 17 presents a speaker who is comfortable with her position as pursuer, wooer, and instigator of the rites of courtship. The Beloved is firmly object and "other" of the speaker-self's discourse and narrative. Herein, Barrett Browning reamplifies her surface purpose, even as

she locates and employs the traditional elements of amatory sequences. An instance of this is her placing the Beloved on a pedestal and then entreating him to use her:

How, Dearest, wilt thou have me for most use?
(17. 9)

Although Frances Bald misreads this line in Sonnet 17 by concluding that Barrett Browning is willing to accept a role which is subordinate to Browning, it is clear to the discerning reader that the poet exercises her own poetic prerogative in conforming to standard practice and procedures for traditional sonnet sequences. She is the dominant party in the courtship since she effectively silences the male voice that contends for dominance in the preceding sonnets.

The companion Sonnets 18 and 19 bring the poet-persona closer to realizing her goal, an act which will not be achieved until the penultimate Sonnet 43. In these poems the lovers exchange locks of hair, and in each, sex roles are delineated since, for the first time in the sequence, the term man appears. The physical act of exchanging locks of hair shows a literary motive which implies sexual union since hair is traditionally identified with sexuality or passion in literature (Thompson 190). "Take it," the speaker-self announces in the opening quatrain, and later, "Love is justified,--Take it thou." The offer of union

constitutes an affirmative response to the proposition estimated in Sonnet 1. The connection to the opening sonnet refocuses the attention to the speaker's electing life over death which the sequence develops. The Beloved offers to the speaker a lock of his own hair in Sonnet 19. But his voice is silent, and the assertive voice of the speaker prevails. Receiving "curl for curl" connotes the speaker's accepting of her own forward progression to the logical conclusion of the quest. By employing the device of accumulatio, or piling up a catalogue of "near flowers," the speaker indicates that the poetic enterprise is yielding fruit, not death, but life. She likens the locks of hair to images from the flower world by assigning to the former some of the same properties as flowers. Barrett Browning implies, then, a connection between the exchange of hair and the images of creativity or life, and hence, love:

I. . . . Receive this lock of hair which
 outweighs argosies,
 As purply black, as erst to Pindar's eyes
 The dim purpureal tresses gloomed athwart
 The nine white Muse brows. For this counterpart,
 The bay-crown's shade, Beloved, I surmise,
 Still lingers on thy curl. (19. 4-9)

Like Sonnet 1, Sonnet 19 closes on a spiritual plane and with a reiteration of the enthymeme of the entire sequence. She restates the sense but not the diction of Sonnet 1:

And lay the gift where nothing hindereth;
 Here on my heart, as on thy brow, to lack
 No natural heat till mine grows cold in death.
 (19. 12-14)

She pledges, in short, to live until she dies.

As stated above, the Beloved is often submerged in the sonnets as Barrett Browning struggles to validate her own poetic voice via an argumentation, now with the Beloved, now with herself. She uses the Beloved as the imaginative draw for her own poetic imagination. The retrospective tone of Sonnet 20 serves many purposes. By recalling a past time when the Beloved was absent from her life, the speaker adds coherence by accentuating the reflective core of the sequence, regathers the series of "past facts" which comprise her argument in the early sonnets. The use of Aristotle's commonplace topoi in the sequence allows the reader to participate in the retelling of an experience. Just as it is a "past fact" that Theocritus lived and loved, so it is with all humanity which lived after him. The implied image is that of a time spectrum which comprises all mankind. Further, the speaker gently jolts her audience into the present by reminding them that the latter is reading a record of events and feelings in progress. Throughout the sequence one is aware of viewing a work in progress. Argument has been used throughout Sonnets as a tool of clarification, for

clarifying and for identifying who and what the poet is. In this sense, her argument has two functions: not only to sway the audience to her own point of view and to help clarify her thinking on the issues which the poems confront.

Such clarification in the sequence is a gradual process driven forward by Barrett Browning's continual confrontation with the complexities of these issues and the competition of opposing views. Sonnet 20 substantiates these ideas by momentarily bringing the reader into the present reality or into the composing scene of the sonnets. Barrett Browning reminds the reader that she sits alone in a room on Wimpole Street composing this sequence as a self-investigation:

Beloved, my Beloved, when I think
That thou wast in the world a year ago,
What time I sat alone here in the snow
And saw no footprint, heard the silence sink
No moment at thy voice, but link by link,
Went counting all my chain. (20. 1-6)

By Barrett Browning's inserting an image of herself as creator of the sequence, poet and audience are on one accord, and a link to the real world is achieved, one of the many coherence tools uniting the poems. Indeed, though Barrett Browning uses the phrase in an altogether different context, the physical sight of the phrase "link by link" in line 5 implies a basic continuity of thought.

The affirmation sought in Sonnet 21 reaches back and gathers images for the retelling of the story initially stated in the enthymeme which states the major premise of Sonnets. Sonnet 21 galvanizes the ideas initially set down in Sonnet 1:

Beloved, I, amid the darkness greeted
 By a doubtful spirit-voice, in that doubt's pain
 Cry, "Speak once more--thou lovest!" Who can fear
 Too many stars, though each in heaven shall roll,
 Too many flowers, thou each shall crown the year?
 Say thou dost love me, love me, love me--toll
 The silver iterance!--only minding, Dear
 To love me also in the silence with thy soul.
 (21. 7-14)

References to darkness, fear, the spirit voice, and to the "silver iterance" reintroduce the pattern of images initially set out in the exordium. Also the repetition of the imperative sentence which demands of the Beloved that he vow true love contributes to the argumentative tone of the lyric voice and moves the sequence toward the conclusion of affirmation, hope, and triumph which it seeks. Finally, this sonnet provides an apt transition to Sonnet 22, where the lyric voice is raised in argumentative discourse. As in Sonnets 10 and 14, the structure of Sonnet 22 is informed by an argumentative format: proposition + response + argument + solution. The speaker sets up prerequisites for union of her own soul and that of the Beloved. She argues for a Utopia on earth for the lovers, an idea which constitutes a turning point in the

sequence. The dim vision described in Sonnet 1 is now clearer. Whereas the speaker in the first sonnet is presented as weak and timorous, as one who does not comprehend the import of the vision of which she speaks, the persona in Sonnet 22 understands something of the nature of this now "fleshed-in" vision. Whereas the speaker in the opening sonnet has sought refuge in the next world, this speaker is ready to reside in this world. Since the sequence opens on a spiritual plane with a "mystic Shape," the pattern of images developed in the sequence is indicative of Barrett Browning's preoccupation with a heavenly love. Sonnet 22 proposes that the speaker seek the ideal world within the real one:

When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curved point,--what bitter wrong
Can the world do to us, that we should not long
Be contented? Think. In mounting higher,
The angels would press on us and aspire
To drop some golden orb of perfect song
Into our deep, dear silence. Let us stay
Rather on earth, Beloved,--where the unfit
Contrarious moods of men recoil away
And isolate pure spirits, and permit
A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.
(22. 1-14)

The response to the proposition that she locate life and love in this world, not the next, is supported by the image of an undesirable and sterile ideal world where the angels would interfere with the lovers' "deep, dear silence" (9).

Her solution, then, is to stay on earth near the "[c]ontrarious moods of men" (11). The image of the "golden orb" (8) in the midst of "darkness and the death-hour" (14) recognizes that love is possible on earth. The rhetorical voice of this poem is devoid of timidity and doubt. It is bold and assertive with no trace of fear. The speaker has come full circle in her argument from the first three sonnets. Sonnet 1 shows the speaker opting to give up this world for the next. She is prepared to struggle against love in favor of spiritual death and an anticipated place in heaven. She has alternated up to this point between confirming and confuting life and its counterpart love. She has looked beyond this world to the next and coveted entry. In short, she has been willing, like the Lady of Shalott, to divorce herself from life and to content herself with a mirrored view of the real world. But also like that lady from Camelot, the speaker-self, in Sonnet 22, also turns from the artificial Utopia and moves down the road to the real world, a world wherein she will construct her own ideal world, encasing the "deep, dear silence" of true love. The struggle, however, is not over, for the argument in Sonnets 23-44 continues to develop the speaker's search for the silver answer, signaled by the narratio of Sonnet 1:

"Not Death, but Love."

Chapter IV

Parnassus Attained:

Sonnets from the Portuguese, 23-44

Via the discursive elements which constitute Sonnets 1-22, Barrett Browning uses the sonnet cycle as a discovery mechanism through which she deliberates herself into a concrete poetic identity. Using the three men who constituted the emotional grounding of her life (drowned brother Bro; father, Edward Barrett; and Robert Browning) as the imaginative objects of her desire to write, Barrett Browning embarks upon a journey of literary confession wherein she struggles against death in favor of love, topples the male sex roles in traditional sonnet cycles, and demands the freedom to write and to speak of love, all with a view toward locating the well-springs of her poetic powers by identifying and perfecting her own authoritative and poetic "I." Hence, the sequence is an exercise in clarification. As she moves through this process of clarification in Sonnets 1-22, Barrett Browning often submerges the Beloved altogether. The Beloved, then, variously becomes emblematic of

- a) the lover/object in the poems;
- b) the embodiment of the speaker's opposing viewpoint;
- c) the passionate side of the speaker-self's psyche.

The identifying tonal feature of the cycle's first 22 poems is their nonlogical progression of fluctuating tones and textures. While the poems do proceed from dialectic and hence argumentation, the initial 22 sonnets present a mind wavering between doubt and certainty, between confuting and refuting Barrett Browning's own hard-won territory and charting the incremental gains of the struggle. The rhetorical structure of Sonnets from the Portuguese is grounded in three major frames, each of which provides an internal consistency to the cycle's claim (a life devoid of activity is tantamount to spiritual death), and to the effectiveness of that claim's supporting evidence. While the classical schemata of argumentation frames the sequence, informing this schemata and tunneling into it is the smaller tripartite paradigm of thesis--antithesis--synthesis, which itself is developed by a series of linking devices such as image progressions (mystic shape or gradual vision which the poems develop); repetition, amplification, and accentuation of principal ideas; and aggregation, or

enumeratio and accumulatio (listing of the parts to describe the whole). Sonnets 1-3 comprise the thesis or exordium, wherein the speaker-self announces the narratio, the statement of the issue to be argued or debated. Sonnets 4-22 represent the antithesis of the argument, the confutatio in which the speaker-self offers elliptical and often covert types of arguments to counter the central premise of the cycle with only incremental gains in her persuasive stance.

Thus, if Sonnets 1-22 may be viewed as a work in progress, or as a first draft of the poet's ideas, then Sonnets 23-44 may constitute the final draft or the completed process of Barrett Browning's clarification exercise. This chapter will, via Sonnets 23-42, describe the speaker-self's gathering up of the incremental gains achieved in the first 22 sonnets. Barrett Browning's major poetic device in these poems, accumulatio, is played out on several poetic "fronts." The major feature of Sonnets 23-42 is structural in that the lyric voice accumulates variant expressions establishing and delineating a qualitative discussion of eight ways of loving (Going 79). Each of these modes of love has been introduced but not given full treatment throughout the sonnet cycle. Sonnet 43 draws together and enumerates these eight ways to love; in this culminating poem, the Beloved is finally

submerged altogether, and the authoritative "I" is achieved, thereby documenting the incremental gains achieved in the first half of the amatory sequence. Finally, Sonnet 44, which serves to clinch the argumentative premise of the sequence and to restate the premise, returns the reader to the room on Wimpole Street where the poems originated. Hence, the second half of Sonnets from the Portuguese completes the debate by synthesizing or bringing to unification the various parts of the arguments.

Virginia Radley argues that with the exception of Sonnet 35, each of the poems (23-44) concludes on a note of affirmation (99). Sonnet 23 reaches back to Sonnet 22 to restate the speaker's willingness to exchange heaven for earth. But a more paramount concern in this sonnet is the search for the sources or well-springs of the speaker-self's poetic inspiration. The poet-persona seeks affirmation from the now silenced Beloved, the emblematic object of her desire to create. The sonnet moves from a series of data in the octave to a claim in the sestet. The data or evidence affirms the healing force which love has afforded in her life. As evidence of the existence of this force, she cites testimony from the love letters. She reminds him that he has claimed a love so confident that he will love her even after death:

I marvelled, my Beloved, when I read
 Thy thought so in the letter. I am thine--
 But. . . so much to thee? (23. 5-6)

She explores reasons or artistic proofs to support her claim that the speaker-self will "yield the grave" by electing life and love over death and spiritual sterility. The heart of an argument is an issue question that invites two or more competing responses, and the issue question which Sonnets debates is encapsulated and dramatized in Sonnet 23. The imperative sentence in line 8 enjoins and invites the Beloved:

"Breathe on me!"

This image of the speaker standing in the center of a creative wind, or a life force, suggests that the Beloved has become for the speaker-self what Shelley's great West Wind was for that poet. The Beloved is now the instrument, the giver of life, of love, and of poetic creativity. He is emblematic of productivity, of a harmonious existence. The tone of the sonnet evinces the rumblings of a newly awakened poetic power in the speaker. The embryonic form of this power has been introduced in earlier poems. The tonal exultation in the octave gives way in the sestet to a declaration:

I yield the grave for thy sake!

Hence, the argument of Sonnet 23 moves the sequence forward in the sense that the speaker is willing to

. . . exchange
My near sweet view of Heaven, for earth with
thee! (13-14)

Sonnet 24 develops the images of the enclosed space on earth from Sonnets 21-23 to illustrate the landscape of the mind which the poems depict. The speaker barter for a Utopia or for an enclosed space on earth. Cognizant of the pain such an undertaking will entail, she uses the metaphor of the "clasping knife" (which will be used to "cut out" her earthly Utopia) to provide an image of the lover's isolation on earth. Although the speaker-self notes the sharpness of the world, its ability to "cut" into the softness of love, she affirms that she can shut out worldly care because she is now guarded by a truly ideal love:

Let the world's sharpness, like a clasping knife,
Shut in upon itself and do no harm
In this close hand of Love, now soft and warm
And let us hear no sound of human strife
After the click of the shutting. Life to life--
I lean upon thee, Dear, without alarm.
And feel as safe as guarded by a charm
Against the stab of worldlings, who if rife
Are weak to injure. (24. 1-9)

She is drawing a conclusion from an admitted proposition (demonstratio). By conceding that the world wherein she will practice her love is less than an ideal place in which to do so, she strengthens her avowal that a Utopia within this world may offer a stronger place to love because of the adversity which encompasses it.

The flight from the world into the enclosed space or Utopia is amplified by the use of flowers as emblematic of heaven and earth, "Growing straight, out of man's reach, on the hill." The flight also recapitulates the idea of the flight of power which is unfolding like a plant caught in the throes of a growth spurt in the entire sequence. This power is reflected in the gathering strength of the poetic "I" heard in the newly confident and less timorous lyric voice.

The thought progression in Sonnets shows the growth of love, the deepening into mature love, when, come what may, the lovers resolve to stand against the world, regardless of those "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" so indigenous to it. Wholeheartedly, the speaker-self has accepted the fact of viable love in her life and the dramatic change which it has wrought. Of this change she speaks explicitly in at least two of the sonnets. In Sonnet 25 she refers to the "heavy heart" that was hers before embracing love; the imagery is heavy, the tone, dull. The poet refers to her attempt to lift her heart "Above the world forlorn," but she encounters difficulty. Then comes love, she says, and bids her

". . . drop [her heart] adown [its] calmly great
Deep being!:

There in the depth of love her heart beats,

". . . mediating
 Betwixt the stars and the unaccomplished fate!"
 (25. 13-14)

The picture presented is that of a woman attempting to lift a heavy burden by herself and finally finding the solution: to drop it into the depth of another source where comfort, warmth, and help reside. The speaker-self makes her mind known in a precise and animated way; her soul is revealed in language. She is practicing what Jeffrey Walker calls the "art of reasoned controversy, an assertion plus evidence" (76).

Another sonnet stressing the change love has wrought in Barrett Browning's life is Sonnet 26, in which she expresses the change from vicarious to direct living which love has effected in her. This sonnet is often cited as reference to her isolation and solitary ways (Radley 89). But one cannot accept it as literal truth, for her life was relatively full. She was a poet; and, like Keats, she too found those "realms of gold" highly satisfactory. Early in the love letters she writes to Browning regarding her world of books and the poetic pleasures derived from these:

Like to write? Of course, of course I do. I
 seem to live while I write--it is life for me.
 Why, what is to live? Not to eat and drink and
 breathe,--but to feel the life in you down all
 the fibres of being, passionately and joyfully.
 (Letters 9)

The pleasures of the vicarious, however, are constantly honed by the contact with the real world. When she was well enough to venture into society to meet with John Kenyon, William Wordsworth, and Mary Jane Mitford--she could return to the world of books all the more prepared to test the vicarious against the actual, or the impossible against the possible. The first lines of Sonnet 26 attest to this life of the mind:

I lived with visions for my company,
 Instead of men and women, years ago,
 And found them gentle mates, nor thought
 A sweeter music than they played to me.
 (26. 1-4)

Barrett Browning recognizes that these visions became dusty and silent as the world with its cares, sorrows, and blight grew more urgently apparent, even though she retreated to this world visions. Reality reappears to her in the form of love, which now becomes what her visions once seemed. Her line of reasoning in Sonnet 26 advances the enthymemic premise of the cycle in several ways. First of all, the speaker-self connects the "mystic Shape" introduced in the exordium to the visions presented in Sonnet 26. By so doing, she underscores the basic argument of the sonnets: the structural progression will eventually foster an images-to-reality development for the "mystic Shape." Secondly, Sonnet 1 opens the debate of whether the speaker-self will embrace a spiritual or an active life.

Sonnet 26 asserts a response in favor of the latter. Indeed, the final line of the octave indicates that the "gradual shape" of the earlier poems is now "fleshed out":

Then thou didst come--to be.
(26. 8; emphasis added)

The affirmation implied in the use of the to be verb dismisses mere images for reality. The image of death, so strong in the opening sonnets, has given way to that of love and of life. At the very heart of the sonnet cycle is a conflict of ideas, and the resolution of this conflict is a central premise of the argument of the poems. The resolution of the conflict will be realized through a repetition and a deliberation of the conflicting points of view in the cycle. The speaker-self dismisses altogether the visions in the final line of the poem:

God's gifts put man's best dreams to shame.
(26. 14)

God's gifts are real and tangible, while man's dreams, her visions, are mirages.

The idea of the source of poetic power is again taken up in Sonnet 27. Love has lifted the speaker from the "drear flat of earth" and breathed life into her almost as God breathed life into dust at the Creation. She who had only looked for death found her ideal in love:

And I who looked only for God found thee!
(27. 8)

This line repeats the trinity enumerated in Sonnet 2 wherein the speaker initially introduces the idea of the enclosed world, a world encompassing the lovers and their God. The confessional tone of her argument in this sonnet reflects not a declaration of guilt or revelation of sins. Rather, the confession signifies a declaration and a belief in the efficacy of love to aid her in deliberating herself out of the dilemma of spiritual death, the struggle which is imaged in the opening sonnet. References to a "life-breath" blown into the speaker underscore one of the poet's primary missions, that of discovering the veritable source of her poetic acumen. The poet denigrates the spiritual life and restates the narratio of Sonnet 1:

I find thee; I am safe, and strong, and glad.
As one who stands in the dewless asphodel
Looks backward on the tedious time he had
In the upper life,--so I, with bosom-swell,
Make witness, here, between good and bad
That Love, as strong as Death, retrieves as well.
(27. 9-14)

By making references to the "tedious time in the upper life," Barrett Browning argues from a premise contrary to that offered in the opening sonnets wherein she tries to elect this "upper" or spiritual life over an active one.

Barrett Browning shifts to another consideration in Sonnets 28-29. The spirit's hunger for true speech characterizes the dialectic tone of Sonnets 28 and 29. If as Chiam Perelman asserts, "discourse of necessity

degenerates into dialogue" (9-10), there is indeed an implied dialogue in these two poems. The speaker-self soliloquizes about the love letters which she exchanges with the Beloved. She catalogues his letters and repeats for us his statements. He wants to see her, to touch her hand, and he makes a declaration of love. The final couplet presents a speaker on the edge of delirium over the joy which comes of love realized:

And this . . . O Love, thy words have ill availed
If, what this said, I dared repeat at last!
(28. 13-14)

She argues by example and illustration in Sonnet 29, a technique which presupposes the existence of certain regularities of which examples provide a concretion (Perelman 106). The catalogue of illustrations strikes the imagination and moves the senses as the speaker-self submerges the Beloved, steps out of the courtship ritual altogether, and actively searches for the well-springs of her own poetic powers:

I think of thee!--my thoughts so twine and bud
About thee, as wild vines, about a tree,
Put out broad leaves, and soon there's nought
to see
Except the straggling green which hides the wood
Yet, O my palm-tree, be it understood
I will not have my thoughts instead if thee
Who art dearer, better! Rather, instantly
Renew thy presence, as a strong tree should,
Rustle thy boughs and set thy trunk all bare.
And let these bands of greenery which insphere
thee

Drop heavily down,--burst, shattered, everywhere!
 Because, in this deep joy to see and hear thee
 And breathe within thy shadow a new air.
 I do not think of thee--I am too near thee.
 (29. 1-14)

Like the inspirational and creative winds which seem to "blow" through Sonnets 23, 26, 27, Sonnet 29 substitutes the Beloved for the poet's own imaginative self. The use of the central image of the tree as an emblem of stability depicts the speaker-self in search of the life-force which informs her artistic powers. The juxtaposition of love and the tree as the life-giving forces represented by the thoughts, buds, and vines suggests creativity and artistic power. The speaker does not know but seeks the depth of herself through the powerful images in this sonnet. The voice is one of power; the tone demanding even as it deliberates and bargains for tenancy with the tree. The gathering force of the argument may be seen in the use of the phrase "insphere thee." The image is nearly sexual in its depiction of union. The persona has turned inward and is speaking less to the Beloved than she is speaking to her own psyche. Passion and reason intertwine like her thoughts. She seeks inspiration and moves to a powerful unity in the final lines. So near to the source of her poetic powers is she that it is not necessary to think of them as she breathes this new air. There is drama in her speech. Jeffrey Walker holds:

A main feature of lyric poetry is that it is essentially a mini-drama. There is a Theophrastian character who speaks to other characters in a fictive scene or to himself in soliloquy; the lyric act must be paradigmatic act, revealing how a character feels in certain circumstances; the act of speaking must constitute the lyric plot; the act of speaking is the arche or soul of the poem. (13)

This dramatic argument in Sonnet 29 is played out via a confessional dialectic, as the persona pleads with herself and tries to seduce reason with passion. The poem advances the initial claim of the sonnet cycle in the speaker's call for "insphering" and "a new air." It is a counter-argument to the first 22 sonnets which have wavered between two disparate positions on the issue to be debated. She has commenced writing under the dominion of males, and the domination is emblemized in the timorous and weak lyric voice of the opening sonnets. The speaker-self's positions are erratic and uncertain. She appears to gain ground, only to reverse herself on the hard-won territory to question her worth in realizing the achievement.

Whenever the speaker-self experiences separation from the Beloved and the latter is submerged in the poems into an imaginative object, the separation means that the speaker will achieve unity of self, or an advancement of enthymeme of the cycle. An enthymeme is an incomplete logical structure that depends, for its completeness, on one or more unstated premises. These unstated premises

serve as the starting point of the argument and therefore are assumptions, values, or beliefs granted by the auditor. The enthymeme which informs Barrett Browning's sonnet cycle may be stated in this way: Embracing not death, but love is spiritually healthy because the latter promotes life and creativity. In seeking the source of her own creative powers, the speaker often addresses not the Beloved but herself. Sonnet 30 underscores the internalized search for Barrett Browning's poetic powers. The central image of the sonnet is that of light, and the poem turns upon one key question. She cannot discern where she ends and he begins:

Beloved, is it thou
Or I who makes me sad?
Thou art out of sight. (30. 3-5)

At this point the Beloved has become a part of the speaker-self's deep structure; he is emblematic of her illusive poetic powers, and his reappearance signals her own reentry into the practice of poetry.

"Thou comest," the speaker announces in the opening line of Sonnet 31. The reference to sitting in line 2 ("I sit beneath thy looks") connotes an attitude of composing, and the exhilarating announcement signals the start of a flow of poetic fertility in the speaker. The "thou" signifies love and, hence, creativity and art. The speaker is inspired beyond what the Beloved can give, an indication that the latter will move in the ensuing poems to the

status of imaginative object until he is submerged altogether in the penultimate sonnet. The poet catalogues the source of the joy, naming it a "prodigal, inward joy" (31. 5).

The flight of power introduced in Sonnets is emphasized and described as beyond the power of the speaker. She is caught up in the winds of creative power, carried over from Sonnets 29-30. Barrett Browning draws a landscape of her own mind, and the reader is caught up in the contagion of the experience. The speaker-self has particularized a cluster of universal emotions. She has dramatized the universal, made it valid and plausible by universalizing an experience that is peculiarly her own. Eric Johnson describes this process as the "result of the struggle between the private/personal and the personal/universal" (73). The process of bringing the struggle to the surface is part and parcel of the exercise in clarification which Sonnets illustrates. Sonnet 31 recapitulates the seeking of poetic sources, a search described in Sonnet 29. A chain of data presented as phrase commands intensifies the speaker-self's search for the source of her artistic powers. And Sonnet 31 is only one of several collection points for this intense search:

Thou comest! (31)

My own Beloved who hast lifted me/. . . blown
A life-breath. (27)

Thee, thou love me, Love! look on me--breathe
on me! (26)

The controlling statement of argumentation in Sonnets from the Portuguese may be represented via a claim with an attached "because" clause. One or more unstated assumptions must be brought to the surface to reveal the complete structure of its argument. The poet must defend these unstated arguments if her argument is to both clarify and persuade. The internal validity of the premises may be measured by casting these in the form of a valid syllogism. The paramount enthymemic argument of the sequence is that love informs and supports the active life because the inactive life leads to spiritual death. The complete argument, then, contains a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion. The major premise is that a life which promotes spiritual death is undesirable. The minor premise is that a loveless life or a life without anchor promotes spiritual death. Therefore, a life devoid of right love and union is undesirable.

Importantly, this syllogism that shows the general argument underlying the enthymemic premise of Sonnets from the Portuguese is informed by many subsets or minor concerns, all of which tunnel into the major argument of the cycle. The overall strategy of support for the cycle's

enthymeme is rhetorical in that Barrett Browning moves from data to support a claim, which is guaranteed reliability via a warrant. The general warrant of this sequence is approximated by the major premise. If one accepts her warrant as plausible, then her argument is plausible. The flight of power documented in Sonnet 31 moves in Sonnet 32 to a substantiation of her right to claim that power. She questions her own right to love and be loved:

The first time that the sun rose on thine oath
To love me, I looked forward to the moon
To slacken all those bonds which seemed too soon
And quickly tied to make a lasting troth.
(32. 1-4)

She turns over in her own mind the possible and the impossible, a commonplace topic in Aristotle's system of proofs. While her need is to embrace love, her impulse is to shun or turn it aside. She gives voice to earlier doubts in the octave, only to dismiss these and conclude on a note of affirmation in the sestet:

For perfect strains may float
'Neath master-hands, from instruments defaced,--
And great souls at one stroke may do and doat.
(32. 12-14)

Dismissing the impossible, she has recollected her faith in the possible--that true love can effect her release from the grasp of spiritual death, from the inactive life. The argument of Sonnet 33 turns upon pathetic proofs as the speaker allays and arouses her addressee by adapting her

concerns to the emotional needs or traits of that audience. She relies upon past fact and moves from the past in the octave to the future in the sestet. The verities of truth, innocence, and youth or childhood expressed in this poem advances these same verities, initially introduced in the sequence in the opening sonnet. The speaker-self knows that her audience will respond to these ideas and that it will sympathize with her:

Yes, call me by my pet-name! let me hear
 The name I used to run at, when a child,
 From innocent play, and leave the cowslips piled,
 To glance up in some face that proved dear
 With the look of its eyes. I miss the clear
 Fond voices which, being drawn and reconciled
 Into the music of Heaven's undefiled,
 Call me no longer. Silence on the bier,
 While I call God--call God!--So let thy mouth
 Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
 (33. 1-10)

By referencing voices heard no more, Barrett Browning solicits the adherence of the audience. Since the aim of argumentation is to "presuppose a meeting of minds between speaker and audience" (Perelman 9-10), the dialectic of this sonnet begins from theses generally accepted by the audience, with the purpose of gaining the acceptance of other theses which could be or are controversial. Hence, the poet established audience adherence in the octave in preparation for what may be a controversial premise presented in the sestet. This premise is that perhaps heaven is not so ideal a place, not so desirable as man had

previously imagined. She uses a system of opposites to underscore the idea that verities or realities of earth supersede the purported idealities of heaven. She will gladly give up heaven for earth. Significantly, the "clear and fond voices" which she misses are given accordance on earth, in the reality of the past. Since these voices "call her no longer," she hopes to

Be heir to those who are now exanimate.
(33. 10)

She gives orders to

Gather the north flowers to complete the south,
And catch the early love up in the late.
(33. 11-12)

She implies then that earth (south) may be made more livable if adorned with "north flowers" (heaven). Since repetition is an essential part of any argument (Ramage 128), the deliberating lyric voice repeats in Sonnet 33 the central evidence of the sequence's claim: it is possible to, not impossible to, wrest from earth a good and substantial life. Hence, she reiterates the argument developed in previous sonnets: yield the purely contemplative life for the active one. And to make this claim, she implies a disconnection with her mother and with her beloved brother Edward, whose home is now heaven. The final couplet encapsulates the proposition of the sonnet:

Yes, call me by that name,--and I, in truth
 With the same heart, will answer and not wait.
 (33. 13-14)

If the lover/object calls her by the pet-name (Ba), she will answer, a reference to her taking up the pen to declare her literary autonomy, a central purpose of the cycle.

The idea is carried into the next sonnet as the speaker pledges to respond to the name by which she was called during her lost youth. The Beloved in Sonnet 34 serves several didactic roles for the speaker. The Beloved is the other self of the speaker. The poem is almost a soliloquy in that the speaker turns inward to contemplate past joys and triumphs:

With the same heart, I said, I'll answer thee
 As those, when thou shalt call me by my name--
 Lo, the vain promise! is the same, the same,
 Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy?
 When called before, I told how hastily
 I dropped my flowers or brake off from a game
 To run and answer with the smile that came
 At play last moment, and went on with me
 Through my obedience. (34. 1-9)

The octave charts the days wherein the speaker-self was not self-directed, but rather, directed by another, possibly her father. The use of the pet name from the past allows the poet to use past fact as a line of argument. When she responded to the name, "Ba," she was obedient and did not think independently, just as before the struggle initiated in Sonnet 1, she was object of

another's life and experience, rather than subject of her own. She was, as she says,

Perplexed and ruffled by life's strategy.
(34. 4)

When called before, she used to

. . . brake off from a game
To run and answer with the smile that came
At play last moment, and went on with me
Through my obedience. (34. 5-9)

She is Eve who is obedient to a conceived higher power and who "knows enough to know no more" (Milton Paradise Lost, III, 18-19). But as a direct result of her having glimpsed the promise of the "mystic Shape," the "gradual vision," her answer is now informed by her own cognizance of her autonomy. The tone changes in the sestet:

I drop a grave thought, break from solitude.
(34. 9-10)

Her brow has been furrowed by cares, typified by the "grave thought." The speaker takes stock of herself and testifies to her own innate worth:

Yet still my heart goes to thee--ponder how--
Not as to a single good, but all my good!
(34. 11-12)

The argument of the sonnet ends affirmatively as the poet refers to warm blood as a life force. Life, she seems to reason, is for the living. She invites her "best one" to participate in the proof of this assertion:

Lay thy hand on it [heart], best one, and allow
That no child's foot could run as fast as this
blood. (34. 13-14)

Virginia Radley argues that with one exception the sonnets from 23 to the last, 44, are affirmative and lack any expression of regret. The exception, she believes, is Sonnet 35 (99). Sonnet 35, perhaps quite naturally, questions whether or not Barrett Browning will regret forsaking home and family for Browning. One cannot wonder at the thought. At forty, having literally lived in the midst of home and family, Barrett Browning expresses a realistic compunction:

If I leave all for thee, wilt thou exchange
And be all to me? Shall I never miss
Home-talk and blessing and the common kiss
That comes to each in turn, nor count it strange,
When I look up, to drop on a new range
Of walls and floors, another home than this?
(35. 1-6)

Barrett Browning's logos-centered argument in this sonnet reverses the argument of the cycle. She invents a contrary premise, or a refutatio of her own kind. Even her sorrowful memories are, she knows, likely to be overshadowed by this new and vital love. Here, she refers to Bro's dead but loving eyes, which for her can never change, for he is part of the beloved past. She states that because she has grieved for so long, she is "hard to love." Yet, she resolves all by asking for love: "Yet love me--wilt thou?" The sonnet reveals the struggle

against grief, a struggle which is played out by the submerged enthymeme informing the entire sequence. The lines

Open thine heart wide,
And fold within, the wet wings of thy dove
(35. 13-14)

provide a counterpoint of a contrast to the violent struggle described in the opening sonnet. The picture of the lover folded in the wings of the dove connotes peace rather than death. Hence, the dramatic conflict between the poet and her own adversaries is played out.

The image of marble presented in Sonnet 36 is emblematic of the gathering force of the cycle's argument. By drawing a conclusion from an admitted proposition, Barrett Browning solidifies the debate. She admits that she initially mistrusted love and draws the conclusion that this approach yielded her nothing substantive:

When we met first and loved, I did not build
Upon the event with marble. (36. 1-2)

The image affords an apt introduction to Sonnet 37 where she begs pardon of the Beloved that she has vacillated so within the sonnet sequence. She knows the strength of love, and she apologizes for making love's signature in sand, a transient element, saying, the years of her life without love were reluctant to take his "sovranty" and

Have folded [her] swimming brain to undergo
Their doubt and dread, and blindly to forsake

Thy purity of likeness, and distort
 Thy worthiest love to a worthless counterfeit.
 (37. 7-10)

She has reiterated the earlier theme that this new love is too good to be true or even feasible.

Sonnet 38 connects the practice of love to the practice of poetry. The Beloved is submerged, and the speaker-self alone comes to the surface. The poet uses a rhetorical induction to invent her own parallel. The three kisses comprise this parallel. The speaker-self equates the first kiss shared by the lovers with her own growing literary and poetic manumission:

First time he kissed me, he but only kissed
 The fingers of this hand wherewith I write;
 And ever since it grew more clean and white.
 (38. 1-3)

The second kiss sought her forehead, emblematic of the seat of reason and knowledge; and the third kiss parallels the kiss of passion, having fallen on the lips. This sonnet is one of three which employs the number three as an instrument by which the speaker makes her case. Sonnets 2 and 25 recast the Trinity, and Sonnet 38 picks up the image of three to encompass the hand, the lips, and the forehead, the three creative, intellectual, and emotional poles of the speaker's psyche. The sense of unity in the epigrammatic couplet announces the atonement which the speaker is locating within herself:

In perfect, purple state; since when indeed,
 I have been proud and said, "My love, my own."
 (38. 13-14)

The progression of thought in the sequence is now giving way to one of the cycle's primary claims: the woman poet has the right to speak of love. Sonnet 39 takes up the claim for the speaker-self's search for poetic autonomy and presents data to document the nearly accomplished quest.

Because thou hast the power and own'st the grace
 To look through and behind the mask of me
 (Against which years have beat thus blanchingly
 With their rains), and behold my soul's face,
 The dim and weary witness of life's race,--
 Because thou hast the faith and love to see,
 Through that same soul's distracting lethargy,
 The patient angel waiting for a place
 In the new Heavens,--because nor sin nor woe,
 Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood,
 Nor all which others viewing, turn to go,
 Nor all which makes me tired of all,
 self-viewed,--
 Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so
 To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!

This sonnet is enthymemically related to Sonnets 10, 14, and 22 because these poems share a common powerful lyric voice, an assertive tone, and an earnest quest for the source of the poet's poetic acumen. The physical sight of the term "power" in the opening line anticipates the delineation of the sources of this power as the sequence unfolds. The sestet carries the argument of the sonnet via its use of anaphora, or repetition of the initial word or words in consecutive lines:

Nor God's infliction, nor death's neighborhood
Nor all which others, viewing, turn to go,
Nor all which makes me tired of all,
 self-viewed,--
 Nothing repels thee, . . . Dearest, teach me so
 To pour out gratitude, as thou dost, good!
 (39. 9-14)

The sestet anticipates the penultimate and culminating expression of love charted in Sonnet 43. The powerful fusion of the individual and the universal images reaches back to connect related images from preceding poems. Finally, the coherence of the lyric voice caught up in asserting the right to love and to write of love submerges the Beloved finally and completely. The employment of the technique of asyndeton--the omission of conjunctions between words, phrases, or clauses--does not allow for a breath unit and hence, helps to create a tension in both the reader and the writer. This tension prefigures the resolution and abating of the tension in the epilogue poems.

By Sonnet 40, the Beloved has disappeared altogether, having served the speaker as subject of the sequence in the opening sonnets, as object in the poems to allow the woman poet to practice the rites of love and courtship, and as an alternate self, or the imaginative nucleus which inspired the composition of the sonnet sequence.

Oh, yes! they love through all this world of
 ours!
 I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth.

I have heard love talked in my early youth,
 And since, not so long back that the flowers
 Then gathered, smell still. Mussulmans and
 Giaours
 Throw kerchiefs at a smile, and have no ruth
 For any weeping. Polypheme's white tooth
 Slips on the nut of, after frequent showers,
 The shell is oversmooth,--and not so much
 Will turn the thing called love, aside to hate
 Or else to oblivion. But there are not such
 A lover, my Beloved! thou canst wait
 Through sorrow and sickness, to bring souls to
 touch,
 And think it soon when others cry "Too late."
 (40. 1-14)

Since the poet is conversing with her inner self, the Beloved, as a single interlocutor, or addressee, is now a part of the deep structure of the poems. And the speaker-self, or the subject of the discourse, is at the forefront of the fictive scene which frames the cycle. The subject is left to deliberate her case, now, strictly to herself, and to offer reasons for her actions, to make her mind known in a precise and animated way, to reveal her soul in language. Having instilled in her universal audience an expectation for the moment of union--between woman and poet--it is left to her to satisfy this expectation. She speaks of the constancy of love via example images from antiquity and by referencing her own childhood and lost youth. She universalizes the experience of love, a technique which reaches past the addressee, or the Beloved, to encompass the universal audience. Her range and scope are no longer limited to the Beloved. She

speaks to all who would hear, and she re-adapts herself to the emotional traits of her universal audience and thereby promotes its well-being:

I will not gainsay love, called love forsooth
I have heard love talked in my early youth,
And since, not so long back that the flowers
Then gathered, smell still. (40. 1-5)

She continues to develop the reflective core of the cycle as she looks back over her life. The retrospective tone of the sequence is advanced by Sonnet 41 when the speaker-self thanks

. . . all who have loved me in their hearts,
With thanks and love from mine. Deep thanks to
all
Who paused a little near the prison-wall
To hear my music in its louder parts
Ere they went onward, each to the mart's
Or temple's occupation, beyond call. (41. 1-6)

The reference to the "prison-wall" in line three may suggest her own room on Wimpole Street where the poems originated. "Instruct me how to thank thee!" she implores her muse in line 11. Then she transcends the ordinary to make a heartfelt wish:

My soul's full meaning onto future years,
That they should lend it utterance, and salute
Love that endures, from Life that disappears!
(41. 11-14)

The assertive tone with which the compressed thesis is expressed in the opening line of Sonnet 42 indicates that the speaker-self has clarified, identified, and substantiated herself, her quest, and her poetic "I." "My

future will not copy my past," she boldly and confidently announces. The self-conscious ministering angel of Sonnet 4 has evolved into her ministering life-angel whose appealing look is "upcast." This angel is not the naysayer from the earlier sonnet; rather, he is confident of the speaker-self's right place in the universe. The poet states that she has opted finally and completely for life over death, an admission which amounts to a formal acceptance of the narratio or enthymemic premise of the opening poem:

I seek no copy now of life's first half;
 Leave her the pages with long musing curled,
 And wrote me new my future's epigraph,
 New angel mine, unhopd for in the world.
 (42. 11-14)

The direction of the poems is affirmation unqualified and leads logically from the confirmatio to the epilogue or restatement of the issues debated in the sonnet cycle, a restatement delineated in Sonnets 43 and 44.

Sonnet 43 deserves careful study on many counts. First of all, it is the culminating expression of the argument of Sonnets from the Portuguese. Second, the poem is widely adored by some and just as widely reviled by others. It is undeserving of the condemnation it has received. Two alternate viewpoints regarding fairly recent criticism of this sonnet are those of Robert B. Heilman and William Going. Heilman finds the sonnet full of "abstract

imagery glaring generalizations, and reminiscences of platform rhetoric" (17). William Going, in response to Heilman's criticism, demonstrates that Barrett Browning summarizes in Sonnet 43 eight ways of loving, each of which she has previously considered in a preceding sonnet. Thus, he insists she has every right to generalize in Sonnet 43 because it is a conclusive sonnet (18).

There is, however, another and perhaps more accurate way to look at Sonnet 43. The poem is Platonic in orientation; to get at the argument of the sonnet, one might consider the following passage from Symposium:

He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty . . . a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul. . . . but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who from these ascending under the influence of true love begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that beauty using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is. (251)

The passage is pertinent to Sonnets from the Portuguese, for throughout, Barrett Browning has struggled to give expression to her love. She has compared and contrasted herself with her Beloved; she has vacillated between doubt that she is worthy and confidence that love ennobles all; she has selected the imagery of birds and royal clothes, of religion, of God, of marble statuary, of flowers, urns, tears, and heart-symbols of freedom, honor, and central permanence. On the other hand, she has referred to the practice of exchanging locks of hair (18, 19), to the Beloved's calling her by her pet name (33), and to her daily letters received from him that mark the stages of romantic progression (38). Barrett Browning has moved, in short, from the weighty to the trivial, and back again from the light to the profound. She has testified to having sought beauty and reality in books, then in nature, but now in love, she argues that she has discovered what transfigures all. The speaker-self, tutored by love, has climbed the ladder of abstraction from fair forms to that absolute beauty concomitant with ideal love.

Evidence of this movement lies in an explicit prose parallel in one of her love letters to Browning. She writes that she has loved him all of her life, "unawares, that is, the idea of you" (Letters 29). She admits that it is habitual for women to love an ideal, to search for it

for years, and finally, to compromise. But in diction strikingly close to that of Sonnet 43, she declares that she has not needed to compromise since their love is a perfect copy of the ideal:

One's ideal must be above one, as a matter of course, you know. It is as far as one can reach with one's eyes (soul's eyes), not reach to touch. And here is mine . . . shall I tell you? . . . even to the visible outward sign of the black hair and the complexion.

She ends by supporting the point that their love, to her mind, is on a level with that of God:

Right or wrong it may be, but true it is, and I tell you. Your love has been to me like God's own love, which makes the receivers of its kneelers. (Letters 29)

Carefully scrutinizing Sonnet 43, one can see her entire experience recapitulated as she attempts to answer the questions all true lovers might pose, one to the other: "How do I love thee?" She begins to enumerate the ways:

I love thee to the depth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.
(43. 2-4)

Quite obviously, she has elected to express the quintessential degree of love: her singular and consummate grasp of the absolute. Necessarily, she must employ abstract terms since the concept she wishes to express necessitates them. Absent from her tone and lyric voice are the nuances of persuasion and convincing. She knows

that she has made her case in the sonnet cycle, and she merely puts the "icing on the cake" in this, the penultimate sonnet. "Ends of ideal Grace" are fit terms in this context. If one takes these lines in conjunction with lines 6-7 that follow,

I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candlelight,

one recognizes her juxtaposing the abstract with the concrete. If one connects this concept to the quotation from Symposium, one sees that Barrett Browning has indeed "learned to see the beautiful in due order and succession." And in the opening line, she has come to "perceive a nature of wondrous beauty. . . ." This perception sends her to the abstract for expression of her grasp.

When the poet states in the ensuing lines 8-9,

I love thee freely, as men strive for Right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise,

she is once again in accord with the concept of ideal love as explicated in Symposium. In these lines she refers to "fair practices," which are a part of true love. Following these lines, she invokes her total emotional commitment, both past and present, and gives it to the Beloved:

I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with the
breadth,
Smiles, tears, of all my life. (43. 9-13)

As the poet catalogues the modes of her love, the imaginative object of this love (Browning) disappears altogether, and the poet locates the authoritative and poetic "I" signified by the use of the anaphora, or repetition of the terms "I love."

John S. Phillipson finds in Sonnet 43 a parallel to St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (II, 17-19), since there is a contrast between the love of God and the romantic love of man (451). Phillipson argues that Sonnet 43 echoes St. Paul via the poet's famous declaration: "I love thee to the depth and breadth and height / My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight / For the ends of Being and ideal Grace." Writing of Christ's love for man, St. Paul speaks of his prayer

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God." (Authorized Version)

Admittedly, much of the imagery in Sonnet 43 is religious; the poet mingles suggestions of divine love with profane, implying a transformation of the latter by or into the former and an ultimate fusion of the two after death. Supplying the religious tone are words and phrases like "soul"; "the ends of Being" (salvation, the gaining of Heaven and eternal joy); "ideal Grace" (that which brings

salvation); "Right," "turn from Praise" (implying Christian humility, St. Paul at verse 8 of this chapter calls himself "less than the least of all sinners"); "faith"; "saints"; and the prediction of immortality.

Taken as a whole the sonnet breathes a spirit of mature religious feeling. The phrase referring to the passion of "my childhood's faith" need not imply a loss of belief, as of putting away childish things; rather, it can imply the gaining of a faith based upon mature knowledge and reasoning. The love previously accorded "my lost saints" is not necessarily that which Barrett Browning now professes for another man. There has been, not a mere transference of love, but a sharing. In any event, the loss is but a seeming one.

But in what sense are the saints "lost"? If one considers them as elect--good Christians--the expression in line 11 becomes a lament for men and women of probity whom Barrett Browning had known in childhood and had lost through death. Or lines 11 and 12 imply a disillusionment at the discovery of human frailties in adults whom the child mind imagined as perfect. Yet, now the faith and love have been justified in a new object worthy of them.

In spirit and in expression, then, Sonnet 43 echoes St. Paul's thought and phraseology while adapting them to a new context. It extends the temporal to the eternal,

mingling the sacred and profane and giving the profane a sacred character. St. Paul implies extension in three dimensions. For St. Paul, the faithful may comprehend the extent of love--the limitations of human love being set against the limitlessness of God's love. For Barrett Browning her love is limited on earth by the trammels of mortality. Death will remove these "if God choose." When she turns from this world to the next, saying,

I shall but love thee better after death,

she has come full circle in her deliberations; she has empowered herself to write and speak of love. She has brought to fruition her poetic "I." Taking the things that belong to the everyday world, those of "most quiet need," the emotional experiences that she has had and that square with reality, she turns to a consideration of the permanence of true love. She is cognizant that this permanence is, ultimately, in the hands of God. But she herself has gone as far as any human being can go in this sonnet to commit herself to love. Hence, the "mystic Shape," introduced in Sonnet 1 and used as a starting place or stasis of the argument in these sonnets, is now "fleshed out." It is no longer a gradual vision but the emblem of true and hard-won love, her right to speak of it. Thus, by enumerating eight ways of loving considered in the cycle (spiritual love, everyday love, free and societal love,

virtuous love, passionate love, permanent love, and eternal love), Barrett Browning restates the major enthymemes of Sonnets from the Portuguese: love has struggled for dominion over grief and won; the poet has clarified and identified her authoritative "I"; she has located the well-springs of her creative powers; and she has successfully challenged the perception of the traditional male role in amatory poetry. Sonnet 43 moves the cycle out of formal argument to the poet's own atonement. She is in full control with no hint of reserve in her expression of love. The speaker in Sonnet 43 is no immodest, weak, and silent woman. She proclaims a self-sufficiency of love and of speech that excludes the Beloved altogether. Indeed, Leighton argues, the "recipient is outside of the poem's reference" (103). The scope of Sonnet 43 is that of her life. She speaks a love so confident of its object that it no longer needs it. The poet has reshaped her own experience.

Patricia Harrington complains that the "silence that follows Sonnet 43 is that of artistic failure" (30). She is mistaken, since there is no silence after the restatement sonnet. Sonnet 44 clinches or underscores the argument of the cycle by providing an apt conclusion to it. The speaker-self has nothing left to deliberate, to persuade and convince the reader of. The sonnet is an

instance of literary integrity. As the poet has carried the reader on a journey of discovery, so she must return him to the point of departure. To insure the structural integrity of the sequence, the poet returns the reader to the room on Wimpole Street where she is composing the cycle. She makes a gift of the poems to the Beloved, who has not spoken since Sonnet 33, and she recounts the circumstances of writing the poems. This final sonnet is a conclusion to the poetic enterprise. Into Barrett Browning's room the Beloved has brought flowers; she returns the favor by offering the sonnet thought:

Beloved, thou hast brought me many flowers
Plucked in the garden, all the summer through
And winter, and it seemed as if they grew
In this close room, nor missed the sun and
 showers,
So, in the like name of that love of ours,
Take back these thoughts which here I unfolded
 too,
And which on warm and cold days I withdraw
From my heart's ground. Indeed, these beds and
 bowers
Be overgrown with weeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding; yet here's eglantine,
Here's ivy!--take them as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall
 not pine.
Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.
(44. 1-14)

The resurrected Beloved allows the speaker-self to reacquaint herself with reality, to remove herself finally and officially from the dreamlike quality which the sonnets

have afforded. The gift of the sonnet is likened to flowers which Barrett Browning reveals she withdrew

From [her] heart's ground. (44. 7-8)

She admits that all the creativity which she has sown has not been worthy of acceptance:

. . . Indeed, those beds and bowers
Be overgrown with bitter seeds and rue,
And wait thy weeding. (44. 8-10)

Her reference to "weeding" reacquaints the reader with a basic claim of the cycle's argument: the poetic and creative process is a difficult one and contains many trials. And her poetic engagement has been a trial, but one not without victories:

Here's ivy!--take them, as I used to do
Thy flowers, and keep them where they shall not
pine. (44. 10-11)

The beautiful eglantine and the tenacious ivy are emblematic of Barrett Browning's two selves which have warred with each other during the struggle which Sonnets from the Portuguese charts. While the image of the eglantine responds to the sense of sight and is visually pleasing, ivy is represented in terms of its tenacity and its resiliency or ability to survive. The two flowers connote reason or intellect intertwined with passion or sensuality. Ivy is reason, and eglantine is passion. The poem concludes on notes of resolution, union, and atonement

as Barrett Browning gives instructions as to the proper function and dispensation of this gift:

Instruct thine eyes to keep their colours true,
And tell thy soul their roots are left in mine.
(44. 13-14)

The image of entwining unity reaches back to solve the dilemma imaged in Sonnet 1. The struggle, which begins with the "mystic Shape" moving behind the speaker and drawing her backward by the hair, has ended. And the speaker-self has "yielded the grave" (22) in favor of love. Like the speaker, the reader leaves the sequence with the sense of having been purged, of having watched and participated in what Jeffrey Walker calls the mini-drama requisite in successful lyric poetry (9). Barrett Browning has retold the trial of her pursuit of right love:

What is perhaps most admirable about the telling of the trial is the poet's avoidance of sentimentality, for sentiment appropriate to the situation and the fulness of the sincerity of feeling expressed by the poet which results in a work delivered with unerring taste. (Goldstein 207)

No longer is the poet-persona engaged in a struggle to reconcile her right reason to her wayward passion; to deliberate the issue of whether to embrace the spiritual life or the active life; to determine the seeds of her poetic powers; and to, above all, test the soundness of the "silver answer" which rang so truly in the opening sonnet.

She has moved from doubt and uncertainly to assert the claim that she will strive for "Not Death, but Love."

Chapter V

Conclusions

Barrett Browning Unlynched: A Room of Her Own

In the next decade Barrett Browning may well be removed from the kitchen to which Woolf assigned her in 1932 and reestablished in a proper room on the second floor of the "mansion of literature." Professor Michael Timko suggested in 1968 that there is great need for critical studies of her poetry as it relates her life and thought to art, and he also stated that there is an urgent need for sensitive studies of individual poems. There is much to be done. Particularly, as far as I have been able to tell, no one has bothered to answer the naysayers who hold that Barrett Browning did not know her rhetoric, that there is no relationship in Sonnets between content and technique.

Because of the need indicated by Timko and others, this study of Barrett Browning's employment of rhetoric is offered as refutation of those who make the claim that the poet was an inept practitioner of the art. Further, the study attempts to compute her contribution to the field of rhetoric. To this end, Sonnets from the Portuguese emerges as her finest work. The poems herein are more than just

love lyrics. There is about them a tough-mindedness that many of her critics have overlooked. The sonnets demand definitive treatment as argument. In this study we have seen Barrett Browning progress from the erudite, though imitative, juvenilia through the voluminous and chaotic efforts of Early Poems; we have watched her struggle up Parnassus in Poems (1844), and achieve the heights evident in Sonnets from the Portuguese. It is this achievement which places Barrett Browning in her rightful place on the second floor of the "mansion of literature."

It is to the detriment of the New Criticism followers that they praise Donne for his intricate imagery while disparaging Barrett Browning for her simple, melodic generalizations. Surely there is a right place for both types of poetry. Barrett Browning was no platform rhetorician as Robert Heilman accuses her of being. She was a rhetorician in her own right, having both studied the rhetorical treatises of the theorists from antiquity, and to my mind, practiced the conscious rhetorical artistry demonstrated in Sonnets from the Portuguese.

A good sonnet sequence is unique in that while each sonnet is a single poem, the sum of the poems also forms a single work that is not a mere sonnet surfeit. Sonnets from the Portuguese has exposition, climax, and denouement. As a structural entity, it stands at the

apex of nineteenth-century sonnet cycles because it anticipates the later love cycles of Dante and Christina Rossetti and Meredith. Significantly, in the case of Christina Rossetti, Barrett Browning becomes for the younger poet the grandmother poet which she herself lacked. The complexity of the sequence is indicated by the multi-purpose fabric of the cycle. In the sequence, Barrett Browning achieves many aims. She erects a fit literary memorial to Browning, but this aim is only part of her purpose. A more seminal aim of the sequence is that the poet challenges the unspoken claim that women must consign their love concerns to the pages of fiction, that poetry is a male dominion. Barrett Browning not only banishes this narrow view, but she also successfully challenges the tradition of presenting the woman as "other," the object of male focus and admiration.

Further, Barrett Browning, like Chaucer's dreamers before her, grappled with the question of the artist's creative source or literary powers. The genius of Barrett Browning is that she was able to test the validity of all of these concerns via the principles of argumentation within the lyric frame. An argument, according to one of the first definitions of the word, was the "naked setting forth of ideas." Indeed, Barrett Browning bares her soul to her auditors during the course of her poetic enterprise.

The effectiveness of Barrett Browning as a debater is her recognition that, in arguing, she would find herself in the uncomfortable position of being forced to clarify her reasoning and thus having to justify ideas which she had heretofore comfortably assumed. Doing so was a frustrating experience for the poet. But Barrett Browning withstood the trial of clarification which is at the core of Sonnets from the Portuguese.

An understanding of Barrett Browning's contribution to rhetoric and to English literature reshapes our conception of Victorian poetics. She empowers the silenced Eve to speak for women as a sex. Informing Barrett Browning's work and responsible for her literary marginality is a poetic and critical tradition that privileges male poets by assuming that their concerns are universal and that the poetic voice is male. Barrett Browning dispels this purely sexist view, and she was the first English woman poet to do so; she does so by successfully practicing the art of rhetoric, a thing which her critics said she could not do.

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