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THE STYLE AND IMAGES OF BROWNING

OF Browning's form we have so far examined only the style of his sentences. But in this connection other points may be considered, such as his vocabulary and the composition of his poems. His vocabulary is the richest ever used by any poet. His hospitality to words is absolutely catholic. He will admit the most pedantic and the most technical. He hates the word that is poetical at first sight, despises the *dulcia sunt* of Horace, the smoothness of Pope. He will not say, as Pope,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.²⁰

He will, on the contrary, express new thoughts in his own rugged, familiar way. All reforms of poetic diction are pale and timid beside his. Not only does he avoid occasion for what was formerly called the elevated style, but he uses colloquial style even on great occasions. He constantly subordinates harmony to variety, and beauty to character. He sacrifices euphony, and might say, with the old poet Donne,

I sing not, siren-like, to tempt, for I²¹
Am harsh.

Let me say, by the bye, that one reason for his ruggedness of sound is his "docking o' the smaller parts o' speech". For these little unaccented words which he docks are useful to prevent collisions of sound. "Does he taste", for instance, is more euphonic than "tastes he", and so you get his unpleasant lines, like:

Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth? ²²
Irks care the crop-full bird? ²³

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Yes, he is harsh, but "there is repristination", as he would say. If once you get tuned to his keys you discover: first, that he is a great writer after all, that he knows all English words and their uses past and present, all racy English idioms and proverbs, that he has them at any moment at his finger's end, uses them with masterly appropriateness and often gives you the almost classical or Popian pleasure of the right word in the right place, of the word both right and unexpected. Secondly, you discover that he is a wonderful painter in words, that what you lose with him in euphony you gain in variety of color. I believe that his partiality for obscure persons, his Pacchiarottos, Balduccis, Laïresses, etc., is not so much due to his love of erudition as to his fondness for quaint, spicy names. Browning is an artist in contrasts and surprises, and his variety of sound enables him to express a closer grasp of the infinite variety of life. His words are like gestures, they become the thing they describe. A line ends with the two monosyllables, "dab brick", none too pretty, but you see and hear the trowel crushing the mortar. Instances of the kind abound. Just think of the first page of *The Ring and the Book* with its

Etrurian circlets found, some happy morn,⁵²
After a dropping April; found alive
Spark-like 'mid unearthed slope-side fig-tree-roots
That roof old tombs at Chiusi: soft, you see,
Yet crisp as jewel-cutting.

As another instance of realism and vividness take this picture of animal life in *Caliban*:

Yon otter, sleek-wet, black, lithe as a leech; ⁵³
Yon auk, one fire-eye in a ball of foam,
That floats and feeds; a certain badger brown
He hath watched hunt with that slant white-wedge eye.

Browning is a painter and no musician, though in his grotesque poetry he achieves some novel effects of sound which may, not disrespectfully, be compared to what is best and

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most lasting in jazz. He is a painter in words, and we can even determine to what special school of painting he belongs: not to the impressionists, not to the school of Turnerian and Shelleyan fluidities, but to the school preoccupied with what the critic Berenson called tactile values, and what recent French painters call volume. Browning himself was an adept in sculpture; he dabbled in sculpture and modelling in Rome during the winter of 1860,¹ and so his words, with a sort of muscular energy, aim at reproducing the texture and the substance of things.

But all this concerns language, not form, strictly speaking. It was long taken for granted that Browning has no sense of form. This reproach he resented, and put it, ironically, in the beginning of his poem the *Inn Album*:

That bard's a Browning; he neglects the form.²⁴

Now, people who say, with Jowett, the famous master of Balliol College, that Browning lacks form, are simply people who do not find in him the forms they are accustomed to, and who do not realize that Browning is almost fastidious in his dissatisfaction with forms that are hackneyed, worn out, or not suitable to his mood or the nature of his subject. He wrote to Elizabeth on April 16, 1825: "You will get some advantage in finding the world's accepted moulds everywhere, into which you may run and fix your own fused metal, but not a grain do you find of new gold, silver, or brass".

He certainly neglects standing forms, including the sonnet. He will not write an ode on the death of Wellington, in which you know beforehand that there will be a descrip-

¹ "Robert has taken to modelling under Mr. Story and is making extraordinary progress, turning to account his studies on anatomy. He has copied already 2 busts, the young Augustus and Psyché and is engaged on another, enchanted with his new trade, working 6 hours a day."—Extract from letter of Mrs. Browning to Miss Haworth.

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tion of the funeral and probably a speech of Nelson from his tomb at Westminster. If he write a funeral poem, it will be quite unconventional, as we see in *La Saisiaz*, where, taking alone the walk he was to take with his friend, he offers to her a chain of reasoning on immortality. Browning has created a number of forms whose novelty is delightful. *In a Gondola*, for instance, is a sort of duet with musical variations between two lovers of which I find no equivalent elsewhere; *Pippa Passes*, where the song of a certain girl passing in the street influences the life of various sets of persons unrelated to each other, is certainly no drama, but its form is self-sufficient, and holds its own. *A Death in the Desert* is likewise self-existing in its combinations of epic, lyrical, and dramatic elements.

His chief invention is of course the dramatic monologue, where the speaker seems really to speak for himself without explaining a situation which the reader has to reconstruct from scant allusions, as an archæologist will rebuild a broken arch by a series of dots. I am always impatient when French critics give the credit of that most interesting form of monologue to other writers, such as Dostoïevsky or James Joyce, and who not? It was in this form that Browning, after several none too lucky experiments in real drama, found the true organ for his own special dramatic art, where the stage is the soul, and where thoughts and feelings take the place of actions.

In this dramatic method as well as in the peculiarities of Browning's language, we find the chief reason of his obscurity. For Browning did not warn the public, and where the reader expected a story he gave him something entirely different. Instead of beginning with: "Once upon a time", he straightway put the reader in the midst of a situation known by the speaker alone and only hinted at by allusions.

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Here Browning carried to its height his tricks of repelling, "discontinuing old aids", that is the exposition of facts, in order to dwell on psychological elements. It was not enough for the reader to be a docile hearer, he had to be an active collaborator of the poet.

The dramatic monologue is Browning's way of giving life to his analysis of thought and feelings. I wish I could hear some of these monologues well recited, and, by the bye, I read a book published in Boston by Mr. Curry, who from the point of view of the reciter draws a valuable classification of the various species of these monologues. Some of them are apologies of special pleadings: *Bishop Blougram*, *Mr. Sludge*, *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*. Some are lyrical, like many of the love-poems, some are narrative, like *Clive*, though the story is told not by the author but by a witness. Some again are soliloquies, like that of the *Spanish Cloister* or *La Saisiaz*, where Browning himself is the speaker. Some are disguised dialogues, but you do not see the interlocutors any more than when a person speaks before a telephone. Sometimes the interlocutor is named, as Gigadibs in *Bishop Blougram*; sometimes he or they are implied, like the young people to whom Rabbi Ben Ezra says: "Grow old along with me!" In *The Englishman in Italy*, Mr. Curry calls the second person "a little girl": it is rather a lovely young girl. Sometimes the other person is mute the whole time, as the lady of Leicester Square in *Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*. Sometimes you hear the replica by the chief speaker.

This enumeration shows how fertile Browning has been in developing his favorite form. For Browning has really invented not only the form but all its varieties, whether it is a real soliloquy, or a disguised dialogue, or whether again the poet himself is one of the speakers, which happens

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in *Parleyings with Certain People*. I will add that in the elaboration of that form, Browning has lots of happy minor inventions. Such is the implied gesture which gives dramatic animation. Thus Napoleon the Third, in the beginning of his monologue, joins by a line of ink two blots on a blotting paper :

Two blots, you saw ⁵⁶
I knew how to extend into a line
Symmetric on the sheet they blurred before,

a gesture so perfectly symbolical of his politics of compromise, creating nothing but making the most of what there was; so again, Don Juan, drawing Elvire on a slab with a piece of broken pipe. It has been objected that these monologues are too long and too subtle to be natural; that the characters would not speak so much nor so well in real life. To this objection Browning replies very aptly in a passage of *Red Cotton*, which really contains his theory of the monologue. He does not aim to reproduce real speech, for

Speech is reported in the newspaper.⁵⁶

He aims at something more :

Who is a poet needs must apprehend ⁵⁷
Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speech.

Now as to the length of the speeches, just reflect how many things we can think of in one minute! To put it in Browning's own terse way,

One particle of ore beats out such leaf! ⁵⁸

If Browning is inventive in his schemes for single poems, he is no less so in the larger frames he devises for a series of them. Take *Ferishtah's Fancies*: a dozen oriental fables separated by short lyrics which have the faintest reference to the morals of the fable. The poet compared the whole to an Italian dish: a skewer of ortolans, where each fatling is separated from the other by a bit of toast and sage-leaf.

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But through all three bite boldly,⁵⁰ . . . [he says]
So with your meal, my poem: masticate
Sense, sight and song there,

and this image is very characteristic of his fastidious palate for composition.

The novelty of the form in the best short poems is enhanced by the fact that the form appears only in the making, that you cannot foresee it, that it is not made, but rather secreted, from the soul of the subject, spiral after spiral, like the shell of the nautilus. It is a perfect modelling and imbedding of the thought, it preserves its bent or its fold. "It has all the charm of accident, the unforeseen of life"; which means that Browning's composition has nothing to do with oratory. This remains true, as a rule, of his longer poems. Those who say that Browning has no plan, are people whom I suspect of deriving their notions of a plan from some treatise on rhetoric. Browning has a plan, but he carefully hides it, and this plan is not a logical development, but rather a musical design.

I compared his language to that of a painter; but his composition is that of a musician. Will you please recall the prologue of *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*? Miss Thackeray had called Normandy "White Cotton Night-Cap Country" because she found such a sleepy air about it. Browning replies: I should rather say Red Cotton, hinting, we suppose, that there had been some drama, some effusion of blood in the peaceful village. Then page after page, hiding his plan, keeping up your interest by continually withdrawing its object, tossing, as it were, a red cherry against your lips, he plays on that idea of red by a series of images and curious devices which I can only compare to musical arabesques or caprices.

One of the best instances of Browning's artistic fancy and musical mode of composition is that most delightful and

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profound of his long poems, *Fifine at the Fair*. I regret that I cannot agree with Professor Phelps who considers *Fifine* "a sad and dreary all but impenetrable wilderness of verse", and still less with Mrs. Orr, who speaks of the "perplexing cynicism" of the poem. *Fifine* is a rhapsody of thoughts on love and art represented by images which are treated like musical motives. The first of these motives is that of the mountebanks, with the red streamer floating on their booth "frantic to be free", a symbol of the sentimental Bohemianism of Don Juan, who himself represents the artist in his quest of beauty. This motive of the mountebanks recurs several times in the poem almost in the same terms as in the beginning.

O trip and skip, Elvire! Link arm in arm with me! ⁴⁰
Like husband and like wife, together let us see
The tumbling-troop arrayed, the strollers on their stage,
Drawn up and under arms, and ready to engage.

But it is chiefly at the end of the poem, after the subtle discussions on Platonism, that we get an interesting procession of images and visions each growing out of the other in the most unlogical way, much like musical themes. Night has fallen, drowning the day landscape on this small coast of Brittany, suggesting that everything is but appearance, except the feeling we have that we exist,

that ourselves are true! ⁴¹

Here Don Juan remarks that the only sincere people are mountebanks, actors and balladines, since they, at least, confess that they are playing a part. He now proceeds to tell a dream he had after playing himself to sleep with Schumann's Carnival. Why Schumann's Carnival? by a natural association with the idea of the masquerade of the actors and balladines; it is an instance of his way of taking leave of one theme in order to pass on to another.

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Presently we get a vision of the Carnival in Venice where men and women all wear the semblance of some animal type, embodying some human feeling or passion, and it appears that what seemed the Carnival of Venice is in reality the masquerade of life. Browning tells his dream with the minuteness and psychological accurateness to which Marcel Proust has since accustomed us in France.

Now a change occurs in his vision. Venice dissolves, temples, halls and palaces are transformed and collapse, suggesting that the religion, arts and sciences lodged in these buildings are in a state of constant evolution, that nothing lasts, that change is the law of life.

But now there happens a further change. Just as Don Juan had seen the fantastic architectures of clouds at sunset dwindle into one continuous bar, the architectures of his dream dwindle into one massive structure, the huge stone, the Druid Monument of Pernic. Nothing could be more effective, more artistic, than this way of planting in our minds, as it were, along with the visual image of the Druid monument, the idea of immutability, of that which does not change. This mammoth-stone, as the author says, is like the keynote, the tried base, under the changing notes. By it we are soothed and quieted, and repose at the end of the symphony in the thought that

*All's change, but permanence as well.*⁴⁹

I have no time to speak of another formal element which is rhythm. On this subject, again, there have been great misunderstandings. Browning has been represented in contrast with Tennyson as a rugged and incorrect versifier. Professor Saintsbury has shown that as a matter of fact Browning, though an audacious, is almost invariably a correct prosodist. We must not judge him by certain eccentricities, which are intentional and a form of his love of the

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grotesque. Browning can be as smooth as Tennyson when he chooses, for instance, in the line:

O lyric Love, half angel and half bird.⁴⁸

It would be easy to show in his rhythms the wonderful variety which is the seal and sign of his art. This is a somewhat special study and would take us too far. Suffice it to quote almost at random the short line of *Pisgah Sights* and the long fifteen-syllable line of *La Saisiaz*, the eight-line stanza on two rhymes of *Childe Roland*, the curious experiment of *Through the Metidja*, where a single rhyme is carried through forty lines; the interior rhyme of *Dis aliter visum*, the *extravaganza in staccato* of the comic poem *Pacchiarotto*, which Professor Lounsbury, I believe, calls "dreadful doggerel", but Arthur Symons "an incomparable effort in double and triple rhymes".

Another element of Browning's art is the image. Rich as is his vocabulary, he supplements it by images. They really play the part of synonyms. They occur to him at any moment from all the corners of his memory. They may seem far fetched to you, but they are to him irrepresible, and as soon as you get accustomed, you will find them as natural as they are unexpected. They are borrowed from quarters little frequented by poets, for instance, from geology and mineralogy. A single gesture, says Browning, reveals a soul as surely "as a handful of sand will reveal what salts and silts may constitute the earth". He will borrow from zoölogy, as in the pictures of that eaves-dropper who catches secrets, like the ant-eater who, "open-mouthed and lazily alive", puts out his tongue till the flies stick to it.

His images are always picturesque, often familiar and humorous. A man discovers a document, but does not

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know what to make of it, or whether it is forged or not. Browning compares him to a bear that finds a scented glove:

That puzzles him,—a hand and yet no hand,⁴⁴
Of other perfume than his own foul paw!

In their appropriateness, familiarity, and unexpectedness, to which the reader soon gets reconciled, Browning's images resemble those of Dante even more than those of Shakespeare. Think, in the *Inferno*, of the man who looks intently at you, like the tailor threading his needle, or of the cripples and beggars sitting in a row, leaning against each other like kettles on the fire.

What Browning lacks is the plastic beauty and grandeur of Dante. But sometimes he has it as in the magnificent comparison of Saul with a serpent:

He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs⁴⁵
And waiting his change, the king-serpent all heavily hangs,
Far away from his kind in the pine, till deliverance come
With the spring-time,—so agonized Saul, drear and stark, blind and dumb.

Everything is grand here, including the image of the cross adumbrated in the attitude of Saul, and symbolizing to me all the sufferings of humanity.

From this inexhaustible subject of the image we may pass to the range of subjects in Browning's art, and we shall find in his subjects and poetical moods as much variety as in the other aspects of his work. As to subjects, it has been said that he is preëminently a poet of man and of the towns. It is true that we can never forget his pictures of cities, especially of Italian cities, of Venice in *Sordello*, of Florence and the market place where he found the yellow book of the *Ring and the Book*, and of the narrow terrace where, pacing lozenge brickwork, he conceived his great poem, in the warm night of June, while

The townsmen walked by twos and threes, and talked,⁴⁶
Drinking the blackness in default of air——
A busy human sense beneath my feet.

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But he is also the poet of nature, of "The good gigantic smile of the brown old earth", and quite especially of the mountains. Hence the comparison by which he shows us Saul shaking the torpor from himself:

Have ye seen when Spring's arrowy summons goes right to the aim,⁴⁷
And some mountain, the last to withstand her, that held (he alone,
While the vale laughed in freedom and flowers) on a broad bust of stone
A year's snow bound about for a breast-plate,—leaves grasp of the sheet?
Fold on fold all at once it crowds thunderously down to his feet.

The appeal of the mountain was a constant one with him, and it is interesting to compare his lines on the noble pleasure of climbing in *The Englishman in Italy*, written before 1845, with those of a much later passage. Here is the first:

Oh, those mountains, their infinite movement! ⁴⁸
Still moving with you;
For, ever some new head and breast of them
Thrusts into view
To observe the intruder; you see it
If quickly you turn
And, before they escape you surprise them.

Finally he reaches the top:

And God's own profound ⁴⁹
Was above me, and round me the mountains,
And under, the sea,
And within me my heart to bear witness
What was and shall be.

We find a late echo of this, in a different style, in the beginning of *La Saisiaz*:

Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and now immense: ⁵⁰
Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in evidence!
And no berry in its hiding, no blue space in its outspread,
Pleaded to escape my footstep, challenged my emerging head,
(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched by shrub and
tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn set free,
Stationed face to face with—Nature? rather with Infinitude).

The same variety as in the general subjects will be found in the moods expressed by the poet. He is of course a

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master of the grotesque, by which I mean transfiguring by imagination what is considered ugly—the chief form of Browning's humor. I found some useful remarks on that subject by L. B. Campbell in the *Bulletin of the University of Texas*. There is the playful, fanciful grotesque of the *Pied Piper of Hamelin*, of *Nationality in Drinks*; the powerful grotesque of *Mr. Sludge*, of *Caliban*; the terrible grotesque of *Holy-Cross Day*, of *The Heretic's Tragedy*, according to Arthur Symons "the finest example perhaps in English of the pure grotesque"; the boisterous extravaganza of *Pacchiarotto* and much of *Aristophanes' Apology*.

There is in fact a little too much of this element in Browning's work, but he can also be exquisitely graceful. Think of the love-duet, *In a Gondola*, which has the soul of song in it, with its lyrical outbursts hushed by sudden interruptions, as in some of Beethoven's symphonies:

Say after me, and try to say ⁶¹
My very words, as if each word
Came from you of your own accord,
In your own voice, in your own way:
"This woman's heart and soul and brain
"Are mine as much as this gold chain
"She bids me wear; which" (say again)
"I choose to make by cherishing
"A precious thing, or choose to fling
"Over the boat-side, ring by ring."
And yet once more say . . . no word more
Since words are only words. Give o'er!

Think of the tenderness in the picture of Pippa, of the dreamlike fancy of *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, to which the rhythm contributes so much, for these trochaic lines with triple end-rhymes and strong pauses actually show the movement, the leaning on the clavichord of the player's elbows as he searches the meaning of the forgotten master he is interpreting.

Oh Galuppi, Baldassarò, this is very sad to find! ⁶²
I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!

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There is both force and charm here! And think again of *Fifine* with the delicate lines describing the sad beauty of Elvire, the deserted wife of Don Juan and the playful lines describing the mountebank girls in disguise.

Ere, shedding petticoat, modesty, and such toys,⁶³
They bounce forth, squalid girls transformed to gamesome boys.

It might be objected that my instances are rather descriptive. For sheer grace of feeling, I refer to a number of short lyrics as concise and pregnant as the best short lyrics of Goethe. So are the *Pisgah Sights*, or one of the shortest of all, written in 1878, which I quote for its shortness.

Such a starved bank of moss⁶⁴
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud
Splendid, a star!

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

And there is also sublimity in Browning. You will find it in *Saul*, you will find it, enhanced by contrast of familiar images in *A Grammarian's Funeral* where again the rhythm plays an important part, for the verse itself with its jolting measure, its difficult crossed rhymes, its iambs mixed with dactyls, its long line followed by a short one, is the best picture of the students who carry on their shoulders, up the mountain, with loving effort, their deceased master:

Step to a tune, square chests erect each head,⁶⁵
'Ware the beholders!
This is our master, famous, calm and dead,
Borne on our shoulders.

The best instance of the sublime in Browning is, perhaps, the poem *Abt Vogler* and especially those two lines,

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among the grandest the poet ever wrote, about the revealing power of music:

And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,⁶⁶
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.

An admirer of Browning, the Rev. W. Robertson, quotes among the poet's deficiencies a lack of pathos, and finds a characteristic instance of it in the poem, *La Saisiaz*, on the sudden death of his friend, Miss Egerton-Smith, with whom he had hired a villa near Mont Salève, in Savoy. "The unfulfilled life, the appalling sudden death, the piteous work of interment, the lonely grave among the mountains in the land of strangers would have been," continues our critic, "we may be sure, in the hands of some other poets, more fully described and more pathetically treated." I am afraid that what the critic misses here is an oratorical display of feeling on rather conventional lines. And it is true that Browning is very modern, very anti-romantic in his dislike of sentimentalism, by which I mean display of feelings. He does not wear his heart on his sleeve, but to me his pathos is the more touching as it is more reticent. I call it an exquisite tribute to the memory of his friend that he offers to her, instead of vain lamentations, a chain of reasoning on life and death made during a walk which he was to have made with her three days before, so that the image of the lady friend, whom he calls the "Dear and True", is everywhere latent among the wild flowers and shrubs and winding paths of the mountains. You feel the image to be latent and that is enough. The judgment as to a want of pathos seems to me superficial. What we have here is rather refinement and taste in matters of deep feeling.

Nobody can forget the simple pathos on the part of Mildred in *A Blot in the 'Scutcheon*, who dies saying

I was so young—⁶⁷
I had no mother and I loved him so!

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Still less, the infinite pity and tenderness of the poet of Pompilia, the heroine and victim of *The Ring and the Book*.

I hope I have made my meaning clear, but I must revert to the negative part of my criticism. I said that Browning's individualism, which engenders so many original forms, has also bad sides. It produces an excessive complacency in his idiosyncrasies, in his own defects. For instance, he overdoes his trick of conciseness, his synthetic faculty. He writes in puzzles in a sort of ciphered language of which he alone has the key. These defects are carried to the height of caricature in the well known puzzle called *Popularity*:

Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats: ⁶⁸
Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup:
Nokes outdares Stokes in azure feats,—
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?
What porridge had John Keats?

which we may paraphrase in prose: "The murex contains a dye of miraculous beauty; and this once extracted and bottled, Hobbs, Nobbs and Co. may trade in it and feast; but the poet who, figuratively, brought the murex to land and created its value may, as Keats probably did, eat porridge all his life". This is an instance of excessive concision.

But Browning's analytic faculty is equally carried to excess. He will take a fact or an idea, divide and subdivide it, look at it from all sides, illustrate it by ever new and crowded images, many of them superfluous, many of them merely parasitic, for instead of simply making an idea clearer, they develop for their own sake and in their turn require an explanation, since each of them is expressed synthetically. In short, Browning so enjoys both his synthetic and analytic power, as well as his abundance of words, images, syntactical turns, that he is never tired of exerting them. Jowett found his thought and feeling out of all proportion to his powers of expression. But it is

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more true to say that he was the victim of that amazing facility of expression which he respected as something sacred, as a sort of sign of his individuality.

And this explains that curious problem: how the most concise of English poets can also be the most voluminous. For he has written more lines than any other, Shakespeare included, and told the same story twelve times over in a poem of over twenty-one thousand lines, *The Ring and the Book*. Nothing is too long, if you like, but there is too much. The same thing is put in twenty concise ways. There is in Browning, I admit, a shocking want of those qualities of choice, taste, purity, and restraint, which you find in his rival and contemporary, Tennyson.

To conclude this somewhat tedious and theoretical survey, I shall say that if some friends of Browning hold with me that he was primarily an artist, or at least an artist as much as a moralist, it may be gratifying to them that somebody belonging to a form of intellectual culture always inclined to judge a poet from the point of view of art rather than of morals, thought Browning an interesting topic. This foreign testimonial may give them an additional sense of being right, and it is the excuse for these lectures.