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An Examination of The Conclusions to Browning's Dramatic Monologues

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Charlotte Hudgens Beck entitled "An Examination of The Conclusions to Browning's Dramatic Monologues." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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F. DeWolfe Miller, Norman Sanders

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March 1, 1966

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Charlotte Hudgens Beck entitled "An Examination of the Conclusions to Browning's Dramatic Monologues." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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AN EXAMINATION OF THE CONCLUSIONS TO
BROWNING'S DRAMATIC MONOLOGUES

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate Council of
The University of Tennessee

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Charlotte Hudgens Beck

March 1966

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND REVIEW OF RELATED CRITICISM

Students of the poetry of Robert Browning are virtually in accord about the importance of his dramatic monologues. In his foreword to Smalley's, Browning's Essay on Chatterton, William Clyde DeVane calls Browning's monologues "his chief contribution to English poetry."¹ Although Browning was not the originator of this poetic form, the majority of Browning scholars would concur with S. S. Curry, author of the only complete book devoted to the dramatic monologue as an art form, when he remarks, "As Shakespeare reigns the supreme master of the play, so Browning has no peer in the monologue."²

Considering the importance of the poet's contribution to literature in the virtual perfection of this poetic genre, it is surprising that so little critical attention has been accorded such structural details as the conclusions. Many excellent articles have explicated individual poems, and some of these will be mentioned in Chapters II and III of this paper. A book, a doctoral dissertation, and a number

¹William C. DeVane, Foreword to Browning's Essay on Chatterton by Donald Smalley (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), p. vii.

²S. S. Curry, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue (Boston, 1908), p. 10.

of articles have dealt with the dramatic monologue as a poetic form; yet, they have not attempted to demonstrate the effectiveness of the poet's technique of concluding the poems. Browning apparently planned his endings carefully, for they are vital in determining the ultimate effect left by the monologue. The portion of the monologue which I will term the conclusion will not, of course, be of identical length in each poem studied. It may vary in length from the one-half line ending "A Toccata of Galuppi's," to the long stanza or section conclusion, such as the poet's postscript to Bishop Blougram's Apology.

The concluding section of each monologue is obvious. Indeed, the shift in mood and subject are so remarkable as to have prompted this study. The endings of twenty-three of Browning's dramatic monologues characteristic of his technique will be examined (chosen from The Selected Poetry of Robert Browning)³ and placed in one of the following classes: (1) those poems which conclude with a departure from the speaker's central topic and a return to a sort of equilibrium, a normal state of affairs for the speaker, with a suggestion of continuity into the future; or (2) those poems which end with an unexpected twist which throws a light, as it were, back upon the foregoing lines of the poem. This second sort of ending may illuminate the hitherto ambiguous meaning of the monologue, perhaps altering the reader's previous interpretation of the facts of the poem. While the monologues

³The Selected Poetry of Robert Browning, ed., Kenneth L. Knickerbocker (New York, 1951).

which fall into the first group are consistent with the poet's interpretation of life as a steady emotional plane, relieved from time to time by pinnacles of experience, the second group represents more truly the conscious artist at work in the genre; for Browning believed that the ending should be the clincher, the final revelation of the poem, giving the ultimate insight into the speaker's motives and emotions.

Up to now, critical analysis of the dramatic monologue has been concerned chiefly with defining the genre and prescribing the ingredients which are vital to its success. Percy S. Grant's article, "Browning's Art in Monologue," is admittedly not a study of "his art in the details of technique."⁴ Grant, therefore, does not study the conclusions of the dramatic monologue but is chiefly interested in exploring the dramatic and autobiographical elements of Browning's works in this form.

In 1908, Curry made his invaluable contribution to the understanding of this genre in his book, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue. Part I is devoted to the analysis of the monologue as a literary form and constitutes the most valuable part of the book. Part II presents an interesting discussion of the now infrequently exhibited art of the dramatic rendering of the monologue.

⁴Percy S. Grant, "Browning's Art in Monologue," Boston Browning Society Papers (New York, 1900), p. 65.

Curry does not devote any attention to the endings of the monologues as an element of literary technique. He does, however, stress the dramatic nature of these poems, presenting as they do a significant moment in the life of a speaker through that speaker's words, just as the dramatic play represents dramatic action in which characters move and speak. Upon the type of activity intrinsic to a dramatic monologue, Curry remarks,

There is a kind of dramatic art which we may term static and another kind which we may term dynamic. The former deals especially with characters in position, the latter with characters in movement.⁵

To Curry, the acted drama is dynamic, while the dramatic monologue is static. An examination of the monologues in my first group will, however, reveal that Browning often meant to imply dynamic action within the essentially static monologue, and that he employed the ending for this purpose. Those conclusions which present a transition from the speaker's principal concern, often a subject which is filled with passion, to a state of more normal emotion which points the way to the speaker's course of action in the future, imply a dynamic progress from present to future. The monologue, therefore, is not merely the voicing of an idea, introduced and concluded like a schoolboy's oration. It represents a moment in the character's existence. It is presented, as Curry later states, "in a dramatic sequence of natural thinking. It is not a logical or systematic arrangement of points, but the association

⁵Curry, p. 136.

of ideas as they spring up in the mind."⁶ It follows, then, that the character presented in the monologue would cease to philosophize upon music, as do Master Hugues and Abt Vogler, or to tell stories of past experiences, as do the lady in "Count Gismond" and the servant in "The Flight of the Duchess," and return to their normal activities. It is one of Browning's significant contributions to the dramatic monologue that he suggests this resumption of normal life in the conclusions to the poems.

To those endings which have been classified in Group I, those with the flash-back ending, Curry indirectly alludes as he states:

The real truth of the monologue comes only after comprehension of the whole. It reserves its truth until the thought has slowly grown in the mind of the hearer.⁷

Indeed, Browning has often reserved the complete exposure of his characters' motives for the endings of the monologues, as will be shown in Chapter III of this study.

Although Curry has not explored the conclusions to Browning's dramatic monologues as a technique, he, like other critics, has commented upon endings of individual poems as he explicates them. Curry's and other critics' comments upon individual conclusions will be reserved for the later chapters of this paper.

⁶Curry, p. 89.

⁷Ibid., p. 15.

In the year following Curry's book, a significant article dealing with this poetic form appeared, written by Robert H. Fletcher.⁸ He begins by remarking that no thorough study has been made of Browning's use of the genre, although he was the first to bring the dramatic monologue into "distinct prominence" and achieved thereby his "most conspicuous successes."⁹ He goes on to define the dramatic monologue as "a literal transcript of words spoken, written, or thought at some definite time by some person who may be historical or imaginary." Fletcher then makes his one comment upon Browning's technique of conclusion, remarking that the poet sometimes ends the poem with a descriptive or narrative paragraph supplied by him as narrator or by some other additional person.¹⁰ (Mr. Fletcher was concerned here with the ending of "Bishop Blougram's Apology.") The rest of this article provides a useful grouping of the monologues according to topic and situation.¹¹ No further attention is given, in this article, to the

⁸Robert H. Fletcher, "Browning's Dramatic Monologues," Modern Language Notes, XXIII, IV (1908), 108-111.

⁹Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Fletcher's classifications and examples of each are:
 I. An action scene or significant conversation ("My Last Duchess").
 II. Expressions of love to the loved one (lyrical, second person less vivid) ("Any Wife to Any Husband").
 III. Narration by the speaker of a "stirring or terrible action" ("Count Gismond").
 IV. A letter or written record ("Cleon").
 V. Speaker's statement of a problem or his analysis of a situation, character, or discourse ("Time's Revenges").
 VI. Patriotic or partisan lyric ("Boot and Saddle").
 VII. Soliloquy (A) of love ("The Last Ride"); (B) not of love

techniques, including that of conclusion, employed in Browning's monologues.

In his witty and enlightening, if less than scholarly book, Robert Browning and How to Know Him, William Lyon Phelps has devoted a chapter to the dramatic monologue. Here he gives a conventional definition of the form, calling it a critical moment described by the principal character in which he reveals much about "his character, the whole course of his existence, and sometimes the spirit of an entire period in the world's history."¹² After some comments upon the importance of the listener to the dramatic import of the monologue, Phelps proceeds to analyze nine of Browning's most popular poems in this genre. His comments about the conclusions of these poems will be mentioned later.

His chapter entitled "Browning's Theory of Poetry," however, touches upon the philosophy behind Browning's use of the "return to Normal" ending. Phelps calls attention to a statement, in Pauline of Browning's theory of poetry:

And then thou said'st a perfect bard was one
Who chronicled the stages of life.

Phelps uses this passage to explain, in part, the poet's use of the naturalistic roughness in meter, language, and abrupt transitions.¹³

("Johannes Agricola").

VIII. Browning's discussion of a problem or remarks to some person not of his friends (The Parleyings).

¹²William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning and How to Know Him (New York, 1915), p. 169.

¹³Ibid., p. 43.

Browning wished to present an accurate picture of a moment, not a smoothly musical poem in the style of Pope. An individual will experience intensely passionate moments followed by a cooling of the blood, after which he picks up the thread of his existence and moves on. Browning often saw fit, in his dramatic monologues, to provide not only the high moment, the conventional province of poetry, but some suggestion, provided by the conclusion, of what was to come next. The monologue comes alive because the person in question reacts in a life-like way.

In 1915, Claud Howard wrote an informative article, "The Dramatic Monologue: Its Origin and Development," in which this poetic genre is explored from the technical standpoint. Howard compares the staged drama with the dramatic monologue as to structure and effect. In the drama, says Howard, the rising action proceeds through stages to a climax. "Toward this, all preceding actions tend, and from it all subsequent actions flow, passing again into equilibrium." He then states that in the highest form of the dramatic monologue, "all action leading up to the climax and all falling action are dispensed with."¹⁴ This statement denies the importance of the crucial final lines and stanzas, which, for Browning, often constituted his version of dramatic falling action, as will be shown in Chapter II.

Elsewhere in the article, Howard almost contradicts himself. In a section devoted to structural principles, he observes that the

¹⁴Claude Howard, "The Dramatic Monologue: Its Origin and Development," Studies in Philology, IV (1910), 39.

period of conscious art in the development of a literary genre is marked by attempts to discover underlying principles of construction. He calls attention to such a statement from Browning, in his "Advertisement" to Paracelsus (1835) in which the poet said, "I have ventured to display somewhat minutely the mood itself, in its rise and progress. . . ."¹⁵ In the word "progress" is revealed the poet's intention of displaying the complete experience, not just its climactic high point. This high point may be in the midst of the monologue; therefore, some suggestion of falling action is often contained in the ending. Howard later states that Browning's method was that of the flashlight, in contrast to the slow, inductive method of the drama.¹⁶ The question asked, and, hopefully answered here is, "Where, exactly, does the flashlight's beam come to rest within the poem?" It may fall at the end, from whence it is refracted back upon the entire poem; or it may fall in the midst of the monologue, shading off toward the ending.

George H. Palmer's essay on Browning's monologues does not mention the technique of the conclusion directly, but some remarks shed light upon the subject. Suggestive of the conditions present in my first group of endings, Palmer states what he calls "Browning's poetic creed":

There is an immortality of activity open to us, whether in ever fresh existence or in a single, continuous existence.¹⁷

¹⁵Ibid., p. 68.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁷George H. Palmer, Formative Types in English Literature (Boston, 1918), p. 298.

A study of the endings in this group will reveal that Browning used his conclusions to represent this belief in life's single, continuous creation. The return to an equilibrium after a significant experience, accomplished by the wording of the conclusion, allows the poem to stand as an assertion of the poet's basic philosophy concerning the nature of existence.

Another of Palmer's statements draws attention to my second group of endings, as he refers to the entire monologue as a "flash-light" which "illuminates not a single mood but a total complex individual."¹⁸ Whereas the monologue itself casts a flood of light upon the speaker, the conclusion similarly illuminates the events described in the poem by revealing a hitherto obscure or unexpressed meaning in the words of the speaker.

E. C. Knowlton's comparison of Browning's monologues with Southey's monodramas yields the astute observation that Browning's characters revealed their nature and personality not under great pressure but in casual or chance moments. This observation counteracts the inaccurate impression, promulgated by some critics, that the dramatic monologue always represents a tremendously critical moment in the speaker's life.¹⁹ Browning did not always find it to his purpose to seize upon the highest moments of the character's life to

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹E. C. Knowlton, "Southey's Monodramas," Philological Quarterly, VIII (October, 1929), 410.

reveal that character's personality. Browning not only chooses, in many instances, a casual moment as in "Count Gismond" or "The Italian in England" to lend the realistic effect, but he also uses the ending to enforce it, by returning the speaker to a state of normal equilibrium.

John Macy discusses Browning's conclusions indirectly, in "Robert Browning, Monologist," as he complains that the poet "often packs a story into a few lines and leaves it only half told, somewhat finely and subtly suggested, somewhat vexingly undeveloped, unrealized."²⁰ Macy interjects the same sentiment when discussing the ending of "Popularity," saying "The dye flows beautifully into the crinkled distortion of the last stanza."²¹ Macy seems to have recognized the originality of the endings, although his opinion as to their effectiveness is adverse. In presenting his character in so life-like a manner, Browning could only leave him with a "subtly suggested" but "unrealized" future. Of the poems having final stanzas which seem to Mr. Macy "distorted," it may be that the ending simply serves to relieve a distorted image which we form of the rest of the poem, by providing a revealing comment on the monologue as a whole.

C. N. Wenger's study, "The Masquerade in Browning's Dramatic Monologue," attempts to probe into the psychological implications of

²⁰John Macy, "Robert Browning--Monologist," Bookman, LXXIII (March, 1931), 40.

²¹Ibid., 45.

the poet's utilization of this genre. Wenger generalizes that the "personages lack integration with their environment and within themselves."²² It is further suggested in this article that Browning's dramatic personae were masques (hence the title) behind which he hid his own personality problems. The validity of this assertion is outside the scope of this study; we can only rejoice in the poet's maladjustment, if the result of it was the dramatic monologues.

Wenger divides the monologues into three categories: (1) "expressive," if the poem is an expression of "exuberant and undivided beings" like Abt Vogler; (2) "regulative," if the speaker regulates the action, as in "The Laboratory"; or (3) "meditative," if the speaker focuses on an inner conflict, as in "Johannes Agricola."²³ The conclusions are not mentioned as having been a factor in arriving at these classifications.

Richard R. Wherry has compared Browning's dramatic monologues to certain poems of Samuel Rogers. He comments that Rogers's conclusions, which remind the reader "of the listener's presence, neatly frame the monologue."²⁴ It may certainly be said of Browning's endings that they frame the monologue. A common characteristic of the Browning ending is

²²C. N. Wenger, "The Masquerade in Browning's Dramatic Monologues," College English, III (1941), 255.

²³Ibid., 227.

²⁴Richard R. Wherry, "Samuel Rogers's Approach to the Blank Verse Dramatic Monologue," Modern Language Notes, LXII (1947), 129.

a change of mood. In some cases the change is to a calmer, often a more resigned mood; in others it is to a mood of greater excitement. The poet recognized the necessity of effectively putting an end to the words of the speaker; therefore, the conclusion was approached as an important structural detail. When the listener is as clearly defined as in *Gigadibs* or the chemist of "The Laboratory," Mr. Wherry's second assertion, that the endings remind us of the listener, is clearly valid.

Ina Beth Sessions, in her 1947 article on the dramatic monologue, continued the work of classification. Her four sub-classes: "perfect," "imperfect," "formal," and "approximate," are based upon the situation treated in the monologue and upon the presence and arrangement of the necessary components--the speaker, the listener, and the occasion. According to Miss Sessions, the "perfect" dramatic monologue has a speaker, an audience, interplay of speaker and audience, revelation of character, and dramatic action. The other classifications are modifications of this perfect class, which Miss Sessions feels are less effective.²⁵ Her example of the ideal dramatic monologue is "My Last Duchess," while "Count Gismond," in which attention shifts from the listener to a third party, the husband, is termed less effective--an "imperfect" monologue.

²⁵Ina Beth Sessions, "The Dramatic Monologue," PMLA, LXII (1947), 503-576.

Miss Sessions does not specifically mention the conclusions of the monologues in the technical sense. She does, however, emphasize the immediacy which is so important to the dramatic effect, stating that the dramatic action is most effective when it takes place in the present, giving "the impression that this is an "original occasion."²⁶ The handling of the conclusion would seem to be vital to this immediate effect, since it is here that the poet must suggest what is to "follow" the action of the monologue. In connection with "My Last Duchess," she states that the poem leaves the reader with "the feeling that poem is to have a sequel or two."²⁷ This feeling of immediacy coupled with a sense of continuity into the future is compatible with the criteria governing the selection of the poems in Group I, those with the calm, "back-to-normal" endings. The impression that these are events in the life of an actual person, events which are taking place now, and events which blend into an unbounded future could certainly be produced in a poem, the conclusion of which is a departure from the abnormal excitement or from the philosophical meditation of the speaker found in the body of the monologue. Without this internal interest, the poem would lack focus and motivation; without the return to a state of equilibrium, it would lose that sense of reality which separates the dramatic monologue from the purely narrative or philosophical poem.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

Those poems whose endings produce the unusual flashback effect also may be said to suggest, as Miss Sessions puts it, "a sequel or two." Here the reader may, because of the surprising nature of the ending, be forced to revise his conjectures about the nature of the sequel. Miss Sessions's essay, therefore, calls attention to an important effect of the dramatic monologue, its sense of immediacy and continuity, without commenting upon one element which is instrumental in the creation of this effect--the conclusion.

Browning and His English Predecessors in the Dramatic Monologue, a doctoral dissertation by Benjamin W. Fuson, is essentially a historical study. As the title suggests, Mr. Fuson maintains that Browning was far from the originator of the dramatic monologue.²⁸ Indeed, says Fuson, Browning contributed virtually no new technique to the monologue. However, the poet's exploitation of the melodramatic potentialities--his use of complex and brilliant psychology make his poems appear unique.²⁹ To prove his thesis, that Browning was not the first, although he must be called the most brilliant, user of this poetic genre, Fuson cites eight hundred poems by two hundred poets before Browning.³⁰

Fuson contributes to the backlog of definitions of the dramatic monologue this broad, and rather wordy one:

²⁸Benjamin Willis Fuson, Browning and His Predecessors in the Dramatic Monologue (Iowa City, Iowa, 1948), p. 7.

²⁹Ibid., p. 9.

³⁰Ibid.

An objective monologue is an isolated poem intended to simulate the utterance not of the poet but of another individual speaker whose words reveal his involvement in a localized dramatic situation.³¹

To summarize, Mr. Fuson names as the essential ingredients which justify the consideration of this form as a literary genre: objectivity, the use of the complete, localized situation, and the presence of intrinsic dynamic action. The idea of dynamic action contained in a completely self-contained situation is suggestive of the type of poem in which the ending is a return to normal. If the action is dynamic, the mood is subject to change. If the monologue is to stand as a complete dramatic form, the ending must serve as the dénouement and exit scene, presenting some sort of resolution of the problems presented in the dramatic situation which precedes it. Browning often conceived of his ending as a leveling off from the peak of the crisis to the plane of normal existence.

Fuson has also alluded to those conclusions which feature the revealing flashback technique. He observes that "the context of a dramatic monologue may be as violent and suspenseful as an O. Henry short story with its trick ending."³² He mentions, in this connection, the "stark murder" committed in the closing lines of "A Forgiveness" and of "Cristina and Monaldeschi." This type of conclusion may indeed be compared with the unexpected twist of the typical O. Henry story. Both are effective because they are conceived deliberately to surprise the reader and cause him to reevaluate what he has just read.

³¹Ibid., p. 10.

³²Ibid., p. 18.

After several chapters devoted to tracing the dramatic monologue from its beginnings until its perfection in the monologues of Robert Browning, Fuson closes his treatise by calling Browning not a "pioneer" but a "past master" in his use of the genre. He goes on to refute those critics who have represented Browning as presenting in his monologues the individual at the precise moment of a major crisis. The adjective, says Fuson, should be "minor," not "major."³³ In relation to this study, it must be remembered that the degree of importance of the event described in the monologue may vary, and that the degree of intensity in the crisis affects the transition from the main topic of the poem to its ending. The poem may hardly have what may be called a crisis; this is especially true when the speaker is narrating a past event or merely philosophizing. The ending then would be almost a continuation of the calm mood of the poem, while in the more violently active poems, the change of mood would usually be more abrupt. The calm ending of "Ivan Ivanovitch" would be a case in point. Fuson's insistence on the relative unimportance of the situation presented in the monologue may be a reflection of his unconscious recognition of the return-to-normal conclusion, which leaves the impression of a realistic situation, not an overblown catastrophe.

Finally, in 1949, an article dealing specifically with Browning's conclusions was written by Hoxie N. Fairchild. In "Browning, the Simple-Hearted Casuist," this critic describes a type of ending to

³³Ibid., p. 90.

Browning's dramatic monologues which he calls "the give-away."³⁴ Described as the poet's way of reconciling "the complex brain and simple heart," this type of ending is designed to make the speaker voice the truth underlying his sophisticated front. Browning, to clear up any moral ambiguities, sometimes created such endings to inform the reader as to whether the speaker is to be considered as a bad or a good character. This article will be mentioned in Chapter III in connection with the "flashback" ending category which best fits the monologue endings discussed by Fairchild.

This brief survey of those books and articles which have previously examined Browning's dramatic monologues as a literary genre show that this poetic form has been defined and classified but not explored carefully as to all of its structural elements. This study is aimed at classifying and explaining the effectiveness of one of these elements, the conclusions. The startling cleverness and originality of these conclusions, to which little attention has been paid, seems sufficient reason for their close examination.

³⁴University of Toronto Quarterly, XVIII (1949), 234-240.

CHAPTER II

THE RETURN-TO-NORMAL ENDING ✓

This chapter will examine those monologues whose endings, as previously stated, represent a return to a type of normal activity or to something approaching emotional equilibrium for the speaker. Browning's use of such endings seems to reflect his basic philosophy about the progress of man's earthly existence. B. F. Westcott's Browning Society paper, "Some Points in Browning's View of Life," contains an analysis of those philosophical elements in the poet's life creed which clearly suggest why he developed this type of ending for many of his dramatic monologues. Westcott proposes to bring together Browning's "most characteristic teaching on some of the widest problems of life."¹ In presenting "the great drama of the soul," says Westcott, "several truths seem to me to come into prominence." These truths concern the unity of life, its discipline through hardships, its continuity, and, finally, the assurance of the ultimate perfection of the soul in an after-life.²

Browning's belief concerning the unity of life, Westcott later ✓ states, is that human life will present a just balance of powers in the course of its varied progress.³ In the poems which end in a state

¹Browning Studies, ed., Edward Berdoo (New York, 1895), p. 92.

²Ibid., p. 94.

³Ibid., p. 96.

of calm, as contrasted with the strong emotion present in the body of the monologue, the poet has demonstrated man's inevitable return to a balanced state, which he sees as the normal nature of existence. "Rabbi Ben Ezra," of all Browning's poems, is most impressive of the poet's philosophy of life, faith in man's progress on earth and his perfection in Heaven. It may therefore be relevant to an examination of these beliefs. Feeling that life is a balanced state lying between joy and sorrow, pain and pleasure, Browning saw any unusual experience, whether good or bad, as useful in disciplining the soul, in preparation for a state of perfection in Heaven. Westcott interprets the poet's mind as adopting the view that "we must, then, . . . that we may live human lives, loyally yield ourselves to and yet master the circumstances in which we are placed."⁴ As the poet states in "Rabbi Ben Ezra":

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three-parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe!
(ll. 31-36)

After passing over the rough places in life's usually level plane, there must come to an end to a person's life. As the Rabbi describes this cessation of all activity, he figuratively describes the "return-to-normal" conclusion.

⁴Ibid., p. 97.

For note, when evening shuts,
 A certain moment cuts
 The deed off, calls the glory from the gray:
 A whisper from the west
 Shoots--"Add this to the rest,
 Take it and try its worth: here dies another day."
 (ll. 91-96)

Just as "a certain moment cuts the deed off," the conclusions in this group separate the speaker from his principal topic, and suggest a resumption of activity and continuity into the future.

Browning's dramatic monologues may be said to fall into three large groups: (1) the action monologue, which might be staged as a one-act play because of the dynamic nature of the activity implied or described by the speaker, and because of the clear delineation of other characters, the listener or listeners, in the scene; (2) the narrative monologue, in which the speaker is engaged in telling a story of past events in which he figured, to some listener, who may or may not be named; and (3) the meditative dramatic monologue, which contains the contemplative thoughts, the philosophizing of the speaker, and is spoken to no present listener. I have chosen what I consider to be clear examples of the "return-to-normal" ending in each of these three categories, in order to show the representative use made by the poet of this type of ending in many of his dramatic monologues.

As the first example of the action monologue with the Group I conclusion, I have chosen "Fra Lippo Lippi," one of Browning's best expressions of his beliefs about the true meaning and purpose of art. In the famous lines:

If you get simple beauty and naught else,
 You get about the best thing God invents
 (ll. 217-218)

the poet makes a plea of "Art for Art's sake," or, perhaps, "Art for Beauty's sake." It is a very successful action monologue. We see a worldly Florentine monk, who is supposed to be at work on a painting commissioned by none other than the rich and powerful Cosimo de Medici, but who has descended to the darkened streets in pursuit of

--three slim shapes,
 And a face that looked up . . . Zooks, sir, flesh and blood--
 That's all I'm made of.

(ll. 59-60)

Indeed, what Fra Lippo is made of is equal parts of the love of art ✓ and the lusts of the body.

The monologue proper is concerned with Lippo's attempts to explain his presence in the streets to the constable who has interrupted his secret progress back to his lodgings. Lippo attempts to explain why a monk can thus far depart from the ideals of the cloister as to consort with the ladies of the street. He tells how the twin tortures, starvation and nakedness, forced him, as a very young lad, to "quit this miserable world" in exchange for the "good bellyful, the warm serge and the rope that goes all around." It was because the church gave him a chance to express his artistic talent that he has remained in its protection and patronage. His power to transmit reality and beauty to canvas has given him a raison d'être which even those churchmen who have demanded that he paint only "the soul" cannot destroy.

This encounter of monk and constable is dramatic and dynamic from beginning to end. As Roma King puts it, "the poem is never static, but, opening with a situation which presents the conflict (the ideals of street versus those of the monastery), it moves steadily toward its dramatic resolution, the description of the 'Coronation of the Virgin;'"⁵ a painting which the artist proposes as his next work. "Fra Lippo Lippi" is essentially a defense of realistic art and the earthiness of the street against the esthetic and didactic side of both art and life.

Browning must somehow end this interview. He chooses to let the monk's defense of his actions be convincing enough for the constable to release him and give him an opportunity to make an unheralded return to the house of his patron. Therefore, the situation is resolved when at the "gray's beginning," Fra Lippo leaves the constable and returns to his normal activity. This skillful conclusion is introduced in line 336, in which the reader is reminded of the presence and function of the listener. Lippo pleads:

That is--You'll not mistake an idle word
Spoke in a huff by a poor monk, God wot . . .
(ll. 336-7)

And hearken how I plot to make amends.
I have bethought me: I shall paint a piece
. . . There's for you! Give me six months, then go, see
Something in Sant'Ambrogio's!
(ll. 343-346a)

⁵Roma A. King, The Bow and the Lyre (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1957), pp. 33, 34.

Lippo has followed up his eloquent plea with a bribe ("There's for you"), and has promised to atone for his actions by producing a magnificent work of art, depicting "God in the midst, Madonna and her Babe." We see, in the final lines of the conclusion, that the pleading for release has met with success, for Fra Lippo Lippi is allowed to go about his business unscathed:

Your hand, sir, and good-bye: no lights, no lights!
 The street's hushed, and I know my own way back,
 Don't fear me! There's the gray beginning. Zooks!
 (ll. 390-392)

The poet has constructed an ending which adds dramatic force to the situation surrounding his discussion of the philosophy of art. In this conclusion he leads the speaker away from the subject of the monologue into his normal life, while also suggesting the actions of the listener. As King suggests, we are led to consider the totality of Lippo, the man, short of being convinced by his lofty arguments, which tend to stick in our minds as rationalizations for his behavior. King observes:

His (Lippo's) final artistic comments, his last roguish remarks before disappearing into the morning light . . . bring our minds back once more to the beginning of the poem. And we know that there will be more paintings which serve as peace offerings to his order, more night escapades, and more internal struggle and intellectual searching.⁶

This conclusion allows us to see Browning's character in realistic perspective, because it shows us the person speaking in a normal way, apart from the lofty sentiments which he expresses in the monologue

⁶Ibid., p. 51.

proper. As King suggests, the ending also tells us something about the character's probable behavior in the future; in other words, there will be more such experiences because the character is little altered by his near exposure for his mischief.

Almost certainly the most popular of Browning's dramatic monologues, and among the earliest written, is "My Last Duchess." This poem epitomizes the action monologue. In no other has the poet shown so much action and emotional tension in so few lines. It has been remarked that the donné of this dramatic monologue might well have been enlarged into a novel or play of several acts, but Browning has skillfully compressed its action, loaded with dramatic innuendo, into fifty-six lines.

Without prologue, the poem begins in medias res, the scene being one in which an emissary is being shown some of the art treasures which are the pride of the Duke of Ferrara. The envoy is shown a portrait of the former Duchess, in which the Duke shows an impersonal pleasure as a beautiful work of art.

That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
Looking as if she were alive. I call
That piece a wonder, now. . . .

(ll. 1-2a)

In describing the painting, the Duke unfolds the history of his wedded life with the lady of the portrait, whose personality was characterized by a joie de vivre, and a love for all mankind which led her to honor all whom she met with a warm smile, a blush of pleasure, or a word of thanks for a simple favor. For the proud nobleman, the smiles and

blushes caused nothing but irritation, which led to hatred in the heart of the proud nobleman, whose "gift of a nine-hundred-year name" did not seem to evoke enough special gratitude and obeisance.

That the tale is told by design becomes apparent late in the poem. The first function of its conclusion, then, is to reveal the purpose of the listener's attendance upon the Duke. As he departs from his topic of conversation, the portrait of the Duchess, he addresses the emissary:

Will't please you rise? We'll meet
The company below, then. I repeat,
The Count your master's known munificence
Is ample warrant that no just pretence
Of mine for dowry will be disallowed;
Though his fair daughter's self, as I avowed
At starting, is my object.

(ll. 47-53)

In effect, the Duke has broken off his speech, which was intended to warn the envoy's master that none but a completely subservient role would fall to any future duchess. The speaker has, therefore, returned to the mundane consideration of a business deal, the concluding of a profitable marriage contract. Also shown here in the conclusion is the resumption of physical action, on the return of the Duke and his guest to the company below, ("Nay, we'll go together down, sir.") marking a shift from a rather static situation of speaker expounding to silent listener. The probable sequel to the poem, projecting it into the future, is adequately suggested. The envoy will return to his master, the father of the lady under consideration for the enviable title of Duchess of Ferrara, to convey the Duke's messages, stated and

implied, and some decision will then be made concerning the alliance.

The first two and one-half lines of this conclusion have been the topic of some critical controversy. In passing, the Duke calls attention to another item in his collection:

Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me.
(ll. 54-56)

Phelps calls this final word from the Duke "the touch to make this terrible man complete."⁷ He explains that the Duke casually calls attention to this group of statuary in order to convey a warning to the emissary in behalf of the proposed bride, in other words, "That's the way I break them in."⁸ George Monteiro agrees with this interpretation, saying that the Neptune picture is an allegorical, "final imperiture" from the proud Duke.⁹

A varying interpretation comes from Jerman's article, "Browning's Witless Duke," in which he develops the following thesis: the Duke has no hidden message for the envoy but reveals himself as a vain, not very perceptive patron of the arts." In regard to the sea-horse allusion, Jerman states his belief that the Duke is an art collector, not a moralist; he is merely pointing out an item in his collection. Jerman observes, however, that there is considerable dramatic

⁷William Lyon Phelps, Robert Browning and How to Know Him (New York, 1915), p. 174.

⁸Ibid., p. 175.

⁹George Monteiro, "Browning's My Last Duchess," Victorian Poetry, I, iii, p. 236.

irony in this comparison which the Duke did not intend.¹⁰

In reply to Jerman's article, Laurence Perrine builds a case for the Duke as "a shrewd bargainer and master diplomat." This characteristic diplomacy is exhibited (in the conclusion) by the physical act of courtesy implicit in the Duke's "Nay, we'll go together down, sir."¹¹ Perrine does not comment upon the seahorse directly, but he implies that every word spoken by the Duke has a purpose.

The best interpretation may lie somewhere between these opposite views of the Duke. While it seems probable that the Duke's exhibition of the former duchess's portrait is a deliberate attempt ✓ to convey a message to the envoy, which he is expected to interpret as a warning that a new duchess must take her role very seriously and make no mistakes like those the former one made, the passage about the statue of Neptune taming the seahorse might be considered apart from the rest of the monologue. This realistic detail, which closes the poem, is part of the "return-to-normal" conclusion, which is characterized always by an abrupt shift in focus from the central topic of the monologue. The Duke has definitely broken off his speech about the portrait with the words "Will't please you to rise?" The Duke is now the elaborately polite host, sugaring his demands for a lavish dowry with graciousness and civility to his guest. What could be more

¹⁰B. R. Jerman, "Browning's Witless Duke," PMLA, LXII (1957), 488.

¹¹Laurence Perrine, "Browning's Shrewd Duke," PMLA, LXXIV (1959), 158.

natural, as Jerman suggests, than for the Duke to call attention to another work of art in the collection?

Browning's skillful conclusion to "My Last Duchess" has shifted its focus from the primary topic, the story of the Duchess, in order to complete a dramatic impression. The elements of this ending, information about the surrounding situation, attention to and explanation of the presence of the listener, and resumption of dynamic action connect the speaker and listener with the events of past, present, and future, enhancing the impression of realism and immediacy in the monologue.

Fuson uses another action monologue, "The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church," to exemplify the ideal dramatic monologue. He feels that it contains "with greatest economy and brilliance all the elements in a pure and advanced specimen of dramatic monolog."¹² Not only does this poem have, says Fuson, the sine qua non, objectivity, but it exhibits dramatic undercurrent, and reveals a concrete dramatic episode, two other necessary aspects of the genre.¹³ He further remarks that the currently progressive nature of the contextual situation of a monologue may exist, but only rarely, in a dramatic monologue.¹⁴ The implication is that "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" has an undercurrent of drama but not a progressive series of events. Although there would be little stage movement if this monologue were

¹²Benjamin Willis Fuson, Browning and His Predecessors in the Dramatic Monologue, State University of Iowa Humanistic Studies (1948), VIII, 13.

¹³Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 18.

staged, I place it among the action monologues because the scene, with the Bishop on his death-bed surrounded by his sons, is a vivid one filled with great dramatic tension. The Bishop is pleading with his "nephews," whom he now acknowledges as his sons, to provide him with a lavish tomb in St. Praxed's Church. He wishes that this tomb be decorated with precious objects, chiefly a lump of lapis lazuli, which he has unlawfully obtained and hoarded during his days as a churchman. Most important to the old man is that his tomb be adorned in such splendor as to exceed in magnificence that of his rival in love, Fra Gandolf.

The once powerful man is weakening rapidly in mind and body, the progress of his decline being reflected in the incoherences in his speech. He asks first for the Latin of Tully to inscribe his tomb,

Choice Latin, picked phrase, Tully's every word. . . .
(1. 87)

A command which he later changes to

No Tully, said I, Ulpian at the best!
(1. 100)

The unsympathetic expressions on the sons' faces and their nods and whispers to one another, which the Bishop notices and comments upon, are important in achieving a suggestion of action in this dramatic monologue, as they contribute to the Bishop's growing agitation. His fevered mind struggles with the desire to have the lavish tomb, which requires that he reveal to the sons the location of the precious lapis lazuli. He becomes more and more convinced, as the scene progresses, that his sons intend to rob him of his treasures, "revel down his villas," and give him cheap burial, "bricked o'er with beggar's mouldy

travertine." His agitation is reflected in the interspersed comments addressed to the sons:

My sons, ye would not be my death?
(1. 36)

Ye mark me not! What do they whisper thee,
Child of my bowels, Anselm?
(11. 63-64)

Finally, as the Bishop realizes the futility of his pleas:

There, leave me, there!
For ye have stabbed me with ingratitude
To death--ye wish it--God, ye wish it!
(11. 113-115)

The passion and excitement which characterize the Bishop's agitated speech to his sons diminish in a conclusion which, if it cannot be called a return to a state of normal activity for the speaker, may be described as depicting a state of calm, the return to a sort of equilibrium. As the Bishop approaches death, his mind settles into a state of resignation, in which he can even bless the selfish sons who obviously intend to disregard his final requests.

Well go! I bless ye. Fewer tapers there,
But in a row: and, going, turn your backs
--Ay, like departing altar-ministrants,
And leave me in my church, the church for peace,
That I may watch at leisure if he leers--
Old Gandolf, at me, from his onion-stone,
As still he envied me, so fair she was!
(11. 119-125)

Truly, this conclusion shows a definite shift in mood. In his death-bed speech, the Bishop exhibits all the desperation of one fighting for his dearest wish. After desire comes despair; after despair, the calm of resignation. Indeed, in his clouded mind, the Bishop becomes

the prone effigy which will adorn his tomb. His sons become the "departing altar-ministrants" who have taken part in his burial service. Now he and Gandolf may view one another from their tombs forever, as the scene in the church becomes one of peace.

"The Grammarian's Funeral" is another example of an action monologue which concludes with the calmness which comes with death, contrasting with the vitality which characterized the life of the principal subject of the poem. The action occurs after the death of the Grammarian. Students of the scholar are carrying his body to its place of burial, a lofty mountain peak which is symbolic of the "lofty design" of his life, the tireless pursuit of knowledge. The speaker, one of the students, describes the life and career of his beloved teacher, whose strivings, while they obtained no material reward for him, have earned the eternal love and veneration of his followers. The Grammarian had little or no use for those who advised him to live "now or never" before his opportunity to enjoy life passed away. With his mind focused upon goals which transcended the barrier of death, he would reply to their entreaties:

What's time? Leave Now for dogs and apes!
Man has Forever.

(ll. 83-84)

As the poem ends, the speaker describes the natural grandeur of the spot chosen as a proper burial-place for one whose desire for knowledge knew no upper limits:

Here--here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,
 Lightnings are loosened,
 Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,
 Peace let the dew send!
 Lofty designs must close in like effects:
 Loftily lying,
 Leave him--still loftier than the world suspects,
 Living and dying.

(ll. 141-148)

The peaceful conclusions to "The Bishop Orders His Tomb" and "The Grammarian's Funeral" are alike in that death is the final resolution of the efforts of both men.

One might compare the sons of the Bishop with the students of the Grammarian, observing that the character of each important personage is reflected in the characters of those they influenced. While the Bishop becomes resigned to the defeat of his selfish ambitions as he faces death, his final words are about the one real triumph of his life, his success in claiming for himself the woman Gandolf had coveted:

As still he envied me, so fair she was! ✓

Actually his life has been dominated by selfishness and greed. Ample evidence of his failure is shown by the reactions of the sons to his request for an elaborate tomb, the faces reflecting the selfishness which mirrors that of the Bishop. It is obvious to him that they will not abandon the pursuit of wealth even to honor this request, since it conflicts with their intentions to obtain all of his wealth for their own purposes.

The Grammarian's students, however, have no thought for themselves, as they humbly bear their teacher's body to a fitting place of

burial. The man himself has prescribed no elaborate manner of burial, just as, in life, he had never asked for personal tribute. His followers reflect the same unselfishness, having profited by his example:

Oh, if we draw a circle premature,
 Heedless of far gain,
 Greedy for quick returns of profit, sure
 Bad in our bargain!

(11. 97-100)

When the beloved scholar dies, therefore, they show no inclination to turn the fruits of his labor into material profit for themselves. Instead, they have planned a triumphal burial as a tribute to the man and his ideals.

"The Bishop Orders His Tomb" and "The Grammarian's Funeral" demonstrate that, although death ends man's desires and strivings, whether noble or base, their influence remains alive in the characters of those whose lives they have partially shaped--which is a type of earthly immortality.

Turning from the action monologue, in which a significant scene of action is the background for the words of the speaker, I shall examine some narrative dramatic monologues. In these, the speaker relates a story of past events in which he was a participant, after which he speaks some words which are indicative of a change in mood from remembrances of the past to activity in the present. "Count Gismond" is an excellent example of a narrative-dramatic monologue with such an ending. My interpretation of this conclusion as normal, uncomplicated conversation, which can be taken at face value, is far from generally acknowledged.

The controversy centers around the small prevarication spoken by Lady Gismond to her maid, Adela, in the monologue's concluding lines. The entire final stanza constitutes the conclusion of the poem.

Our elder boy has got the clear
 Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
 Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
 And have you brought my tercel back?
 I was just telling Adela
 How many birds it struck since May.
 (11. 121-126)

The lady's story has, up to this point, been on anything but the tercel and its conquests. In a warm and touching manner, she has told her maid an exciting love story. When she, an orphan dependent upon the kindnesses of her relatives, was to reign as Queen of the May, she was betrayed by her envious cousins. The instrument of their plan was Sir Gauthier, who, at the moment of her coronation, came forth to claim that the supposedly chaste Queen of the May was "she whose body I embraced a night long." At once a champion arose, in the person of Count Gismond:

He strode to Gauthier, in his throat
 Gave him the lie, then struck his mouth
 With one back-handed blow that wrote
 In blood men's verdict there.
 (11. 73-76a)

Having dealt Gauthier his death blow, Count Gismond forces him to confess his lie. The victorious knight carries away fair lady, as the story ends. In her present happiness, the lady is able to end her narrative with a prayer for her accuser:

Gauthier's dwelling place
 God lighten! May his soul find grace.
 (11. 119-120)

This prayer is followed by the controversial final stanza.

Phelps interprets the poem as a chivalric romance filled with "charm and brightness." He sees Gismond as a "Lohengrin in the moment of Elsa's sharp distress."¹⁵ DeVane takes a similar view of the character, calling Gismond "a Browningsque hero of the chivalric tradition." DeVane goes on to describe the poem as an illustration of the medieval belief that God will "have a stroke in every battle." He compares Gismond's instant recognition of the lady's virtue with similar situations in "The Glove," "The Ring and the Book," and Andromeda's lines in "Pauline."¹⁶

In direct opposition to these interpretations are the views expressed in two more recent articles, both of which cite the conclusion as evidence in their attempts to prove that the lady was really unchaste, fully deserving of Gauthier's accusations. In the first of these articles, John Tilton and R. Dale Tuttle claim that an examination of Browning's use of hawking imagery proves their thesis. Recognizing the importance of this conclusion, they comment "that she used him rather than loves him is established as indubitable in the last stanza." The sons' physical characteristics, described in the conclusion, are said by these critics to show that the poet intended an

¹⁵Phelps, p. 177.

¹⁶William C. DeVane, A Browning Handbook (New York, 1935), p. 110.

association of the boys with falcons, ready to defend her as their father had.¹⁷ Continuing with a discussion of the "much questioned 'small prevarication,'"¹⁸ the authors call the lady's mentioning of the tercel a means of concealing both the subject of her conversation and her guilt from Gismond, implying that she still fears that the "truth" will come to light.¹⁹

Concurring in, but not content with, this destruction of the lady in "Count Gismond," Sister Marcella Holloway sets out to deal a similar blow to Gismond's character. She attempts to prove that he knew of the lady's guilt from the beginning and took advantage of this knowledge to imprison her and mistreat her with impunity.²⁰ In Holloway's analysis of the final stanza, she claims that the lady's differentiation between her sons, in terms of their physical characteristics, indicates that the elder is Gauthier's son, not Gismond's.²¹ This interpretation seems incompatible with an earlier word from the mother about her sons:

See! Gismond's at the gate, in talk
With his two boys: I can proceed.
(ll. 49-50)

The Lady Gismond is presumably "telling all" to Adela; therefore, why should she bother, if this implication of the elder son's fatherhood

¹⁷John W. Tilton and R. Dale Tuttle, "A New Reading of Count Gismond," Studies in Philology, LIX (1962), 92.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Sister Marcella Holloway, "A Further Reading of Count Gismond," Studies in Philology, LX (1963), 549.

is correct, to refer to the sons as "his boys" and the elder as "our" elder boy?

Of the final two lines of this conclusion, Sister Holloway remarks:

It is no little white lie the Lady tells her husband at the close of the poem . . . Gismond is literally her tercel, having struck down many victims like her.²²

I believe that this conclusion, far from having a hidden irony in its wording, is a highly effective "return-to-normal" ending. The references to hawks and falconry, have, I believe, been used in forming two unlikely interpretations of the monologue. To the medieval mind, nothing was more priceless than the immortal soul. If Browning is faithful to the historical period in which he has placed this poem, he would hardly allow the parting words of a knight be a lie and a false oath to God. As he dies, Gauthier says, at Gismond's command, "I have lied to God and her." We are not justified by an evidence present in the poem, then, to doubt him.

Therefore, the conclusion reveals, not the lady's guilt, but her humanity, femininity, and her warmth of feeling for the man who saved her from disgrace and proudly made her his wife. Browning's belief in the strength and fidelity of wifely love is exhibited here as it is in "A Lover's Quarrel" and "Any Wife to Any Husband." The lady's discussion of her son's physical characteristics:

²¹Ibid., p. 550.

²²Ibid., p. 555.

Our elder boy has got the clear
 Great brow; tho' when his brother's black
 Full eye shows scorn, it . . .
 (ll. 121-123a)

is conversation typical of a mother, chatting with another woman about her sons and whom they "take after." This is an abrupt shift from a narrative, so touching to the narrator as to cause, at one point, "the old mist" to blind her eyes, to some light feminine banter. It is such chatter that strong men find foolish; so the lady breaks it off when her Lord enters. Perhaps he has bid her to forget the painful events of the past and never to repeat them. Perhaps, as Phelps suggests, the "white lie" which she tells Adela is spoken because "she cannot talk about the great event of her life before the children."²³

This skillful conclusion is an outstanding example of the ending which shows the speaker resuming natural activity after relating some important experience, an experience which is the principal subject of the dramatic monologue. Rather than revealing some obscurely ironic meaning, the conclusion to "Count Gismond" shows Browning's skillful utilization of the "normal" conclusion, making the dramatic incident which has been related to blend into the character's whole scheme of life.

As DeVane points out (see footnote 16), "Count Gismond" bears a resemblance in subject matter, a treatment of the medieval chivalric tradition, to "The Glove." They are also similar in that they are

²³Phelps, p. 178.

both narrative dramatic monologues which end in "return-to-normal" conclusions. As I define the conclusion to "The Glove," it consists of the final stanza, from line 171 through 188, in which the passage of time reveals a calmer, more docile De Lorge, bearing out the lady's previous estimation of his character. Ronsard, the speaker, is merely a commentator and does not figure prominently in the monologue.

The principal event of the poem is a retelling of an old story by Schiller. Browning, as Arthur Symons observes, shows the story in a new light, putting the lady in the right and De Lorge in the wrong.²⁴ Ronsard, the speaker, tells an anecdote of life at the court of King Francis. One day, at the king's request, the courtiers go to amuse themselves by viewing a captive lion. As King Francis finishes a hair-raising speech about the fearsome beast's powers, a glove is thrown in to the lion's pit. Seeing that the owner of the glove is his "heart's queen," the "true knight," De Lorge, bravely retrieves her property, and, amid shouts of approval, flings it into the cruel damsel's face.

Ronsard is the only person to see the lady's side of the incident. He perceives "an expression in her brow's undisturbed self-possession" which suggests that this experience of the glove is, to her, "no pleasing experiment." As she later tells Ronsard, she had grown tired of the "deed proved alone by word" and resolved to conduct

²⁴Arthur Symons, An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning (London, 1916), p. 87.

a test of De Lorge's courage (not so heartless a test, since a page had not feared to retrieve his cap from under the same lion's nose).

The conclusion of the incident, for the lady, is an elopement with an unassuming young man whose attentions have won her love; they do not stay at the court to be objects of derision. Her future is suggested to be a normal and happy one.

To that marriage some happiness, maugre
The voice of the Court, I dared augur.
(ll. 169-170)

De Lorge's future life, however, is poetic justice for one who has been a conceited braggart. Having been once in much favor at court, he, since he has the misfortune to wed a "beauty" who is also admired by the King, is subjected to humiliation of sharing her with the King. There is a subduing change in De Lorge's manner. No longer a valiant snatcher of gloves from dangerous beasts, he now calmly fetches his wife's gloves from her chamber, while the King takes "the closet to chat in."

The conclusion tells, in lines 157-170 how the Lady finds peace and a normal existence away from the court, which can only symbolize for her the unhappy experience of the glove. De Lorge's return to normal existence, described in lines 171-188, indicates that he changes from a boasting gallant to a very undemanding husband. In both cases, the poet successfully depicts the calm aftermath to a momentous experience, which makes this conclusion conform to the requirements of this type of ending.

In addition to the lines which resolve the major issues raised in "The Glove," is the poet's postscript, which ends the poem:

Venienti occurrite morbo
With which moral I drop my theorbo.

This couplet is either a typically robust Browningism, sure to delight devotees of his optimism, or a lightly ironic comment upon the "grave dangers" which gallants must face in pursuit of heartless women.

Some very short endings, however, fulfill significant roles as the functional conclusions to dramatic monologues. One narrative monologue, "The Italian in England," has a one-line conclusion which is an excellent "return-to-normal" ending. The speaker is an Italian patriot, who, after an abortive attempt to free his land from Austria, lives an exiled life in England. His unnamed listener hears the story of his escape and rescue, "die to the tact and fidelity of a young peasant woman," as Symons phrases it. He attributes the charm of this monologue to the simplicity and directness of its telling.²⁵

I consider that lines 111 through 160 constitute a pre-conclusion to this monologue, because there is a complete break from the narrative here. In these final lines, the patriot recounts some events of the past as well as expressing his present thoughts. He asserts the abiding nature of his patriotism:

How very long since I have thought
Concerning--much less wished for--aught
Beside the good of Italy,
For which I live and mean to die.
(ll. 111-114)

²⁵Symons, p. 87.

and reveals the three desires which remain paramount in his mind: to strangle his enemy Metternich, to see his faithless friend, Charles, die of a broken heart under his new employers, and someday to return home, and, perhaps, visit the "little farm" where the kind peasant girl, his rescuer, lives. The speaker's life, however, has altered, and this conclusion suggests that it will probably be no more dangerous than a contemplation of revenge.

This calm mood is changed, however, by the last two lines and their suggestion of brisk activity.

So much for idle wishing--how
It steals the time! To business now!
(ll. 161-162)

Curry calls this entire monologue a "conversation [which] takes place preliminary to business." He calls the narrative conversation a moment in which a man of action turns from serious business to a moment of recounting past experiences, a moment which reveals the inner character of the speaker.²⁶

"The Italian in England," therefore, has a two-part conclusion after the narrative is ended, both parts of which fulfill conditions of the "return-to-normal" conclusion. First, the life of the patriot which he has described in the narrative has undergone a change from violent activity to the mere retelling and contemplation of such activity, a change from turbulence to calm, although it is not the calm of

²⁶S. S. Curry, Browning and the Dramatic Monologue (Boston, 1908), p. 156.

contentment. Secondly, the final two lines provide a second shift in mood from thoughts to normal activity. Exactly what the business is, which the man will now turn to, is not specified, probably the cause of Italian patriotism; what is significant is the poet's shifting of mood and subject matter in the conclusion to this narrative dramatic monologue, rather than allowing the narration to stand alone. This ending suggests renewed action and continuity into the future, resulting in an effect of realism and immediacy which no mere narrative could provide.

Of the longer narrative dramatic monologues, "The Flight of the Duchess" serves as an example of one which concludes with the type of ending under discussion. "Nowhere," says Stopford Brooke, "is Browning more original or more the poet,"²⁷ than in this poem. The universal theme of the monologue is the individual's innate desire to escape from the world of conventionality, often beset by sorrow, to the free, unincumbered gypsy life.

This time the story-teller is a huntsman, who has watched as his master, the Duke, has married a tiny, childlike bride selected from a convent. Her life with this man, whom the huntsman characterizes as "the pertest little ape that ever affronted human shape," and his mother, the "sick tall yellow Duchess," is one of constant mental and spiritual torture. This Duke is obsessed with reviving medieval customs and usages in his domain. Finding in an old book an account of

²⁷Stopford A. Brooke, The Poetry of Robert Browning (New York, 1902), p. 277.

the medieval customs relating to the hunt, he resolves to reenact them, to the letter, on his estate. His lady must perform her traditional role, which the book describes as follows:

When horns wind a mort and the deer is at siege,
 Let the dame of the castle prick forth on her jennet,
 And, with water to wash the hands of her liege
 In a clean ewer with a fair toweling,
 Let her preside at the disembowling.

(ll. 263-267)

The lady, who, despite her accustomed meekness, decides that the season for self-assertion has arrived, refuses to attend this gory function.

Riding out "in a perfect sulkiness," the Duke meets a band of gypsies. Noticing a scary-looking old gypsy woman, he decides on a plan of revenge. The old hag would frighten his squeamish bride into compliance.

Little could anyone guess the outcome of this interview between the young Duchess and the gypsy queen. Peeking through the lattice at them, the huntsman sees the gypsy regally seated and in deep conversation with the Lady, who is "coiled at her feet like a child at ease." The outcome is the Duchess's escape from her unhappy marriage to the unconventional life of the gypsies.

The huntsman, always a little in love with his mistress, has preserved a keepsake gift from her, a "little plait of hair." He describes in simple terms her departure.

I pushed the gate wide, she shook the bridle,
 And the palfrey bounded,--and so we lost her.

(ll. 786-787)

Such a lengthy poem has, properly, a lengthy conclusion, comprising all of stanza XVIII. It is a typical return-to-normal ending, which begins when the huntsman follows the completion of his story with a change of subject, a discussion of his plans for the future. First he will "see this fellow [the Duke] his sad life through," for this is his duty. When his master's death frees him, however, the huntsman will leave the estate where he has lived and has buried all of his family, to adopt for himself an itinerant existence. He hopes to discover what has become of his lady, after which he imagines a calm end for his life:

--So, I shall find out some snug corner
 Under a hedge, like Orson the wood-knight,
 Turn myself round and bid the world good-night:
 And sleep a sound sleep till the trumpet's blowing
 Wakes me (unless priests cheat us laymen)
 To a world where will be no further throwing
 Pearls before swine that can't value them. Amen!
 (ll. 909-915)

Recalling that the poet's philosophical basis for these calm, normal endings of many of his dramatic monologues may have been his concept of life as a continuous thread of existence, interrupted by occasional important happenings, the following line from "The Flight of the Duchess" is an appropriate introduction to its concluding section.

Now up, now down, the world's one see-saw.

The huntsman's life is the focal point of this monologue. Within his mundane existence, often filled with sorrow, sometimes with joy, this momentous, exciting experience, his role in the freeing of his beloved

Duchess, is the pinnacle. As this experience comprises the body of the poem, the ending, with its shift from narrative to information about the daily life of the speaker, listener, and about the speaker's future, clearly fulfills the function of this type of conclusion. His hope of recapturing something of the wonder of that experience, by finding the Duchess, is the huntsman's only goal, after which he will gladly lie down to a calm sleep.

These four examples of narrative dramatic monologues exhibit the realistic effect which is always present in the "return-to-normal" ending. There are innumerable narrative poems in English literature, but these of Robert Browning seem almost uniquely realistic, with their attention to the speaker at the poems' conclusions, and suggestion of future events.

My third type of dramatic monologue, the meditative monologue, is, in several instances, concluded with a change in subject, as the speaker departs from his meditation to make some strikingly commonplace comments relating to his life here on earth, removed from the subject of his contemplation in the body of the monologue. Two of these deal with music and musicians, "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" and "Abt Vogler." The conclusion to the latter monologue exemplifies best, perhaps, the "return-to-normal" ending. In the opening of the monologue, the controlling metaphor, the comparison of a musical sound to a piece of architecture, is revealed. The organ's keys are "slaves of sound" which "rush at once," as he bids them to "pile him a palace of unheard-of magnificence." His idealistic palace is, then, the sublime

musical composition of his imagination. This poem has been called "a crescendo of feeling evoked by music."²⁸ Browning truly seems nearer the mystic than the barbarian of George Santayana's article,²⁹ when the speaker of his monologue is a musician. Music, to Browning, was man's most convenient conveyance from the earth-bound to the heavenly experience.

An early explication of this poem is the Browning Society Paper of Mrs. Turnbull, read on June 22, 1883. She states that the speaker, Vogler, was an obscure organist who is remembered now only as the master of Weber and Meyerbeer. The poet chose Vogler because his music was not as excellent and enduring as that of Beethoven or Bach, for example, and he is therefore a better spokesman on the evanescence of music as compared with other arts.³⁰

Stanzas one through three are devoted to the musical metaphor. Vogler enlarges on this idea in verses four and five, as he makes what Mr. Turnbull calls "a bold attempt to describe . . . that strange state of clairvoyance in which the soul shakes itself free from external expressions."³¹ Music becomes the vehicle to a mystical experience. As Mrs. Turnbull phrases it, "Obeying an impulse to reach

²⁸W. O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment and Other Essays (Toronto, 1950), p. 13.

²⁹George Santayana, "The Poetry of Barbarism," Interpretations of Poetry and Religion (New York, 1900), pp. 166-216.

³⁰Turnbull, "Abt Vogler," in Browning Studies, ed. Berdoe (London, 1895), p. 143.

³¹Ibid., p. 146.

for the ideal, the impossible, the perfect musical sound, Vogler draws the heavens down to meet the earth."³²

Novel splendors burst forth, grew familiar, and dwelt with mine,
 Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
 Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
 For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.
 (ll. 29-32)

Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast,
 Furnished for ages to come, when a kindlier wind should blow, . . .
 (ll. 34-35)

Or else the wonderful Dead who have passed through the body and gone,
 But were back once more to breathe in an old world worth their new.
 (ll. 37-38)

From stanza VII on, the mood shifts from a description of the mystical experience to a philosophical discussion inspired by that experience. Here are expressed two of Browning's major philosophical tenets: (1) that, although the good in life, symbolized here by the perfect musical sound, may pass away never to return, God promises that what is or has been good can, in a sense, never be lost.

There shall never be one lost good: What was, shall live as
 before. (69)

(2) that life's ambiguities, hardships, and unaccomplished goals, the discords of life, will have resolution in heaven.

On the earth the broken arcs; in the heaven, a perfect round.
 (72)

After the music and the philosophy which it inspires, there comes, in the final stanza, the most representative "return-to-normal" conclusion. The poet has even provided a symbol, in musical terminology, for

³²Ibid., p. 146.

this return to the commonplace after the speaker has soared into the Ideal--the C Major chord. Abt Vogler's extemporizing at the organ has led him to produce a musical sound which, to him, is an ecstatic experience. Such experiences cannot endure for long, and, as Turnbull expresses it, "life with its round of duties calls us."³³ The conclusion to "Abt Vogler" reads:

Well, it is earth with me: silence resumes her reign
 I will be patient and proud, and soberly acquiesce.
 Give me the keys, I feel for the common chord again,
 Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,--yes,
 And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground,
 Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep:
 Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my resting-place is found,
 The C Major of this life: so, now I will try to sleep.
(ll. 89-96)

The process of descent to earth, or to daily life, is symbolically described as a modulation to the "common chord." It is not clear from the preceding lines which chord begins the modulation to C Major, but the poet speaks of descent into the minor, which would be a chord outside of the key of C Major, and thence far removed in musical sequence from it. The minor keys usually suggest sorrow, melancholia, or seriousness. From the minor, the musician moves to a ninth chord, a dissonant chord which has a strong tendency to lead downward to the octave, or the common chord. Helen Omerod suggests that Browning may have chosen "C Major" to express the idea of final resolution because C Major is a "natural scale, having no sharps or flats." The poet,

³³Ibid., p. 148.

therefore, may have chosen this key as "one most allied to matters of everyday life, including rest and sleep."³⁴

It is clear, then, that Abt Vogler's return to the common chord, "the C Major of life," symbolizes a return to normal activity after the excitement of this mystical experience. The final line, "now I will try to sleep," suggests the continuation of earthly existence, renewed by the refreshment of sleep, and hopeful of recapturing the wonder of this experience, which afforded him a brief glimpse of heavenly perfection.

A second monologue of musical meditation is "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha." The poem might be called a light-hearted companion to "Abt Vogler." Again the speaker is at the organ, but this time he is no serious musical composer but a poor church organist, who is befuddled by an ornate fugue composed by the departed Hugues ("dead and done with many a year"). He calls up the ghostly presence of Hugues, telling him that "when the church empties apace," and the "huge house of the sounds" (the organ) "bids the last loiterer back to his bounds!" he may answer the following question, "What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?"

Apparently the composition in question is a quintuple fugue, a terribly complicated work in which five different "voices" or melodies are interwoven; for the organist complains of its five interpolated themes:

³⁴Helen J. Omerod, "'Andrea del Sarto' and 'Abt Vogler,'" Browning Studies, ed. Berdoe (London, 1895), p. 160.

Lo, you, the wick in the socket!
 Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
 Down it dips, gone like a rocket!
 What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
 Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
 And find a poor devil has ended his cares
 At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?
 Do I carry the moon in my pocket?
 (ll. 142-149)

What a departure from serious music and philosophy to berating an errant sacristan! The poet has created a humorous and quite realistic conclusion, totally unrelated to the rest of the poem. It is his purpose to produce a true-to-life experience, and he does this by shifting the attention of the speaker away from his subject, the relationship between a composer's works and his philosophy, to such a mundane matter as the need for a light in the church.

In these and other musical poems, Browning reveals a considerable knowledge of the intricacies of music and a great desire to show it off. His knowledge is skillfully used when the musical composition becomes a symbol of a life experience, in which many themes are woven into the whole. Browning never forgets that his dramatic monologue is intended to present the entire experience in the most realistic way possible; therefore, he must show what his speaker says, does, or thinks, when he has finished the main part of his monologue. The very practical matter of the need for light, and anger at the negligence of the sacristan who has been remiss is not providing it, fulfill perfectly the requirements of the "return-to-normal" conclusion.

"The Patriot," subtitled "An Old Story," as it expresses a universal truth about human nature, the fickleness of public acclaim, is

among Browning's more effective short monologues. The vivid scene pictured in this vignette would seem to place it among the action monologues; however, since the poem contains only the thoughts of the patriot, not his spoken words, and because there is no listener named, it seems better to exemplify the meditative dramatic monologue.

The speaker represents all patriots who have received "roses, roses, all the way" from an adoring citizenry in their season of triumph, only to pass through the same streets a short time later, with ropes binding them and cries of "traitor" ringing in their ears. DeVane states that the possible inspiration for the character of the patriot was Arnold of Brescia, an Italian who led revolts against the Austrian occupation in 1848-1849.³⁵

The monologue presents a well-unified contrast between success and disaster. Stanzas I and II describe the scenes of triumph in the streets, as the patriot receives the loud acclaim of the populace; IV and V tell of his walking the same street toward "the scaffold's foot" one short year later. The patriot reflects upon his tragic situation in stanzas III and VI, the latter of which is the conclusion. In III, he speculates upon the reasons for his downfall, deciding that his faults were over-generosity and overzealousness.

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
To give it to my friends to keep!
(ll. 1512)

³⁵DeVane, p. 239.

Stanza VI, because of its calm mood of resignation on the part of the speaker and its suggestions about the future, places the ending of "The Patriot" in my first group of conclusions.

Thus I entered, and thus I go! . . .
 In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
 "Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
 Me?" God might question; now instead,
 'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.
 (ll. 26-30)

Of this conclusion, Curry writes:

The closing thought, so abruptly expressed, the most difficult one in the poem, is a mere hint of what might have happened had he triumphed in the world's sense of the word. He might have fallen dead--his soul might have become dead to truth, to noble ideals, and to aspirations. In a few words, he reveals his resignation, his heroism, and his sublime triumph.³⁶

The patriot has recaptured, despite his misery, the ability to view calmly the events which have led to this moment. Only a short time ago he stood upon the pinnacle of success. Despite the failure of his cause, he is content with the quality of his effort, saying, "Naught man could do, have I left undone." From finding out the state of the patriot's mind, we see that he has come to a philosophical acceptance of his fate. Like Abt Vogler, he believes in the mending in Heaven of life's broken arcs; so he can die confident that "God shall repay."

Browning has reserved one of the important concepts of this monologue, the idea of resignation and contentment in the face of failure, for his conclusion. It describes a state of calm, of disturbance resolving into equilibrium; and it suggests the speaker's role in the

³⁶Curry, p. 4.

future, which, for the patriot, can only be played out in another sphere, for he is condemned to die. The conditions of the "return-to-normal" ending are thus met in the conclusion to "The Patriot."

"Time's Revenges," like "The Patriot," exhibits in its conclusion the speaker's mind in a state of calm and resignation; but this time the resignation is not born of contentment. The first subject of the meditation is announced in the first two lines:

I've a Friend, over the sea;
I like him, but he loves me.
(ll. 1-2)

The speaker then discusses the relationship between him and his friend, partisan and self-sacrificing in his love, while he, the speaker, is only tolerably fond of him. The "Friend" hotly defends the books written by the speaker; he would argue down all criticism of them. In time of illness, despite an unequal return from his affection, the "Friend" would become the speaker's faithful nurse.

In contrast to this, the speaker tells of another person who figures in his life, his mistress. Unlike the "Friend," she is unworthy of and unresponsive to his love. Although the speaker would scarcely lift a hand to have his friend's company, he would willingly place his "cheek beneath that lady's foot," would even kill for her. Consumed with passion for this woman, he is burning out "a fire God gave for other ends." Although the "Friend" would come from a foreign land to administer to his needs, she would "calmly decree that (he) should roast at a slow fire," in order that she might obtain an invitation to an important ball.

To conclude this short monologue, which contrasts vividly two unequal relationships in which the speaker is the pivotal common denominator, Browning adds this epigrammatic conclusion:

There may be heaven; there must be hell.
 Meanwhile, there is our earth here--well!
 (ll. 65-66)

To the speaker-writer, starving and freezing in a garret, loved by a friend whom he does not love, loving a woman who does not feel anything for him, life is indeed a level plane of misery, suspended between heaven and hell. He must, though he is unhappy, be resigned to this unsatisfactory state of affairs, hoping that either heaven or hell will at least solve some of the conundrums of life. This conclusion shows a state of equilibrium in the sense that the speaker has found no solution to life's unequal relationships and has become calmly resigned to his misery. The revenges of time may be just in the long run, since they pay back unhappiness for unhappiness inflicted, but it is a merciless justice. The final "well!" may best exemplify the statement of Symons, that this poem is "infused with a peculiar grim humour, the laugh that chokes in a sob."³⁷ It may also be interpreted as a heavy sigh of resignation in the face of time's revenges.

Perhaps the most original of Browning's dramatic monologues is one which is both a satire upon all meditative monologues and a satire of anthropomorphic theology,³⁸ "Caliban Upon Setebos." Browning has

³⁷Symons, p. 86.

³⁸See C. R. Tracy's discussion of Caliban's anthropomorphism in "Caliban Upon Setebos," Studies in Philology, XXXV (1938), 487-499.

incorporated Shakespeare's half-man, half-beast character from "The Tempest," and Caliban's dam, Sycorax. Probably inspired also by the currently sensational theories of Charles Darwin, the poet shows a primitive creature, not quite advanced enough to think and behave like a true Homo sapiens, as he meditates upon the nature of his deity. Caliban feels oppressed by his god, a crude, vengeful, malevolent being whom he calls Setebos. Caliban's interpretation of his deity is, therefore, anthropomorphic (as are all men's conceptions of the nature of God, the poet implies). As the subtitle phrases it,

Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself..

The only optimistic idea in Caliban's mind is centered upon another god-figure, mightier than Setebos, whom he calls "Quiet."

What knows,--the something over Setebos
That made Him, or He, may be, found and fought,
Worsted, drove off and did to nothing, perchance.
(ll. 129-131)

This Quiet, all that it hath a mind to, doth.
(l. 137)

Caliban's only hopes are in the power of Quiet to conquer Setebos, or in the possibility that Setebos may come to neglect, to pay no attention to him.

That some strange day, will either the Quiet catch
And conquer Setebos, or likelier He
Decrepit may doze, doze, as good as die.
(ll. 281-284)

This hope is shattered, in the conclusion, by a storm which Caliban takes as evidence that Setebos has overheard his rebellious words and is punishing him. In this concluding section, Caliban departs from

his ambitious attempts to figure Setebos out and from his boasts and self-assertions. He has almost risen to the status of a man, but fear of the vengeance of Setebos drives him back to his normal bestial state:

What, what? A curtain o'er the world at once!
 Crickets stop hissing; not a bird--or, yes,
 There scuds His raven that has told Him all!
 It was fool's play, this prattling! Ha! The wind
 Shoulders the pillared dust, death's house o' the move,
 And fast invading fires begin! White blaze--
 A tree's head snaps--and there, there, there, there, there
 His thunder follows! Fool to gibe at Him!
 Lo! 'Lieth flat and loveth Setebos!
 'Maketh his teeth meet through his upper lip,
 Will let those quails fly, will not eat this month
 One little mess of whelks, so he may 'scape!
 (11. 284-292)

Charles Gordon Ames's Browning Society paper (1890) places considerable emphasis upon the conclusion to this dramatic monologue.

"The last twelve lines," says Ames, "contain the whole poem, and, for compressed explosive dramatic and psychological force they are, as far as I know, rarely equalled in the world's literature."³⁹ With the words "compressed" and "explosive," I believe that Ames describes most effectively the poet's abrupt shift in mood from the main monologue topic to the "return-to-normal ending" of this poem. The shift is from an exalted, almost human Caliban to a dejected sub-human groveling in the slime, to the Caliban, which is, nonetheless, the normal Caliban.

Another slant of interpretation is taken by E. K. Brown, who studied shifts from the habitual third person, which have been pointed

³⁹"Caliban Upon Setebos," Studies in Philology (New York, 1900), p. 77.

out as an important part of Browning's primitive characterization of Caliban, to the first person. Brown has pointed out six instances in which Caliban speaks in the first person and has attributed these shifts to a heightening of tension in the speaker.⁴⁰ Related to the present study is Brown's explication of the sixth shift from third to first person and the subsequent transition into the conclusion, which finds Caliban using, once more, the primitive-sounding third person in speaking of himself.

Brown calls this shift "the boldest of all," (ll. 269-283) as Caliban speaks of appeasing Setebos by "rite, abstinence, and self-torture," as Brown phrases it, "hoping that Setebos will be defeated by Quiet or be indifferent to men."⁴¹ "On the heels of this passage," Brown continues, "comes the dramatic close in which Caliban abounds in third person speech, as he says what he will do now that Setebos has noticed him."⁴²

Brown has drawn our attention to a very valuable piece of evidence which shows how deliberately the poet must have planned this "return-to-normal" ending. He has clearly demonstrated, by his shift of person in Caliban's speech, from the philosophical Caliban, questioning the nature of his deity, to the bestial, submissive, but normal Caliban. Although the natural conditions, the storm, produce a violent mood at the close of this poem, the effect of all this upon

⁴⁰E. K. Brown, "The First Person in 'Caliban Upon Setebos,'" Modern Language Notes, LXVI (1951), 392-395.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 394.

⁴²Ibid., p. 395.

the speaker is, as has been demonstrated, to force him back to the submissive attitude that he has habitually taken in regard to Setebos, thus making this conclusion consistent with others in this group. The additional function of the conclusion, its suggestion of what will occur in the future, is fulfilled by Caliban in his behavior shown in the conclusion. Rather pessimistically, the poem demonstrates the essential consistency, the level plane, of man's understanding. Man may ascend in moments of clearest intelligence to partial understanding of the nature of his God, but he will surely return to his worldly nature, pitifully finite in ability to understand the concepts of cosmic reality.

Not superstitiously, I have chosen thirteen examples of those conclusions to Browning's dramatic monologues which seem best to demonstrate the conditions of the "return-to-normal" ending. These conclusions furnish the equivalent of falling action in the staged drama, aiding in a realistic representation of a complete experience in the life of the monologue's speaker. Included in this type of conclusion is always some suggestion of the speaker's future actions.

It might be, and perhaps has been, argued that these shifts in mood and subject which mark the transitions from the main part of the poem to the conclusion, are the results of Browning's inability to think logically and preserve unity in his monologues. Kenneth Knickerbocker has answered this argument by attributing Browning's apparent disorderliness to the groping of the minds of the characters. He states

that the poet "made little effort to be consistent, on the grounds, possibly, that life in any general sense is inescapably inconsistent."⁴³ Browning has shown in these conclusions one aspect of the inconsistency of life--its normally level plane of experience, to which all men must return after experiencing life's high moments.

⁴³Kenneth L. Knickerbocker, "A Tentative Apology for Browning," Tennessee Studies in Literature, I (1956), p. 81.

CHAPTER III

THE SURPRISE, OR FLASH-BACK ENDING

As Fuson has said, "the context of a dramatic monolog may be as violent and suspenseful as an O. Henry short story with its trick ending."¹ Indeed, many of Browning's dramatic monologues do provide the same suspense, the same turnabout of events and ideas at the conclusion, which characterizes O. Henry's technique. The generic differences between the dramatic monologue of Browning and these short stories are obvious, but the fact of each writer's use of the trick or surprise conclusion lends validity to Fuson's comparison. This critic was not specifically examining the conclusions to the dramatic monologues of Browning; however, his comparison is clearly based upon this similarity of concluding technique.

Eugene Current-Garcia's excellent book on O. Henry and his works discusses the surprise ending in the section on structural techniques, as "the most obvious technical manifestation of O. Henry's art."² Current-Garcia defines this type of conclusion as "the result of some trick of reversal based on essential information withheld or only

¹Benjamin Willis Fuson, Browning and His Predecessors in the Dramatic Monologue: State University of Iowa Humanistic Studies (1948), VIII, p. 18.

²O. Henry (New York, 1965), p. 137.

partially disclosed."³ After remarking on the device's use previous to and contemporary with O. Henry, but not mentioning Browning in this connection, he lists certain forms of the surprise ending as O. Henry employed them: "the hoax, anti-conventional or distorted revelation, paradoxical or antithetical disclosure, manipulation of psychological concepts, the double-reversal, [and] the problem close."⁴

Although no critic has provided a statement about Browning's surprise endings to compare in definitiveness with Current-Garcia's on O. Henry, this study will attempt to demonstrate how the poet used many of the same devices in some of his conclusions to dramatic monologues as Porter used in his stories. In Browning's poetry, however, an additional characteristic is added to the surprise element produced by the trick ending. This is what I shall call the "flash-back" effect, an illumination of the preceding lines which aids or even alters one's interpretation of the poem. Obviously, the reader of poetry is faced with an interpretive task which is more complex than that facing the reader of the short story. The poet economizes on words; he shows more than he tells. Many figures of speech, ellipses, and words used for rhythmic effect may obscure the facts presented in a poem. The reader of the short story may, at his pleasure, follow only the story, while its submerged meanings are passed over completely. Browning's

³Ibid., p. 138.

⁴Ibid.

"flash-back" endings function as an aid to interpretation, by casting an illuminating light over the previous lines of the poem, so that the reader may have a reversal of opinion concerning the meaning. Browning has used the unexpected twist, the surprise at the end of the poem, to add interest while focusing his reader's attention back upon the body of the monologue, which may now appear in a different light because of the revelation provided in the conclusion.

This chapter will show, in ten poems, how this ending operates in Browning's dramatic monologue. These conclusions, I believe, constitute a clearly differentiated second type, as opposed to the "return-to-normal" conclusion. These conclusions reveal Browning to be a conscious craftsman developing a technique, more than they exemplify one of his philosophical tenets, as do the endings in first group. Again I have divided the poems into action, narrative, and meditative monologues, although the categories often overlap. In the category of action monologues, I have chosen "Mr. Sludge, the Medium," "Any Wife to Any Husband," and "Bishop Blougram's Apology." The narrative monologues, and these are somewhat different from their counterparts in Chapter II, will be "Cleon," "An Epistle to Karshish," "Instans Tyrannus," and "A Forgiveness." The first two are in the form of letters, while the latter two are narratives which partake of the nature of the meditative ("Instans Tyrannus") and active monologues ("A Forgiveness"). The meditative monologues to be considered are "Porphyria's Lover," "A Toccata of Galuppi's," and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation."

This list of dramatic monologues to be examined in the discussion of the "flash-back" ending reveals fascinating group of characters. There are insane murderers, a medium who cheats, a dying wife trying to perpetuate her influence, a tyrannical king, and a slightly unorthodox Bishop. Only the English scientist seems to be a normal person, who might be the poet's voice, to expound upon a philosophy of life. Although the Duke of Ferrara and the dying Bishop in Chapter II are not normal people in our sense of the word, in the context of their age, they were. It seems that Browning has often used the flash-back, rather than the normal ending, when dealing with his more fantastic characters. These monologues, then, exhibit the height of the poet's creativity, both in characterization and in technique of conclusion.

The first of these unusual speakers is "Mr. Sludge, the Medium." This dramatic monologue is one of the later and longer ones,⁵ and is a good example of a revelation of character found in the conclusion. The poet must have used the American medium D. D. Home, or Hume, as his model.⁶ Although there were many devotees of spiritualism in Browning's day, including Mrs. Browning, he despised Home and did not believe in spiritualism or in any modern miracle.⁷ Raymond calls Sludge

⁵William C. DeVane, A Browning Handbook (New York, 1935), p. 307. (The poem as published in 1864, containing 1525 lines.)

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.

"the meanest and most contemptible of his Browning's casuists," and observes that Home, the cause of a serious disagreement between the poet and his wife, could hardly hope for sympathetic treatment at his creative hands. Yet Browning, due to his "catholic charity," his belief in the good in all God's creatures allows Sludge a germ of truth in his argument.⁸

This argument is the body of the monologue, spoken to Hiram Horsefall, an erstwhile patron of the medium's. There are two important shifts in mood within the poem, so that it divides into an introduction, monologue, and conclusion. Corresponding to the structural divisions are the shifts in the behavior of Sludge, the speaker, which reveal various aspects of his character.

In the introductory lines 1-82, Sludge appears to be terrified. He has been caught at cheating, and is about to be strangled by the irate Horsefall. None could deny that this is an action monologue, for the poet has included graphic sound effects:

Aie--aie--aie!
Please, sir! Your thumbs are through my windpipe, sir!
Ch--ch!

(ll. 15-17)

By some glib talk, Sludge is able to work out a trade: if Horsefall will let him go, not expose his cheating, and pay his passage to England, he will reveal "all about the tricks" and will "change [his]

⁸W. O. Raymond, The Infinite Moment and Other Essays (Toronto, 1950), pp. 141, 142.

trade and cheat no more." Horsefall agrees, mostly for fear that exposure of his medium would reflect upon his ability to recognize a charlatan and make him the laughing-stock of his circle of friends.

Robert Langbaum has called attention to the transition which occurs at the beginning of line eighty-three, marking the end of the introduction:

Horsefall agrees to the bargain out of curiosity, since he does not need the confession for proof of Sludge's guilt. His role becomes at this point less dramatic, less of active opponent, more that of interested auditor, and the long argument that follows has a gratuitous quality.⁹

Part two, the body of the dramatic monologue, is spoken by Sludge in a calmer, more self-assured mood. He reviews his career, in a kind of defense of charlatanry, which is capable of winning his listener's and the reader's sympathy. The introduction has elicited disgust at Sludge's dishonesty and, perhaps, some pity for him because of Horsefall's abuse. On the other hand, the Sludge of the argument sounds more sincere, so that we view the medium as the victim of circumstances, as a kind of showman like a poet or a playwright, and as a true medium with powers which he neither controls nor comprehends. Briefly, Sludge's case is as follows: that the people of Horsefall's set, obsessed with spiritualism, corrupted him by seizing on the smallest evidence that Sludge might have mystical powers; that Sludge has been a social asset to his patron;

⁹The Poetry of Experience (New York, 1963), p. 185.

Who finds a picture, digs a metal up,
 Hits on a first edition,--he henceforth
 Gives it his name, grows notable: How much more,
 Who ferrets out a "medium?"

(ll. 175-178)

that the craft of the medium is akin to that of the poet or actor:

The . . . not so very false, as falsehood goes,
 The spinning out and drawing fine, you know,
 Really novel-writing of a sort,
 Acting or improvising, make-believe,
 Surely not downright cheater, . . .

and that there is some truth to his assertions of spiritual powers,
 even as the supernatural element in the Scriptures is thought to be
 true:

I and all such boys of course
 Started with the same stock of Bible-truth;
 Only,--what in the rest you style their sense,
 Instinct, blind, reasoning but imperative,
 This, betimes, taught them the old world had one law
 And ours another: "New World, new laws," cried they:
 "None but old laws, seen everywhere at work.

(ll. 877-883)

"The superfluity of the argument indicates that Sludge is carried away
 by it, that his self-revelation is unintentional and, to that extent,
 sincere," states Langbaum.¹⁰ Smalley has observed that the character
 of Sludge exhibits the poet's desire to show the little bit of truth
 present in every falsehood.¹¹ Certainly, the reader detects the "germ
 of truth" in these words and is in a measure won over to Sludge's side

¹⁰ Robert Langbaum, The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition (New York, 1957), p. 187.

¹¹ Smalley, p. 67.

at this point in the poem.

Then comes the second transition which introduces the conclusion, an ending which is a reversal in the tone of the speaker's words, forcing us once more to alter our opinion of Sludge. He is revealed in the conclusion as infinitely lower, more hateful than ever before. This section begins with line 1500, after Horsefall has once more become angry at the medium's cautious reference to his "saintly mother" and has stormed out. Abruptly Sludge changes his entire demeanor, revealing that he is thoroughly unrepentant. He curses Horsefall viciously:

R-r-r, you brute-beast and blackguard! Cowardly scamp!
I only wish I dared burn down the house
And spoil your sniggering!

(ll. 1500-1502)

He threatens to spread rumors about his patron in order to get revenge:

I too can tell my story: brute, —do you hear?—
You throttled your sainted mother, that old hag,
In just such a fit of passion; no it was . . .
To get this house of hers, and many a note
Like these . . .

(ll. 1505-1509)

He demonstrates his complete disinclination to reform:

Boston's a hole, the herring-pond is wide,
V-notes are something, liberty still more.
Beside, is he the only fool in the world?

(ll. 1522-1525)

Surely, we can no longer accept the ring of truth which emerges from the argument, after reading this conclusion. Langbaum calls it "the speaker's negation of the argument."¹² A flash-back reevaluation of

¹²Langbaum, p. 185.

the poem now leaves the impression, as Langbaum further comments, "that his argument, with all its transcendental implications, was pure strategy."¹³

Another critic has evaluated this conclusion from the standpoint of the poet's purpose in its creation. Hoxie N. Fairchild points out, in this and some other dramatic monologues, Browning's compulsion to make the speaker reveal the "real truth which underlies the surface play of intellectual sophistication."¹⁴ The poet, in other words, came to distrust his readers' ability to separate the right from the wrong in his monologues, so he sometimes added a passage to tell them how to interpret the poem.¹⁵ Therefore, the casuistic ending of "Mr. Sludge, the Medium" purposely leads us to think of Sludge as a thoroughly bad character. Fairchild has dubbed this type of conclusion, which he also observes in "Bishop Blougram's Apology," "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," "Cleon," and "Porphyria's Lover," Browning's "give-away," which the poet used when a religious idea is at stake.¹⁶

Fairchild has rightly labeled this conclusion consciously contrived. Yet the two important shifts of characterization, providing insight into all phases of the speaker's character, seem not only ingenious but consistent with Browning's apparent desire to make his

¹³Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁴Hoxie N. Fairchild, "Browning, the Simple-Hearted Casuist," University of Toronto Quarterly, XVIII (1949), 237.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁶Ibid.

conclusions distinctive, surprising, and important in delineation of character. Since the speaker, Sludge, voices this conclusion as well as the rest of the monologue, it seems dramatically effective, not superfluous tacked-on, as Fairchild charges.

That critic's charge of excessive concern, on the part of Browning, that the reader form the intended opinion of the speaker extends to another of the longer dramatic monologues, "Bishop Blougram's Apology." "Browning the psychologist had made the bishop talk too cleverly to satisfy Browning the moralist."¹⁷ The poet then had to clarify all the ambiguities about right and wrong in his conclusion.

"Bishop Blougram's Apology" is an action monologue, describing an encounter between two ideological opponents, Blougram, a pragmatic, worldly churchman who holds that it is best to believe the fundamental Christian doctrines, even when the Reason has come to doubt those beliefs; and Gigadibs, called by DeVane, "a third-rate journalist, in his own estimation clever, rational, and a man of integrity."¹⁸ The Bishop has invited Gigadibs, an acknowledged sceptic and outspoken critic of orthodox Christianity, for dinner and theological discussion. The introduction (ll, 1-12) consists of the speaker's everyday small talk, leading to an abrupt pronouncement to his guest, "So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs." Blougram then begins an involved defense of his

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸DeVane, p. 242.

faith, which exists despite strong elements of doubt.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in detail the various aspects of Blougram's beliefs. As his argument progresses, he gives answers to the issues which Gigadibs has previously raised, but the monologue is dominated by the Bishop's ideas:

It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.
(11. 46-48)

Gigadibs apparently has questioned Blougram's sometime religious skepticism, his obvious enjoyment of worldly goods and honors, and his disrespect for proven Truth. As for his lack of Faith, Blougram replies:

'Tis clear, I cannot lead my life, at least,
Induce the world to let me lead it peaceably,
Without declaring at the outset, "Friends,
I absolutely and peremptorily
Believe!"
(11. 241-245a)

As for his doubt, Blougram's rejoinder is:

I show you doubt, to prove that faith exists.)
The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,)
(11. 602-603)

And as for the things of the world, the Bishop claims:

I act for, talk for, live for this world now,
(1. 770)

Why lose this life i' the meantime, since its use
May be to make the next life more intense?
(11. 778-779)

DeVane has rightly labeled the close ironic:

The Bishop is more successful than he know, for Gigadibs,
the unbeliever, we learn at the end of the poem, has renounced

his ambitions and proposes to follow a different ideal in Australia, seeking what he formerly despised, in a study of the Gospels.¹⁹

There is, I believe, a double conclusion to this monologue. The first, lines 971-979, is an example of the "return-to-normal" ending, indicating that the speaker has finished the monologue proper by mentioning the physical activity which both characters have engaged in as the Bishop talked:

Over his wine so smiled and talked his hour
Sylvester Blougram.

(ll. 971-972)

With Gigadibs, the literary man,
Who played with spoons, explored his plate's design,
And ranged the olive-stones about its edge,

(ll. 975-979)

A feeling of calm is suggested by the imaginative passage,

While the great bishop rolled him out a mind
Long crumbled, till creased consciousness lay smooth.

(ll. 978-979)

Had the poem ended here, it would certainly have been discussed in Chapter II of this paper.

However, an extra-conclusion has been added, which does seem somewhat over-explanatory. Browning has abandoned, throughout the conclusion, the objectivity assured by letting the character speak, as Sludge effectively does, and has intruded too much into this conclusion. A new evaluation of the Bishop emerges in this second part of the ending:

¹⁹ Ibid.

For Blougram, he believed, say, half he spoke.
 The other portion, as he shaped it thus
 For argumentative purposes.

(11. 980-982)

He said true things, but called them by wrong names.
 (1. 996)

Blougram has changed from an interesting, if slightly displeasing character into an arguer for the effect of the argument, so that the reader may not mistake the poet's own knowledge of right and wrong.

What saves the conclusion, however, is the paradoxical disclosure about Mr. Gigadibs. To our surprise, rather than writing his article, "Blougram, the Eccentric Confidence," he changes his entire life by buying "settler's implements" and taking off for Australia. This focuses the reader's attention back to the earlier lines with attention to the listener, who has grown in importance to the overall meaning of the monologue. Rather than Blougram's falseness and hypocrisy being exposed by the skeptic, the skeptic is converted to pragmatic Christianity:

By this time, he has tested his first plough,
 And studies his last chapter of St. John.

(11. 1013-1014)

This ending, therefore, cannot be called the most effective of Browning's conclusions. The poet has expected too much, it seems, of it, combining the "return-to-normal" element, a "give-away" to clear up the ambiguities, and a flash-back to emphasize Gigadibs's untenable position. This ending, however, is evidence that Browning attached

great importance to his conclusions; it is too involved and eclectic to be anything but a laboriously contrived part of this monologue.

Another of Browning's poems showing the imperfection and frustration often present in earthly marriages is the poignant "Any Wife to Any Husband." Mrs. Orr sums up the story as follows:

"Any Wife to Any Husband" might be the lament of any woman about to die, who believes that her husband will remain true to her in heart, but will lack courage to be so in life.²⁰

DeVane comments that this poem presents a recurrent theme in Browning's poetry, the difference in type and depth between woman's love for man and man's for woman, a theme occurring also in "James Lee's Wife" and "A Woman's Last Word."²¹ The poet is expressing the possibility that the woman is more constant in love than the man.

In this dramatic monologue, the wife is attempting to exact a rather unfair promise from her husband: that following her approaching death, he will not remarry. In her desire to place a kind of restraining hand over his future actions, she uses various approaches. In stanzas I and II, she expresses her self-assurance that he has truly loved her and will sustain great grief at her dying. His eyes say it, his "voice breaks to say" that he loves her; and his "soul is [in] his face." The following two stanzas affirm her belief that his love has

²⁰Mrs. Sutherland Orr, Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning (London, 1902), p. 227.

²¹DeVane, p. 251.

been true throughout their marriage, unlesened by the fading of her beauty. But following Stanza V, a disturbing protest is made, "Disengage our hands and thou wilt sink." He will find a new object for his love, which she has solely possessed.

The speaker paints a vivid portrait of a devoted husband, even as she reveals that he may someday take note of "the fresher faces" and the hair which one must grasp because of its "wealth." The poem does not have the effect of degrading the husband, however, because the wife realizes that a contented married life is a habit not easily broken. It is likely that he will "re-coin" himself and "give it to them to spend." In facing these facts, she nevertheless strikes a deliberately sacrificial note, as if she were daring him to protest that he will remain constant.

The final four stanzas continue the desperate, almost cruel demand for some sort of promise. Stanza XVIII protests that it would be no task for her to remain faithful, while XX describes her attempt to gain her object through flattery:

And yet thou art the nobler of us two;
What dare I dream of, that thou canst not do,

As the final stanza opens, it appears that this praise has evoked some confidence; and that her last wish will be granted because she can trust to his pride.

Pride?--when those eyes forestall the life behind
The death I have to go through!--when I find,
Now that I want thy help most, all of thee!

What did I fear? Thy love shall hold me fast
 Until the little minute's sleep is past
 And I wake saved--And yet it will not be!

Her assurance grows to a crescendo in "What did I fear?" The answer in the final half-line is a devastating reversal of mood. She reveals here that her show of confidence was a sham, a desperate effort to exact a pledge. Ironically, she realizes that even were the promise given, it would not be kept for long. Understanding well the nature of her husband, she knows that he cannot keep such a promise throughout his life.

The conclusion is a most effective presentation of opposite ideas and moods, with the effect of great contrast and dramatic irony. Also, as a flash-back conclusion, it asks the reader to review the speaker's words in the knowledge that there was never any real hope of success in her plea.

"Cleon" and "An Epistle" are two narrative-dramatic monologues which have the flash-back ending. They are in the epistolary form, and, therefore, form a unit of study in Browning's works. DeVane calls them companion pieces, "Cleon" being composed last.²² Both show the possible effect of the revelation of Christian doctrine upon the minds of learned men of pagan cultures in the century after Christ's death. Both contain conclusions which are unique and difficult to classify. Essentially, there is, in each, a "return-to-normal" ending, but the

²²Ibid., p. 263.

final lines provide a surprising touch which arrests the falling dramatic action. For this reason, they are discussed here in this chapter on the surprise ending.

"An Epistle, Containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician" is a letter from a physician of the Arab culture to his mentor, Abib, the "All-sagacious." The letter deals with a strange medical phenomenon encountered by Karshish on a journey, the details of which he wishes to impart to Abib to gain his opinion of the unusual occurrence. The poem can readily be divided into parts by the abrupt shifts in Karshish's subjects of conversation, ranging from the purely scientific recounting of interesting diseases and cures which he has observed, to his less objective account of the miraculous story of Lazurus's alleged resurrection from the dead. Lines one through twenty constitute an elaborate introductory greeting from Karshish to his friend and teacher. Following this, the leech describes his hardships on the journey through Jericho to Jerusalem; wild beasts, war, robbers, and unfriendly townsfolk, which are reminiscent of Jesus' parable of the "Good Samaritan." Having reached Jerusalem, Karshish continues to Bethany from which he is writing his epistle.

Karshish promises to "set in order his experience," including the new diseases and cures, information which had been the purpose and goal of the journey. Here he would end; yet, he cannot resist describing a most surprising incident:

I half resolve to tell thee, yet I blush,
What set me off a-writing first of all
(ll. 65-66)

This occurrence, then, is actually the inspiration for the epistle, and the following lines are the most important of the monologue. Half stammering, he begins by describing Lazarus, who appears to have died, been buried, and to have then been revived by "a Nazarene physician of his tribe." At first Karshish maintains his scientific objectivity, calling the case one of "mania--subinduced by epilepsy, at the turning-point of trance prolonged unduly some three days," (ll. 79-80) having been relieved by "some drug, or spell, exorcisation, stroke of art unknown to me." (ll. 82-83)

What is remarkable, however, is that this Lazarus behaves so strangely as a result of his experience. He "eyes the world now like a child," his knowledge of the afterlife apparently "increased beyond human faculties." Karshish wonders about the powers of the Nazarene physician, since Lazarus regards him as divine; the Arab's rationalistic mind is disturbed by his musings:

This man so cured regards the curer, then,
As--God forgive me! who but God himself,
Creator and sustainer of the world. . . .
That came and dwelt in flesh on it awhile!
(ll. 267-270)

Cleon, the self-perfected Humanist, is likewise disturbed by rumors of a supernatural being, called Christ, who has demonstrated his ability to cause the dead to arise. Symons calls this dramatic monologue "a historical picture, imaginary, indeed, but typical . . . which reveals . . . the religious feeling of the pagan world at the time of the coming of Christ; its sadness, dissatisfaction; the failure of its

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wisdom to fathom the truth of the new Gospel."²³ The monologue is an epistolary narrative monologue, of Cleon's travel experiences as told to his ruler, admirer, and friend, Protus. Cleon, by his own admission the master of music, philosophy, art, mathematics, and all other worldly knowledge and art, has wrung life dry of all inspiration to strive for perfection, and he is dissatisfied with his dead-ended existence.

Was the thing done?--then what's to do again?
(1. 81)

Why stay we on earth unless to grow?
(1. 114)

Protus, the "listener" to the monologue, has previously asked Cleon whether or not he fears death. Protus rejoices that Cleon will have a kind of immortality in the paintings, statues, books, and poems which he will leave as his memorial. Yet Cleon puzzles about the possible existence of the soul after death. With dismay, he observes that as his mind reaches perfection, his body deteriorates.

While everyday my hairs fall more and more,
My hand shakes, and the heavy years increase--
(11, 313-314)

He gropes for some hope of future existence:

I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joys . . .
(11. 324-327a)

²³Arthur Symons, An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning (London, 1916), p. 109.

But his mind has been educated to believe that there can be no afterlife, so he always ends his painful thoughts in frustration.

Zeus has not yet revealed it; and, alas,
He must have done so, were it possible!
(ll. 335-336)

Both Cleon and Karshish, who are imagined to have lived in the early Christian era, receive the news of Christ's doctrine. Their sensitive minds grapple with the startling idea of resurrection and eternal life, and they experience spiritual turmoil. Browning must have intended that the two poems be considered together as a comparison of the effect of Christian doctrine upon two men who represent the highest learning attainable in their respective cultures. In both monologues, it is significant that the poet chose to save the complete revelations of the speakers' opinions concerning the doctrines of Christ for the conclusions to the poems. Both have flash-back conclusions which supplement the preceding lines; but the revelation is of a very different nature in each of the two poems, and they are handled quite differently from a technical viewpoint.

The conclusion to "An Epistle" is dramatically abrupt. The poet has brought the work to a close which is at first a "return-to-normal" conclusion. The leech apologizes to Abib for "the long and tedious case" which he has finished describing. He resumes the objectivity which is normal for him, calling the Lazarus incident not "cause for peculiar interest." Mundane particulars concerning the sending of the letter are followed by Karshish's "farewell." He "intends" that his

letter end here; but the force of his experience with the resurrection of Lazarus has so disturbed his old beliefs that he finally bursts forth with a surprising exclamation:

The very God! think Abib; dost thou think?
 So, the All-Great, were the All-Loving too--
 So, through the thunder comes a human voice
 Saying, "O Heart I made, a heart beats here!
 Face, my hands fashioned, see it in myself!
 Thou hast no power nor mayst conceive of mine,
 But love I gave thee, with myself to love,
 And thou must love me who died for thee."
 The madman saith He said so: it is strange.
(ll. 336-353)

Wonder and near acceptance have been Karshish's final response to the suggestion of the soul's immortality, dramatized by his encounter with Lazarus. This ending is a complete revelation of the mind of the speaker and a surprising change of mood after the calm objectivity of the lines preceding it. We also must reevaluate the poem, knowing that Karshish's cool scientific explanation of his experience cannot now be taken at face value. The conclusion reveals that his entire faith has been shaken by the time of the composition of the letter, and the story of Lazarus has become far more than an unusual medical case. He is, in fact, writing the letter in order to find out Abib, his teacher's, reaction to this new concept. Thus, the conclusion is an excellent example of the use of the "flash-back" technique.

The conclusion to "Cleon" is less startling, but it does reveal fully the effect of this new doctrine upon the mind of the educated Greek. Unlike Karshish, who seemed close to belief, Cleon can never accept the concept of immortality. He rejects it completely in the

concluding line, saying of the Christians, "Their doctrine could be held by no sane man." Browning makes these conclusions different, both in meaning and technique. While Karshish's remarks are an extravagant outpouring of joy and wonder, Cleon's statement is a cryptic denial, revealing that his mind is forever closed to the doctrine. It has been revealed that Protus wrote to Cleon asking him to forward a letter to "one called Paulus;" whose philosophy interested the ruler. Cleon protests the idea that "a mere barbarian Jew" might know the answers to the questions which have been troubling his soul:

Thou wrongest our philosophy, O King,
In stooping to inquire of such an one,
As if his answer could impose at all!
(11. 346-348)

This talk of Paul and Christ has disturbed Cleon and induced him to speculate upon their teachings, but his mind is sadly closed to the idea of "a God of love" and "individual immortality."²⁴

Other narrative-dramatic monologues deal with the working of hatred in the minds of the speakers, among these being "Instans Tyrannus" and "A Forgiveness." In both, the speakers describe revenge wrought, or about to be wrought upon an enemy; and both use the surprise, flash-back conclusion to great advantage. Roma King, commenting upon Browning's interest in situations and characters "in which there are conflicts, incongruities and paradox," points out the

²⁴DeVane, p. 265.

presence of internal conflict in "A Forgiveness," implying that this narrative poem should not be termed a dramatic monologue; although the interplay between speaker and listener, especially in the poem's exciting conclusion, demonstrates that the dramatic element is present. King calls the speaker "confused," "disturbed," and "tortured."²⁵ The hatred-revenge theme, occurring in several dramatic monologues of Browning, lends itself quite naturally to the type of monologue which the poet characteristically concluded with his unexpected twist, his flash-back ending to monologues dealing with abnormal characters and emotions.

"Instans Tyrannus," says Herford, is "a sardonically humorous travesty of persecution."²⁶ The speaker is a ruler "of a million or two" who has singled out "for cause undefined" one man as the object of his hatred. Physical abuse, the lure of "gold and jewels," and the "choicest cates" and rare wines cannot bring the spirit of the man under the will of his tormentor. The man has no relatives to persecute, not even a close friend to pursue. He is safe in his nonentity, causing the king to take himself to task, asking why it is possible for "toad or rat [to] vex the king." Deciding, however, that half his kingdom would not be too great a price for his enemy's destruction, the king lays plans to destroy his victim and settles back to "enjoy the

²⁵Roma King, The Bow and the Lyre (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1959), p. 125.

²⁶C. H. Herford, Robert Browning (London, 1905), p. 90.

event." Ironically, the "event" produces quite an opposite effect:

When sudden . . . how think ye, the end?
 Did I say "without friend"?
 Say rather, from marge to blue marge
 The whole sky grew his targe
 With the sun's self for visible boss,
 While an Arm ran across
 Which the earth heaved beneath like a breast
 Where the wretch was safe prest!
 Do you see? Just my vengeance complete,
 The man sprang to his feet,
 Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
 --So, I was afraid!

(11. 61-72)

This monologue, having been a spoken memory of an event in the life of the speaker, must be viewed differently after the conclusion has been taken into account. Perhaps the speaker may be understood now to be repenting of his cruelty, after he has been chastened by a demonstration of God's intervention in behalf of one who trusted in His protection, as is demonstrated by the man's obvious courage in the face of death. Surely the king has a different opinion of the power of tyranny, a power which has been proven ineffective in the face of one man's incorruptible will supported by the power of deity. Thus the conclusion forces, once more, a reappraisal of the entire monologue. Mrs. Orr says of this conclusion:

But, at the critical moment, the man . . . threw himself on the protection of God. The King saw, in a sudden revulsion of feeling, an Arm thrown out from the sky, and the "wretch" . . . safely enfolded in it. Then he in his turn--was afraid.²⁷

²⁷Orr, p. 305.

She has taken notice of the climactic shift in mood and meaning that results from this important conclusion, which actually contains the point of the poem, the poet's message.

The second of these dramatic poems built around the theme of hatred and revenge, "A Forgiveness," builds tremendous tension leading to a most shocking conclusion. As Fuson puts it, "stark murder occurs during the closing lines of "A Forgiveness,'" ²⁸ making it one of Browning's most effective surprise endings. In the opening lines, the events of the conclusion are foreshadowed:

I am indeed the personage you know
As for my wife,--what happened long ago,--
You have a right to question me, as
I am bound to answer.

(11. 1-4)

The listener, a monk at the "confession-grate," replies through "clenched teeth," "Son, a fit reply!" The speaker is identified as a penitent, confessing something concerning his wife to a confessor who is in some way involved in the story. The speaker begins his narrative, and the reader must await the conclusion for the complete revelation of what is suggested in the introduction.

Briefly, the story describes a statesman whose marriage has come to be secondary to the demands of his career. Assured of his wife's devotion, however, his soul sings "at each sharp throe of laboring flesh and blood--'She loves me so!'" Quite by accident, he discovers

²⁸Fuson, p. 18.

that she has taken a lover, and, for three years hence, they play the roles of "stage king and queen" for the world's eyes. The statesman, who is the speaker, does not take his revenge on her, blaming himself for choosing his mate unwisely, for over-valuing her worth.

Why should I blame brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me--a warning I was overbold
In judging metals.

(11. 102-105a)

The end of this period of frozen amnesty comes when the wife decides to live no longer, nor to die without revealing the truth:

I loved yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to ashes, now my shame you know . . .
(11. 245-246)

. . . Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft.

(11. 305-308a)

In desperation she had taken a lover; in contempt of her unworthiness he had decided to disregard her guilt. But this revelation changes contempt to hatred, and he decides to claim her life in revenge. Ending his story, the speaker directs this remark to his confessor:

"She sleeps, as erst beloved, in this your Church" (11. 387-388)

Then comes the startling revelation that the priest is, in fact, the lover! The husband sarcastically mentions the lover's "fond hope" that he may hide his guilt under his clerical robes, to elude . . . vengeance in the cloister's solitude." No longer does the maddened husband speak in normal conversational form to the Priest; he now refers

to him in the impersonal third person, until, as the knife is thrust through the confessional barrier, he unites the two types of reference in the concluding exclamation:

Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father--as your grate helps now!
(11. 395-396)

One need not remark on the surprise element of this violent conclusion to "A Forgiveness." Its flash-back value is an important secondary effect. The reader can now imagine the fear in the heart of the listener and the hatred which colors the intonation of the narrator, now that these characters have been revealed in their true relationship. Surely this is Browning's most skillful, most dramatic surprise ending!

The first meditative monologue to be discussed in this chapter is another of Browning's poems about music, "A Toccato of Galuppi's." Here, as in "Abt Vogler," music becomes man's vehicle to an ecstatic experience. The speaker is an English scientist, normally an advocate of the reason over the imagination. Disturbing his protective cloak of rationality, however, come the strains of a Baroque toccata, played by its composer, Baldassare Galuppi. DeVane states that Browning referred, in this poem, to no specific composition, but to music typical of such Baroque composers as Bach and Galuppi (1706-85). The toccata was a polyphonic composition designed, chiefly, to exhibit keyboard dexterity. Browning cannot be identified with either the speaker or with the music, say DeVane.²⁹ Yet, it appears that he stands

²⁹DeVane, p. 220.

somewhere between. The central meaning of the poem seems to be the revelation, conveyed by the coldly ironical notes of the toccata, that there can never be, and has never been, an idyllic state of existence such as the Englishman imagines to have existed in old Venice.

Galuppi's music creates a vision of light-hearted gaiety, but it is accompanied by strangely cynical overtones, implying that this gaiety was but a romantic illusion.

Stanzas four through six tell us of the happy side of Galuppi's Venice, with young people enjoying "balls and masks," lasting from midnight till midday. There are the beautiful ladies in black velvet masks with their adoring gallants wearing swords. In stanzas seven, eight, and nine, the poet uses musical imagery to interject a plaintive note, which casts doubt upon the true and enduring happiness which the scene seems to be showing.

The Englishman has lived by his reasoning powers, but he is now led, by the haunting music, to imagine a romantic long-ago. Galuppi's music threatens to destroy his smug rationality by suggesting that his life of cold science has separated him from the contemplation of the romantic side of life.

But when I sit down to reason, think to take my stand nor swerve,
While I triumph o'er a secret wrung from nature's close reserve,
In you come with your cold music till I creep through every nerve.
(ll. 31-33)

Although the Englishman knows that all that is left of Venice is "dust and ashes." However, even as he tries to dismiss the frivolous picture of gay Venice from his mind, the mocking strains still accuse him of

having lived half a life in disregarding the life of love and the contemplation of beauty which the vision of Venice has brought to his mind.

He seeks to rationalize away the creeping feeling that the music has caused by protesting that all the beauty of the past has died; but, in the concluding stanza, the Englishman finally faces the truth, that in ruling out the worth of love and frivolity, his life is a failure:

"Dust and ashes!" So you creak it, and I want the heart to scold.
 Dear dead women, with such hair, too--what's become of all that gold
 Used to hang and brush their bosoms? I feel chilly and grown old.
 (11. 43-45)

With chilly finality, he describes the effect of his own thinking induced by the toccata in the half-line conclusion, "I feel chilly and grown old." This conclusion is a flash-back ending, in that it turns the reader's attention back to the first stanza, which says that this speaker understands but regrets what he hears in Galuppi's toccata.

I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
 But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind.
 (11. 2-3)

Therefore, we are not surprised when the Englishman is left with a feeling of disappointment, for the conclusion explains what the first stanza has hinted. The shift in mood at the point of the half-line conclusion is aided by skillful imagery. The gold of the women's hair, as it brushes their bosoms, is suggestive of life, warmth, and fertility, while the words "dust and ashes," "chilly," and "old" imply their opposites: death, cold, and sterility. The speaker's life of cold reason and the warmth of the romantic life which he now realizes that he has missed are likewise contrasted in the concluding line, which shows a

startling change in mood, from protest to recognition of the truth of the lesson which the toccata has taught.

To complete this chapter, I shall examine the conclusions to two dramatic monologues which Browning first grouped together under the title "Madhouse Cells," perhaps, as Tracy suggests, so that his readers might not identify the poet with either of the rather unorthodox speakers.³⁰ They are "Porphyria's Lover" and "Johannes Agricola in Meditation," two studies in abnormal psychology which contain excellent flash-back conclusions. Both poems are of the meditative type of monologue, in which there is not a live listener and in which the speaker engages in a kind of philosophical contemplation.

The speaker in "Johannes Agricola in Meditation" is the historical founder of the Antinomian sect, which held that the elect of God have no need of good works for salvation and cannot be damned by any amount or degree of sin.³¹ The poem was first published in a liberal theological magazine, and therefore must be regarded as a satire on Calvinist doctrines of election and approbation.³²

The speaker begins by congratulating himself upon his secure position as one of the elect. God has, in the man's own words, "ordained a life for me, arrayed to the minutest." He is free from the taint of

³⁰ C. R. Tracy, "Porphyria's Lover," Modern Language Notes, LII (1937), 580.

³¹ C. R. Tracy, "Browning's Heresies," Studies in Philology, XXXIII (1936), 618.

³² Ibid.

the vilest sin:

I have God's warrant, could I blend
 All hideous sins, as in a cup,
 To drink the mingled venoms up;
 Secure my nature will convert
 The draught to blossoming gladness fast: . . .
 (11. 33-37)

From his lofty position as one saved, he gazes, in his imagination,
 upon the non-elect in their strivings for salvation:

Priest, doctor, hermit, monk grown white
 With prayer, the broken-hearted nun.
 The martyr, the wan acolyte,
 The incense-swinging child--undone
 Before God fashioned star or sun!
 (11. 51-55)

The monologue's conclusion contains, in the last five lines, an unexpected twist, preceded by many expressions of Agricola's self-righteous arrogance. In these lines the speaker, although in no sense shaken in his belief in predestination and his own election, begins to entertain a different concept about his relationship to God.

God, whom I praise; how could I praise,
 If such as I might understand,
 Make out and reckon on his ways,
 And bargain for his love, and stand,
 Paying a price, at his right hand?
 (11. 56-60)

What a difference might the changing of the final question mark to an exclamation point make in the meaning of this conclusion. As a question, this conclusion ends the poem with a consistent philosophy throughout. The speaker, then, is saying, "If it were possible to earn salvation, a matter of purchasing it with good works, it would become a tawdry thing." If, on the otherhand, we take the liberty of altering the

punctuation, the passage becomes, possibly, one of Browning's "give-aways," as Fairchild would phrase it. The poet may have intended that this conclusion indicate the presence of a disturbing doubt, concerning his Calvinistic faith, in the mind of Johannes Agricola. In support of this suggestion, it may be observed that Agricola twice phrases, then rephrases a thought, each recasting of the phrase resulting in a slight difference in connotation. He first says "might I understand" God's ways, which suggests a nearly universal desire, then changes to "make out and reckon his ways," implying a lowering of God's divine ways to fit man's finite understanding. Secondly, Agricola speaks of a "bargain" for "god's love," which places salvation upon the auction block, as it were, capable of being bought and sold, a concept which makes redemption seem dependent upon worldly values; then alters this to a more exalted phrase, "paying a price, at his right hand," which suggests that prayer and good deeds may purchase salvation, making it have a higher value than his predestined election.

Viewed as evidence of subconscious doubting of the creed which he so vehemently declares in the earlier lines of the poem, this conclusion indicates an abrupt shift taking place in the thinking of Johannes Agricola. As the complete revelation of Agricola's subconscious mind, the ending fulfills Browning's oft-exhibited desire to demonstrate clearly what he saw as the truth in any ambiguous statement of religious philosophy, and the truth, as he saw it, was the opposite of Agricola's expression of Calvinistic doctrine, I see this ending as

a problem ending, which may be interpreted as either consistent or subtly inconsistent, with the ideas which precede it in the monologue. Fairchild expresses surprise that the poet withheld any clear comment on the antinomianism expressed by his speaker,³³ but perhaps this is merely a more subtle version of the "give-away."

In the same paragraph of his article, Mr. Fairchild calls the conclusion to "Porphyria's Lover," ["and yet God has not said a word,"] "a light touch of editorializing."³⁴ He feels that Browning has used the conclusion of this dramatic monologue to suggest paradoxically that God will soon punish the sin of the love-crazed speaker. In this poem, as in "The Laboratory," the poet has described a horrible crime utilizing color imagery, almost turning the incident into an esthetic experience. The climax of this technicolor tale comes in these lines:

That moment she was mine, mine, fair,
Perfectly pure and good: I found
A thing to do, and all her hair
In one long yellow string I wound
Three times her little throat around,
And strangled her.

(ll. 36-41)

The monologue is meditative in nature, since the speaker is sitting alone, after holding his dead mistress all night and meditating upon both the deed and the fact that not even God has questioned it.

This strange final line has a kind of bizarre profanity about it that jars the "ears" of the reader. It is this weirdness of effect

³³Fairchild, p. 238.

³⁴Ibid.

which provides the element of surprise. It is also an excellent flash-back ending, in that it indicates that the speaker's mental state is abnormal, leading the reader to return to the poem in search for more evidence of his insanity. Although Tracy finds the lover "unconventional" but "no more mad than many another of Browning's heroes."³⁵ DeVane calls the poem "the first of Browning's studies of abnormal psychology,"³⁶ which is consistent with Browning's early title, "Mad-house Cells," for this and "Johannes Agricola." The conclusion to this poem is, I believe, most distinctive because its bizarre effect is consistent with the poet's characterization of the lover as one whose words and deeds result from an abnormal mental state.

The ten poems discussed in this chapter have been selected for their excellent demonstrations of Browning's flash-back ending, with its accompanying element of surprise. Having discovered examples of this type of conclusion in each class of dramatic monologue, active, narrative, and meditative, I find that the poet employed this technique widely, not limiting its use to any particular type of monologue. Although Browning was not indebted to O. Henry, or, perhaps, visa versa, for the surprise ending, there is a certain similarity between the two writers' endings. I have observed in Browning's conclusions some of the rhetorical devices which Current-Garcia pointed out in the O. Henry

³⁵Tracy, p. 579.

³⁶DeVane, p. 126.

endings: the delayed revelation, the antithetical disclosure, and the reversal of meaning. More distinctively Browning's is the flash-back effect produced by these endings, as they reveal unsuspected facts about the characters and events of the poem and lead the reader to review his preconceptions about them, perhaps to come up with some entirely new interpretations. Browning seems to have planned such endings with the double purpose of clearing up the ambiguities within the poem and providing the universal appeal of an unexpected twist to conclude the monologue in dashing style.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The conclusion is an important structural element of Robert Browning's dramatic monologues. Roma King aptly says, in his essay, "The Bow and the Lyre," that no structural device of the monologue can be separated from the ideas and emotions which motivate the entire work. "His structure," says King, "is a precise expression of clearly formulated ideas and emotions; his poems are dramatic, presenting a fully developed speaker to a listener. . . . The tone, structure, and cadence are colloquial."¹

In no part of the dramatic monologue can this colloquial style be more clearly noticeable than in the first type of ending, the "return-to-normal" conclusion. In a most natural, true-to-life manner, the monologue proper terminates in order that the speaker may resume his usual activity. At this point in the monologue, the poet does not end, even though the serious business of the poem has been discussed; rather, he allows the reader to experience the speaker's thoughts, actions, and words as he returns to his normal life. Browning illustrates in this type of conclusion his belief in the essential evenness of life; that the mountaintop experience is the rare event in any person's life, and he must somehow return to the business of life, happily

¹Roma A. King, The Bow and the Lyre (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1957), pp. 139-140.

or unhappily, after he has experienced his high moments.

In not all of the dramatic monologues can the conclusion be said to fulfill this normalizing function, as is exhibited in the ingenious, often surprising flash-back ending. The philosopher gives way to the creative artist in a type of conclusion which is frankly contrived, it would appear, to please and illuminate the reader. To quote again from "The Bow and the Lyre," "Browning is inevitably the poet of paradox and irony."² Browning's skillful use of paradox, as well as delayed disclosures and unexpected twists of facts have been discussed as essential to the success of this second type of ending.

I do not claim to have fitted every one of Browning's dramatic monologues, Procrustean-like, into one of these two categories. Some endings have qualities of both types, a case in point being the highly imaginative conclusion to "Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister." In the monologue, the monk is furtively grumbling about the obnoxious (to him) qualities of his colleague, Brother Lawrence, and is planning to bring about his damnation. In the conclusion, the monk is interrupted by what appears to be the vesper bell, calling him to devotions.

Hy, Zy, Hine.
'St. There's Vespers. Plena gratia,
Ave Virgo! Gr-rr-you swine.
(11. 70-72)

The ringing of the bell signals a return to the normal activity of the cloister, fitting this conclusion into Group I; however, the final

²Ibid., p. 137.

curse, mingled with words of prayer, indicates that the monk's mind still dwells upon his hatred for Brother Lawrence, not upon the prayer to the Virgin. The reader's attention, moreover, is focused upon the beginning line, "Gr-rr--there go, my heart's abhorence!" due to the repetition of the curse in the conclusion, making this a flash-back ending.

A characteristic shared by endings of both types is their apparently deliberate separation from the body of the monologue. In each dramatic monologue studied, an abrupt shift in mood, tone, and ← subject matter occurs before the conclusion. This observance leads me to conclude that Browning consciously observed in his dramatic poetry the Aristotelian concept that every dramatic work of literature must have a clearly defined beginning, middle, and end; and he developed each, particularly his endings, as important structural devices.

The most important inference to be drawn from this study of Browning's conclusions is that they are not only extremely interesting but are vital to the success of each poem. These conclusions, as it were, produce the taste that remains with the reader, the aftermath of the dramatic poem. That the poet realized this is reflected in the originality of his endings and his obviously careful attention to them as an important device in the overall plan of the monologue. It is, therefore, Browning the artist and craftsman that emerges. Symons expresses this view of the poet most effectively as follows:

It has been, as a rule, strangely overlooked, though it is a matter of the first moment, that Browning's poems are in the most precise sense works of art, and this in a very high degree, positive and relative, if we understand by a "work of art" a poem which attains its end and fulfills its purpose completely, and which has a worthy end and a plain purpose to attain.³

It is this view of Robert Browning that this paper has hopefully demonstrated by presenting a close study of one element in his artistic design.

³Arthur Symons, An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning (London, 1916), p. 14.

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