In a significantly large portion of the later poetry, Browning dispenses with the dramatic monologue and uses the form of the narrative. This shift is important in view of the rise of the novel as the dominant literary form in the nineteenth century. A wide-ranging mind such as Browning's could not but respond to the new impetus. The development of the novel towards a more inward rendering of experience was matched by Browning's creation of complex effects within the dramatic monologue.

Scholes and Kellogg are of the opinion that the 'tendency of modern novelists to shy away from full omniscience in one direction or another ...is tied to certain changes in the entire cultural climate which have made some facets of this nineteenth century device untenable in the twentieth century,'¹ A crucial change lay in what Langbaum terms 'the modern habit of allowing the literary work to establish its own moral: judgements'.² This could only be achieved through a rigorously objective presentation. Browning's dramatic monologues are a step in this direction. The form is, in fact, the ideal solution to the modern novelist's problem of presenting the mind of a character without having recourse to the authorial voice.

But, as Wayne Booth has shown in his masterly book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, complete objectivity is a myth. He points out that "the emotions and judgements of the implied author are ... the very stuff out of which great fiction is made."\(^3\) For Browning, too, art was a means of telling the truth "obliquely". As he put it in *The Ring and the Book*—the writer may "write a book shall mean, beyond the facts, / Suffice the eye and save the soul beside" (XII, 866-67). Browning himself probably realized that though dramatic indirection afforded opportunities for discrimination and qualification, the dramatic monologue was, of necessity, a brief vignette, positing a narrow range of viewpoints, and so did not always allow a completely unequivocal exposure of the truth. In *The Ring and the Book* Browning had sought to present a completer truth through multiple viewpoints raised through the pattern created by nine speakers. But, as John Killham points out, "the method of juxtaposing his monologues within the framework of explicit moral condemnation destroys the irony which elsewhere so stimulates the reader into admiration of his art."\(^4\)

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Browning's problem in his later period was to find a way to express truths while at the same time abjuring narrative omniscience. In the longer narrative poems, he holds in tension differing sets of ideas and viewpoints, sometimes controlling them through the consciousness of a narrator so that he has the simultaneous advantage of dramatic presentation and a wider range of perceptions. Thus, dramatic projection combined with a multiplicity of interrelated perspectives is the method adopted by Browning to present the ambiguous multiplicity of reality as also to derive moral values from it. The importance of this method lies in its continued use by twentieth century novelists as a way of giving the reader the multi-faceted 'feel' of an experience.

Red Cotton Night-Cap Country (1873) is not only an attempt by Browning to study another morbid case of the soul, it is also an exploration from a different angle of the major theme of Fifine at the Fair—the conflict between the flesh and the spirit and the deceptiveness of appearances. But while in Fifine, the action is 'internalized' and the problem a more or less hypothetical one (at least till the end), in Red Cotton
Night-Cap Country external scene and event provide the base for a well-developed narrative line which gives Browning's speculations an air of immediacy. His concern in the poem is much the same as in The Ring and the Book—to delve into a sordid tale devoid of conventional poetic beauty for meaningful values. It is a process of moral exploration that ultimately transforms inert "facts" into "a thing of truth".

In The Ring and the Book the dramatic exposition of the same incident by a number of characters from their own particular point of view leads to a shift in the focus from the action of the story (which is narrated in Book I) to the character's comprehension of that action. The focus-character's view initially appears to illuminate the central issue, but really tends to illuminate the viewer himself. But in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country Browning adopts only minimally this dramatically expressive point of view technique of presenting character and event simultaneously. His method is rather to focus the action through a narrator, who in this case is not directly involved in the story, but whose interest in it serves as a means of directing attention to and laying emphasis
on significant aspects of the story. The narrator assumes almost the same significance as he does in the fiction of Henry James and Conrad, a means of limiting and controlling the area and even the nature of the reader's responses.

It is important to note that in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country the narrator is the author himself; so that Browning really has recourse to two narrative voices—the one, that of the omniscient recorder of factual matter, and the other, the tentative, ambivalent voice of someone who is feeling his way through arid "fact" to the psychological "truth", apportioning to it value in terms of moral action. It is when he assumes the latter voice, as will be shown during the analysis of the poem, that Browning comes very close to using a technique characteristic of modern fiction, whose object is what Conrad termed a "moral discovery"—not the illustration of a preconceived moral truth, but by the very fact of artistically ordering certain facets of life, making a discovery about the meaning of life itself.

The poem opens with a firmly sketched-in, minutely observed descriptive backcloth which provides that "air of reality (solidity of specification)"\(^5\), that Henry James

so admired and whose outward clarity serves to define the artist's essential concern with "soul", to show that a person

...if he lack not soul, may learn to know,
Earth's ugliest walled and ceiled imprisonment
May suffer, through its single rent in roof,
Admittance of a cataract of light... (p.372)

Browning's expansiveness, as he proceeds from an exposition of different kinds of night-caps and, surprisingly, violins, to an "incident of Ninety-Two, has special advantages. It allows him a variety of effects not possible in a more restricted, tightly ordered field. There is the tongue-in-cheek irony that laughs good-naturedly at the priggishness of small-town mentality in his description of the little church, "Our brand-new stone cream coloured masterpiece" (p.372). The urbane, conversational tone creates an impression of normality that will contrast effectively with the actual tale of self-mutilation and suicide, and also serves to familiarize the reader with an important motif in the poem—the Church of Ravissante. The under-current of satire in Browning's treatment of the theme of religious superstition will have echoes throughout the poem and will function importantly in the presentation of Miranda's case. Further, Browning's ironic technique of frequently presenting events in the
actual voices of the participants varies his narrative tone. J. Hillis Miller calls this 'the method of indirection' and describes the movement of the poem as spiral one: "The idea is to reach the depths by lingering on the surface, by just that 'prolonged hovering flight of the subjective over the outstretched ground of the case supposed' for which James praised Conrad." 6

Browning first presents Miranda as he appeared to the society around him and describes Clairvaux (Miranda's country-home) and especially the tower that he has built in terms of normal supposition. But appearances can be deceptive; and in his role of perceptive narrator, Browning notes "a sense that something is amiss, Something out of sorts in the display" (p.380). The narrative tension is upheld at this point by two conflicting points of view: the auditor's, that insists on the "whiteness" or normalcy of what is being retold, which contrasts with the "redness" that the narrator seeks to demonstrate. This dual argument slowly builds up to an enunciation of the primary motifs which form the poems symbolic frame of reference—"Notion of outside mound and inside mash, /Towers yet intact round turfy rottenness" (p.385).

The twin contrasted symbols of tower and turf, the former standing for the self-indulgent life of the flesh and the latter, the life of the spirit, with its struggle

for self-mastery, are employed as a means of formal control over the massed details and are expressive of the moral intent of the poem. For Miranda's case, as the narrator sees it and is concerned to make the readers see, is essentially a problem of faith and of mistaken choices. Both the emotional and intellectual background to Miranda's problem is rendered in detail. Molière's Sganarelle plays the role of the artful schemer, helping to salve a guilty conscience, (a role played by Sagacity in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau), advocating—'Youth, strength and lustihood can sleep on turf/Yet pace the stony platform afterward': (p.387).

In the succeeding sections, Browning uses the epistolary method (Miranda's ''airy record to a confidant'') to dramatize the narrative, while building up through repetition of the symbols the strife within Miranda and his inability to make a firm moral choice. Miranda means to have his cake and eat it too. But his confidence in himself lacks the firm moral base that would make it valid. "'Trust me, I know the world, and know myself,/And know where duty takes me—in good time!" (p.389). Browning's ironical treatment of Miranda's dilettantish attitude reveals itself obliquely through his style. The technique of commentary from Miranda's view-point provides a more
cogent picture of Miranda's character than direct comment: "At all points thus against illusion armed..."—the very
diction demands that the statement be read ironically.

The description of the meeting between Miranda and
Clara, given in a tempo that has been speeded up to
correspond to Miranda's flurried and fervent actions, is
followed by slow-paced comment: "Truth I say, truth I mean,
this love was true..." (p.390). But even so, moral definiteness
is absent, for the narrator is aware of contradictions
inherent in the situation:

...there exists
A falsish false, for truth's inside the same,
And truth that's only half true, falsish truth. (p.390)

The objective account of Clara's past history is varied by
recourse to a dramatic mode of third person commentary
representing society gossip and direct presentation of
Miranda's reactions: "Renounce the world for them—some
day I will:/Meantime, to me let her become the world" (p.394).
The ambiguity of Miranda's situation is highlighted. On the
one hand, the narrator builds up an idea of the weakness in
his character through direct comment: "Monsieur Léonce
Miranda, meant to lean/By nature" (p.394); and again:

Monsieur Léonce Miranda probably
Had else been loath to cast the mask aside,
So politic, so self-preservative,
Therefore so pardonable—though so wrong! (p.395)
On the other hand, the narrator provides a foil by using particular incidents to portray Miranda's confused impulsiveness: his attempt to reproduce Parisian tastes at Clairvaux, his destruction of the old Norman priory. The incidents are so shaped as to inform our sense of character. Miranda's indecisiveness is not wholly of his own making; his mother further compounds it by ordering 'Keep both halves, yet do no detriment/To either!' (p.399).

The heralding of the New Year, described by Browning in vivid poetic imagery, introduces another phase in Miranda's life. The crucial scene of Miranda's summons to his mother's death-bed has all the compelling vividness of Browning's best dramatic manner, while its significance is integrated into the symbolic framework:

The tawdry tent, pictorial, musical,
Poetical, besprinkled with hearts and darts;
Its cobwebwork, betinselled stitchery,
Lay dust about our sleeper on the turf,
And showed the outer towers distinct and dread. (p.402)

Beyond this Browning as narrator declines to either comment or analyze. The conflict within Miranda is not particularized except now and then, through telling phrases. The emphasis here is on the ironical portrayal of the money-grubbing Cousinry, through dialogue and visual particulars. The Cousinry help to enhance the complexity of the points of
reference by which Miranda is to be ultimately judged. And because the narrative has told us what to make of the main character, not directly, but through the manipulation of the symbols of the tower, turf and intermediary tent, and also shown the character objectively, we can move to the next important episode with our expectations clear and intense.

The climactic scene of the burning of Miranda's hands is delineated by means of four different voices and is open to four different interpretations: that of the protagonist himself, to whom the burning of his hands becomes a sacrificial rite to achieve purity; the doctor, who pronounces his patient to be mad; the narrator, who finds in the concept of the distinction between the body and the soul, an explanation for Miranda's being ''insensible to pain''; and the Cousinry, who see in this an incentive to hasten their ''purpose of reform''. What follows is concentrated narrative that carries forward the action swiftly towards the next major event. The insistent use of the symbolic tower and turf to denote the twin impulses of Miranda's being is one means of imposing unity over the narrative structure. More interesting to the reader is Browning's concern, later developed so finely by Henry James, of illuminating his character's concern with the meaning of
what is happening; so that the narrative can be said to encompass the development of the character's consciousness about life. Browning's aim here is the direct apprehension of the 'truth', not just a partial point of view. And since truth's source is the human mind, an evaluation of truth necessarily becomes an evaluation of character.

But this evaluation differs from the process in a dramatic monologue. As Langbaum observes, "the dramatic monologue must at some point be abandoned where logical completeness is desired." In Red Cotton Night-Cap Country we have a balance between the inside and the outside points of view that is reminiscent of a novel by Conrad: a filtering of the action through the consciousness of the main character, what it meant to him, what difference it made to him, and what difference it made in him; and also a general perspective, created mainly by the narrator's expository comments, which prevents the reader from uncritically identifying himself with the character's thoughts. But even here, the narrator is not omniscient, but rather concerned to throw as much light as possible on the action in order to aid judgement.

The digression on Hilsand, who, according to the narrator, was better equipped to help Miranda "on the path of rectitude" (p.408) than conventional channels, prefaces another on the bases of faith and belief. Economy here is sacrificed in the interests of detailed exposition of what the narrator believes to be the proper area for analysis—the actions emerging from a man's beliefs and not the beliefs themselves. This theme adds an extra dimension to Browning's examination of the well-springs of human motive and action. As in The Ring and the Book, the institutions of revealed religion are inadequate guides. Browning sets Miranda's case against a religious background to emphasize the disparity between a cold-blooded, superficial dogma, devoid of intrinsic moral quality and an anguished quest for faith, however misguided. Miranda's doublings and twistings under the grip of circumstance are viewed sympathetically by the narrator—"According to his lights, I praise the man" (p.411).

The actual scene of Miranda's jump from the tower, at once an emotional and moral crisis, is presented dramatically, an actual rendering of the event as it appeared to the character at the moment of its occurrence, the result of which is to make vivid and concrete what takes place deep within Miranda's soul. The narrator
remains impersonal; the reader is invited to form his own judgements about the validity of Miranda's action. Browning's concern is with exposing a very compelling human situation to our view, and his narrative method awakens the perceptions of the reader.

Miranda seeks not to evade issues but to come to terms with them. It is what Conrad describes in *Lord Jim* as "the struggles of an individual trying to save from the fire his idea of what his moral identity should be". The intensity derives from the juxtaposition of concepts—strength and weakness, despot and enchantress, acorns and life-apples, Queen and the 'unrobed One'. Miranda's conflict thus becomes one between opposing systems of thought and ways of life. Up till now, the narrator had made no direct comment (except obliquely, through the symbols of turf and tower) on the upheaval within Miranda that had led to various events like his renouncing Clara and then going back to her, his attempted suicide and the burning of his hands. Now he provides the rationale for these acts by dramatizing Miranda's inner conflicts. Miranda's speech is one-sided argument, yet the implied dramatic interplay between different perspectives gives

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added depth. The method of rhetorical questions gives his heart-searching a poignancy reminiscent of Lord Jim's. Like Lord Jim, Miranda seems to be involved in 'a dispute with an invisible personality, an antagonistic and inseparable partner of his existence—another possessor of his soul.'

Like Jim, Miranda complicates rather than resolves issues by being so sensitive yet so naive. For him, the problem is just 'managing to live on terms with both/Opposing potentates, the Power and you' (p.415), and its solution, an expression of indomitable faith in the miracle-working Virgin of Ravissante, and, as a means of pleasing her by this show of faith, leaping down from the high tower.

It is remarkable how Browning conditions our responses to Miranda through the diction even while remaining withdrawn in his narrator's stance. The first part of Miranda's speech reveals a tendency in him to think of his situation in terms of a bargain to be struck with the Ravissante. The frequent use of words like gain, loss, plain-dealing, instalment, purchase, tribute-money, is typical of this attitude. It is this reduction of a complex problem to such simplistic terms that leads to Miranda's self-delusion. In a manner similar to Conrad's exposure of Lord Jim, Miranda's emotional stresses are revealed from the inside by Browning, without

any explicit judgement; but on the whole, the narrator's attitude to his confusions and somewhat immature reactions is one of sympathy and understanding. "I see no slightest sign/Of folly" (p.412), he says. We remember Marlowe saying in Conrad's story: "It was tragic enough and funny enough in all conscience to call aloud for compassion, and in what was I better than the rest of us to refuse him my pity?"10.

Miranda's fervent, exalted faith, even if self-centred, contrasts favourably with the cynicism of the clergy, who opine: "What folly does the madman expect?/No faith obtains—in this late age, at least—/Such cure as that! We ease rheumatics, though!" (p.414). Thus, Browning provides the material for a correct assessment without intrusive commentary. At the climax of his peroration, Miranda enlarges his own problem of faith for the world at large, but this position is not maintained, once more underlining his essential weakness. Miranda's leap is, in his own eyes, the resolution of his "Spiritual effort to compound for fault/By payment of devotion" (p.411). The gardener, who witnesses the catastrophe, emphasizes the irony inherent in the situation by his remark—"Angels would take him! Mad!" (p.417). Just as Jim's action is assessed not by

Iarlowe alone but by others like Chester who says: 'What's all the to-do about? A bit of ass's skin...You must see things exactly as they are...'' (p.125); and the French lieutenant: ''And what life may be worth when...the honour is gone—ah ça! par exemple—I can offer no opinion...''(p.115), so Miranda's action admits of different interpretations.

Browning's pointed intervention, using his authorial voice at this juncture, serves to minimize the tension, detaching the reader from the experience presented and preparing him for an assessment of the meaning. But before this can be done, the loose ends have to be tidied up in the interests of narrative coherence. Clara's speeches serve not only to round out the action but also to reveal character; her second confrontation with the cousinry shows her unexpected strength and reinforce the theme of the deceitfulness of appearances. In his more overt judgement of Clara's character, Browning uses a fully developed imagery that produces as much a sense of reality as ''inside'' representation would. As regards the judgements themselves, Browning as narrator deliberately keeps them fluid, for the complexity of interpreting motives precludes simple formulas of right and wrong. The reader's own evaluation, his perception of the significance of events are sought to be played off against a scheme of values, a general perspective
which encompasses such favourite Browning theories as "Success is nought, endeavour's all" (p.422) and "Love bids touch truth, endure truth, and embrace/Truth, though, embracing truth, love crush itself" (p.423). If the narrator had earlier praised Miranda—"According to his lights I praise the man" (p.411), he is now critical—"Miranda hardly did his best with life" (p.422). Clara is the "happier specimen" and yet we have the implicit irony of his description of the "finished little piece" (p.422) who, "caterpillar-like" fed on "unlimited Miranda-leaf" (p.423). Yet along with moral condemnation, there is pity and compassion. To aid our total apprehension of the characters, Browning sketches in, with biting sarcasm, the clergy who should have shown Miranda the true path, but rather chose to exploit his spiritual confusion for material gain—"trundled money-muck/To midden and the main heap oft enough" (p.423).

It was Turgenev who insisted—"Realism by itself is fatal—truth, however powerful, is not art." It is interesting to note that Browning met the Russian author in 1871, during grouse-shooting in the Highlands. In Turgenev's

12. Ibid., p.55.
art, Browning may have found a corroboration of his intention of looking at real life, not as mere facts in themselves, but only through the human soul and in their effects upon personality. So that, in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country Browning "is not a journalist reporting the bald external facts of Miranda's case."

Through the use of a narrative persona, he assumes the role of the narrator as enquirer. His aim is "Truth, and nothing else" (p.425); the imagery of light which Browning uses in this connection—flash, blaze, effulgence, reveals the illuminating nature of this experience of interpretation and evaluation. As in Conrad's fiction, the superiority of imaginative truth over empirical truth is affirmed.

Apart from its interest as a further attempt by Browning to find meaningful values in sordid matters, The Inn Album (1875) is noteworthy because of its special methods as regards structure and narrative technique. Most commentators have noted its affinities with the drama and the novel. Roma A. King writes: "The Inn Album does give evidence of having been conceived as drama," Felgar comments: "Browning is trying to beat the novelists at

their own game by having the best of both worlds, the concentration and intensity of poetry, in addition to the realism and melodrama of Dickens and Thackeray.'^{15} Philip Drew is of the opinion that "it gives the feeling of Victorian life that we find and value in the great novelists.'^{16} The present reading holds that through this unique combination of drama and novel, Browning comes very close to the point-of-view method of dramatized consciousness that is characteristic of the artistic achievement of a 'modern' novelist like Henry James.

Browning rarely ever told a story for its own sake, and in *The Inn Album*, too, his aim is not merely to tell a sensational story where the plot is the sole concern and the action has little to do with the personal qualities of the characters. It is the personal reaction to circumstance that remains Browning's central concern, as it is the concern of novelists like James and Conrad. The apparatus of melodrama is used, but because this subserves his artistic vision, there is no sense of contrivance. Browning's intention in this poem is more serious and more imaginative than mere manipulation of curiosity and suspense.

In *Red Cottion Night-Cap Country* the truth of the situation was conceived by Browning in a sudden flash of illumination, but he conveyed it to the reader as meaning in the process of being shaped, exploring the moral implications in a slow, digressive fashion by means of a narrative persona. In *The Inn Album*, however, he achieves concentration and immediacy by adopting a dramatic structure within a narrative framework. The descriptive method is abandoned in favour of dialogue as a medium for advancing action and portraying character. Third-person narrative is pared down to a minimum. *The Inn Album* shows Browning superbly in control of his material, linking the intensity that drama provides with the fullness and completeness of a well-narrated story with all its elements of surprise, climax and excitement.

The story, a sensational one of intrigue, seduction, suicide and murder, is not very remarkable or promising from the aesthetic point of view. But for Browning it provides a base for a reading into human character and motivation. Stevenson remarked: "With each new subject... the true artist will vary his method and change the point of attack". Browning does this by so constructing his narrative as to make the conduct of the main characters

the subject of debate among themselves. We remember James' remark in this context: "I could think so little of any situation that didn't depend for its interest on the nature of the persons situated and thereby on their way of taking it". The emphasis is on the tactics of presentation through the consciousness of characters rather than through an objective presentation of the author's viewpoint. This is the Jamesian technique of making the presented occasion tell all its story itself. Aesthetic distance is maintained, so that the moral significance emerges as a direct result of our perception of these characters, not as opinions imposed upon us by the author himself.

Browning's narrative in The Inn Album takes a single event that has occurred in the past and examines its repercussions on the present lives of all concerned (either directly or indirectly) with it. Both the Elder Man and the Younger Man have loved and lost the same lady, though they realize this only later. The youth has been rescued from a life of stagnation by the "much-experienced man", has been introduced to the pleasures of society life and then been advised to marry the Cousin, who in her turn seeks the advice of her friend, the Lady. The dual perspective

of time past and time present at once enriches the
narrative, for the past, recaptured in retrospect, at
once acquires fresh meaning. The exposition, subtly
carried out step by step along with the story, is done
through dialogue, the narrator limiting himself to a
brief description of the setting and the external features
of the characters, which corresponds almost to the stage
directions in a play.

The limitation of what we know and think about
these characters to what they themselves know and think
about each other at this point ensures objectivity.
Browning cleverly ensures the reader's interest by
maintaining the swift pace of the dialogue, releasing
new information in a phased manner and abjuring psychological
subtleties at least till we are familiar with the characters.
The rich texture of the dialogue is evident from the Younger
Man's first speech, which provides an elucidation of the
present action: the two men have been playing cards and
he, surprisingly, has won; an explication of the relationship
between the two men: the Younger Man looks upon himself
as a disciple; and a sketch of the social background against
which the story is to unfold:

I'm off for Paris, there's the Opera—there's
The Salon, there's a china-sale,—beside
Chantilly; and, for good companionship,
There's such-and— such and So-and-so. (p.428)
This last aspect, i.e. the social setting, is an important means of giving physical presence and credible existence to the characters themselves.

The conversations in Section I and II establish the potentialities and motive forces of the two principal characters, which are afterwards made evident by actual events, and also provide an indirect view of the third, the Lady. In true Jamesian manner, the protagonists are like players in a game. With each new revelation of fact in the present and succeeding sections, the situation takes a more meaningful turn. Browning shows a novelist's skill in selecting and accumulating significant detail to highlight the thematic opposition of concepts like innocence and experience, ignorance and knowledge, reason and intuition, vice and virtue and to lay unobtrusively the moral norms against which the characters are to be judged. His method is, as Henry James describes it in the Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, the method of a novelist who saw characters as "subject to the chances, the complications of existence, and saw them vividly, but then had to find for them the right relations, those that would most bring them out; to imagine, to invent and select and piece together the situations most useful and favourable to the sense of the creatures themselves, the complications
they would be most likely to produce and feel'.'

The Younger Man's innocence is established by the tone of his conversation with the Elder Man. Initially dazzled by the polished exterior that the Elder Man presents, he yet has gained enough perception from experience to see their relationship in a more realistic light. Nevertheless, commitment has destroyed the initial innocence and even his freedom to act. Experience has also shown him his folly in meekly and humbly accepting his lot, instead of making vigorous efforts to transform the situation. In the case of the Elder Man, experience has brought disillusionment, cynicism and hatred. He is a self-confessed failure: "...so hate alike/Failure and who caused failure" (p.434). His cold materialism is evinced by the epithets he uses to describe himself—polisher, collector. Yet, even as he recognizes his deeds as 'The devil's doing' (p.435), there is in him the saving grace of remorse:

...yet I seem to think
Now when all's done,—think with 'a head reposed'  
In French phrase—hope I think I meant to do 
All requisite for such a rarity...

(p.435)

He has 'proved the fool' in misjudging the quality of

the woman he has made a proposition to. Experience has brought him a kind of insight, which, in turn, increases his frustration. Each man acknowledges the saving, redeeming power of the woman's love, had it been given. In a crucial passage with tragic overtones the Elder Man speaks:

...But I see, Slowly, surely, creeps
Day by day over me the conviction—here
Was life's prize grasped at, gained, and then let go!
That with her—may be, for her,—I had felt
Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect
Any or all the fancies stëggish here
In the head that needs the hand she would not take
And I shall never lift now.

(p.437)

A little later comes our first intimation that the fault may not be wholly one-sided:

Therefore I hate myself—-but how much worse
Do not I hate who would not understand,
Let me repair things—no, but sent a-slide
My folly falteringly, stumblingly
Down, down and deeper down...

(p.437)

But lest we tend to sympathize too closely with this man, Brownin; would have us judge the quality of his reactions by juxtaposing them with the simplicity of the Younger Man's "I can't hate" (p.434). It is this multiplication of view-points that highlights the significance of a character's perception of the particular situation, and at the same time gives us a sense of his character, even while it reinforces
Browning's view of the essentially paradoxical nature of human behaviour and of the tentativeness of all judgements about it.

Having deliberately given up the digressive privileges of the traditional narrative form, Browning uses a well-integrated pattern of imagery and symbol to enrich and deepen the significance of the narrative, and to impose aesthetic order upon his material. The album at the inn is not only symbolic of the main themes of the story—friendship and love, it becomes a means of revealing character, as each person refers to it in his or her own particular manner. For the Elder Man, the Album is a convenient place to scribble accounts in, pointing to his role as a despoiler of innocence. But later, it becomes representative of his inmost thoughts:

Love once and you love always. Why, it's down
Here in the Album: every lover knows
Love may use hate but—turn to hate, itself—
Turn even to indifference—no, indeed!

(p.451)

The Younger Man reveals his intrinsic honesty when he finds that "To spout like Mister Mild Acclivity/In album-language" (p.429) goes against the grain. To the Younger Woman, the album is an inspiration to look at life poetically, but in the concluding section, it aids her
in her task of facing reality with equanimity. The Lady's last reference to the album as she dies confirms our perception of her as a creature of extremes, who sees life solely in terms of black and white. Ryals comments that the Album "becomes symbolic of how truth and seeming are so often at variance". The Eden imagery (with its recurrent references to the fruit of knowledge and the arch-enemy, Satan, associated with the serpent) links the poem to the mythic pattern of the fall and redemption, and also emphasizes its character as a morality probing human codes and values. In a similar way, James attempts to increase the evocativeness of his narrative by the images of the dove and the serpent in The Wings of the Dove and a symbolic use of the flawed bowl in The Golden Bowl.

The probing of the inner life demands that the author delve deep into the subconscious. But much more takes place in the minds of the characters than they would speak out in everyday life. In order to communicate that "more" without stepping in himself as the omniscient author, Browning throws his characters into situations that call for evaluation of past conduct and of present positions. Thus, in Conrad's Lord Jim, Marlowe's sympathetic interest leads Jim to unburden his inner

confusions in a manner in which the unspoken is more revealing than the explicit. In The Inn Album the conflict between the Younger Woman's romantically naive view of love and marriage and the Lady's view which proceeds from 'sad apprenticeship', in Section III, creates a similar situation. The girl looks upon her friend's married life as 'trellised bliss/Of blush-rose bower' and 'One fairy tent with pitcher leaves that held/Wine and a flowery wealth of suns and moons,/And magic fruits whereon angels feed...'' (p.442). In contrast, the Lady terms her married life as 'Inferno' (p.444). The allusiveness of Browning's art can be seen in the manner in which he packs dialogue with meaning: when the younger woman laughingly composes poetry, she refers to love, but the Lady thinks of death and oblivion. This is indirect and oblique view of the characters that provides the 'psychological reason', as James puts it.

The girl's terror (''face struck sudden white'') is the outcome of her view of the murky depths of experience and of her sudden realization that her innocence is 'easy ignorance' (p.443). Further contrast between the girl's spontaneity and the elder woman's reticence (''You were/Are, ever will be the

locked lady") p.444, is important in the light of subsequent developments, when her love for her friend is eclipsed by her love for the Younger Man, and when, in her innocence, she adopts a more positive attitude than has been possible for the more experienced woman.

Another situation of the same kind is created by the unexpected meeting of the Elder Man and the Lady at the inn parlour. It is a confrontation that leads each to accusation, explanation and justification. The process is more revealing of character and motivation than either intends or is aware of. Each is brought face to face with the ugly realities of existence devoid of love.

The conflict in Section IV is between acceptance of mistake, acknowledged with humble sincerity and a rigid pride of self-righteousness. Langbaum's remark with regard to the dramatic monologue is apt in this situation—'extraordinary motives in Browning come not from disordered subconscious urges, but, as in Henry James, from the highest moral and intellectual refinement'.22 And Browning's moral discrimination is as keen as James'. In the case of the Lady, her moral sensitivity, laudable in itself, has encouraged self-deception; the refined

sensibility has hardened into a conventional morality that becomes an end in itself, unresponsive to the actual issues of living. Her idealism is suspect. We have in her the kind of moral and emotional inadequacy involved in George Eliot's vision of the latter-day St. Theresas. Her martyred effacement of personality is not the redemptive action that she believes it to be. In chasing the chimera of the ideal, divorced from the real, she has deliberately rejected life in favour of a kind of spiritual death. Instead of using the Elder Man's confession as a means of purifying and deepening their relationship, she retreats behind a facade of martyred indignation and misguided idealism. She ignores the Elder Man's plea that her "'angelic potency/Lift me from out perdition's deep of deeps/To light and life and love!'" (p.453), and instead retaliates in what the narrator calls "'the hard, grey, grimly comic speech'" (p.454). In her "'crowned contempt'" she calls the Elder Man the "'Arch-Cheat'" and "'the Adversary'". But the ironical possibility emerges that her attitude has made him so. She has misused her potentialities for good. Hers is not the liberal and awakened sensibility that cuts across the surface of evil to the essential core of goodness. We remember in this context Browning's words in Fifine at the Fair:
But touched aright, prompt yield each particle
its tongue
Of elemental flame,—no matter whence flame
sprung
From gums and spice, or else from straw and
rottenness,
So long as soul has power to make them burn, (LV)

Section V increases the complexity of the situation
with the arrival of the Younger Man. But now that the
facts are known, the emphasis is on the thoughts of each-
character about the situation at hand. Browning dramatizes
the consciousness of each, as each is allowed the inter-
pretations, inferences and explanations of which he or she
alone is capable. Browning's narrative art at this point
encompasses not so much the kind of psychological analysis
presented in a dramatic monologue, but, as in Henry James,
"the dramatic presentation of mental states as the
characters themselves are conscious of them".23 Simul-
taneously, however, an outside view of the characters is
also provided through the subtle balancing of the dialogue,
so that the presentation and evaluation proceed hand-in-hand.
It is in this creation of multiple viewpoints, which in
their inter-relationship define the conditions of the
story and highlight its significance, that Browning shows
his affinities with the technique of the modern novel.

23. J.W. Beach, The Twentieth Century Novel: A Study in
Technique (New York: Appleton Century Crofts Inc.,
1932), Indian Reprint, Ludhiana: Lyall Book Depot,
1965, p.197.
The three-pronged situation of emotional conflict further reveals character at the same time that it advances the action. Browning shows his technical maturity in overcoming his reluctance (a reluctance which had proved a major drawback during his early experiments with drama) to give his characters only those qualities that are strictly necessary for the action. The Youth has advanced in his knowledge of the ways of the world, and though he says miserably "'There's no unknowing what one knows'" there is no trace in him of cynicism or of negation. His love for the Lady intensely loyal:

...Half an hour ago,
I held your master for my best of friends;
And now I hate him! Four years since, you seemed
My hearts one love: well, and you so remain!

(p.455-56)

The Lady's stance as teacher and moral superior is ironical. Her words reveal the extent of her self-delusion and pride—"'in my verdict lies your fate'" (p.456) and "'That reptile capture you? I conquered him'" (p.457).

The most telling evidence against the Lady comes in glimpse of her duplicity; happiness in love, as she conceives it, is based on ignorance. She advises the
Younger Man: "'Never let her know/How near came taint of your companionship!'" (p.457). She reveals an essential confusion of mind as to values—ignorance she calls a sin, yet she would have her husband remain ignorant of her past because that would abolish his faith in her as 'pure and true'. The idea emerges that for her, external impression counts a great deal. In the light of the narrator's indication of the change wrought in the Elder Man:

"'Ah'!—draws a long breath with a new strange look
The man she interpellates—soul a-stir
Under its covert, as, beneath the dust,
A coppery sparkle all at once denotes
The hid snake has conceived a purpose (p.457)

the lady's contention, "'I yearn to save/And not to destroy!'" (p.457) shows itself as false. Experience and knowledge for her have not been nurturing, fostering influences. Her unbending attitude has destroyed the last vestiges of faith and truth in the Elder Man, and leads to his final descent to dastardly behaviour. In the succeeding section, (VI) he becomes Satan, tempting the Youth to "'strip the tree/Of fruit desirable to make one wise'" (p.462).

In Section VII, the tension between the protagonists is resolved in the clarity of discovery. The crisis has
forced on each a sharper insight. The Lady now sees herself as blameworthy:

I do believe I should have straight assumed
My proper function, and sustained a soul,
—Nor aimed at being sustained myself
By some man's soul—the weaker woman's want!

(p.463)

The Young Man sees very clearly his duty—to rescue, redeem, avenge and protect. He has put his new experience and knowledge to fruitful action. His humility—"'redeem myself/The stupidest of sinners'" (p.464) highlights by ironic contrast the selfish obtuseness of the Lady:

...Blame I take
Nowise upon me as I ask myself
—You—how can you, whose soul I seemed to read
The limpid eyes through, have declined so deep
Even with him for consort?

(p.462)

Unlike the narrator in Red Cotton Night-Cap Country the narrator in The Inn Album studiously avoids giving any explicit opinion about the Lady. Yet, we are subtly made aware of the inadequacies in her character, chiefly through the overtones in her speeches. The Elder Man, with his sordid proposal, arouses in her an almost physical revulsion (''Takes it as you tough carrion''). Roma A. King interprets this as an instance of ''her maturity, her simultaneous devotion to the ideal and her clearheaded awareness of the ways of the world''24. On the other hand,

24. The Focusing Artifice; p.199.
viewed in the light of the violent imagery that she uses—serpent, poison-seed, leprosy, plague-spot—we might see the extreme nature of her reactions as a symptom of her exaggerated refinement. The contrast with the simple, sincerely unpretentious nature of the Young Man's words is pointed.

The climax, when the Young Man springs upon the Elder Man and kills him and the Lady chooses her own 'refining fire' by committing suicide, is handled with reticence and economy. There is a minimum of emotional display, but Browning maintains the dramatic tension by focusing attention on character as it emerges from the incident.

For the problem of incident has been resolved; what remains to be resolved is the matter of interpretation. Browning directs our attention to the point of intensest interest—the ambiguity of the Lady's character as an off-shoot of the paradoxial nature of all moral ideals and the tentativeness of all judgements. If the Lady's suicide is an affirmation of her devotion to the ideal, it is also seen as an escapist's way of coping with reality. We remember as a instance in contrast, Isabel Archer's proud assertion in *A Portrait of a Lady* 'One must accept
one's deeds' and her return to a future of moral
challenge. A further contrast is presented by Pompilia's
compassionate magnanimity in her dying moments: ''I am
saved through him/So as by fire; to him--thanks and
farewell'' (The Ring and the Book, VII, 1738-39). In
The Inn Album the Lady's reaction to the murder--''And
that was good but useless'' (p.468), and her last references
to the dead man as ''Villain'', and ''fool'''--emphasize
her hard, unforgiving nature. Unlike the positive idealism
of the Youth, her idealism has led to negation. Her last
words are characteristically full of the rhetoric that
has throughout been the giveaway of her misguided line
of action. It is significant that the narrator never-
makes the kind of explicitly approving remark with regard
to the Lady as he does with regard to the Youth and the
Younger Woman, who are called the ''good, strong fellow''
and the ''good, gay girl'' respectively.

Thus, while one can agree with Philp Drew that the
characters in The Inn Album' perform what is almost a
masque of Vice and Virtue, enacting a basic conflict:25,
our agreement has to be qualified with the observation
that in keeping with Browning's trend of thought in his

later years, these concepts are not viewed as absolutes.

One remembers the lines in *The Ring and the Book*:

> Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,  
> Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,  
> Shows one tint at a time to take the eye;  
> Which, let a finger touch the silent sleep,  
> Shifted a hair's--breadth shoots you dark for bright,  
> Suffuses bright with dark, and baffles so  
> Your sentence absolute for shine or shade.  

*(Bk.I, 1367-73)*

These were the years when Browning was becoming increasingly conscious of the subjective nature of judgement; and as Professor Drew himself points out "He is accordingly more ready to present a speaker without implying a single judgement of him, leaving the reader with the materials for a more tentative judgement." Ultimately, however, Browning's narrative technique is not only concerned with directing judgements, but with carrying the reader through the process of the experience itself.

> It has been said that "the ambition of the modern novelist is to apprehend the whole of human nature, including its shifting contradictions." Viewed in this light, Browning seems very much the modern novelist, with the "voracious appetite for the salient" that Henry James attributes to Balzac. Browning himself in his letters,

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expressed a strong liking for the French novelist and it is not fanciful to suppose that he transposed elements into his poetry that were derived from Balzac's novels. Balzac wrote: "...The introduction of the dramatic element, of the image, the picture, of description, of dialogue, seems to me to be indispensable in modern literature. Let us confess frankly that Gil Blas is wearisome as form: in the piling up of events and ideas there is something sterile. The idea personified in a character, shows a finer intelligence...".

Gilbert Phelps notes that "at first his [Balzac's] version of the search for 'the true', with its disregard for conventional morality, and of the limits traditionally regarded as proper to literature, inspired almost universal revulsion and the verdict of the Quarterly Review of April, 1836—'a baser, meaner, filthier rascal never polluted society'—was typical." But, Phelps further writes, "by 1889 Arthur Symons was hailing him as 'One of those divine spies, for whom the world has no secrets'.'

29. Cf. "I entirely agree with you in your estimate of the comparative value of French and English Romance-writers. I bade the completest adieu to the latter on my first introduction to Balzac, whom I greatly admire for his faculty, whatever he may choose to do with it...'' RB and BBB Letters, II, p.658; Letter of April 27, 1846. Also, to Isa Blagden: "...make your incidents as simple as you can, put out your strength in the analysis of character, keeping in mind the immeasurable superiority (to my mind) of French models than English." Letter of May 22, 1867, Dearest Isa, ed. McAler, p.266.

30. Quoted in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel, p.103.

The points of affinity between the French novelist and the Victorian poet are evident. In his narrative poetry, Browning sought to create life in all its actuality, the immediate, the unpoetic and the material observed with intimate particularity, but, as Henry James says of Balzac, 'with the inner vision all the while wide-awake, the vision for which ideas are as living as facts and assume an equal intensity'.

But it is not only as regards the matter that Browning has points of contact with the modern novel, his manner, too, breaks away with the traditional methods of presentation. Henry James wrote in the Introduction to The Golden Bowl about his point-of-view techniques:

I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, and even to extravagance commented on, my preference for dealing with my subject-matter, for 'seeing my story', through the opportunity and sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. Again and again, on review, the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it— the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. The somebody is often, among my shorter tales I recognize, but an unnamed, unintroduced and (save by right of intrinsic wit) unwarranted participant, the impersonal

32. Selected Literary Criticism, p.194.
author's concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist...My instinct appears repeatedly to have been that to arrive at the facts retailed and the figures introduced by the given help of some other conscious and confessed agent is essentially to find the whole business—that is, as I say, its effective interest—enriched by the way. I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case plus some near individual view of it; that nearness quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's—however avowed the 'minor' quality in the latter—close and sensitive contact with it. Anything, in short, I now reflect must have seemed to me better—better for the process and the effect of representation, my irrepressible ideal—than the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible 'authorship'...

A little further on in the same Preface, James points out a changed narrative technique in The Golden Bowl itself:

There is no other participant, of course, than each of the real, the deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding participants; but...the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters. The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us...and yet after all never a whit to the prejudice of his being just as consistently a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general imbroglio, actor in the offered play....

As we have seen in the preceding analysis of Browning's later narrative art, he too, like James, shows a marked preference for enriching the significance of the action presented by filtering it through the consciousness of
either a narrator or a perceptive actor in the story itself. Browning is at his best when he is most dramatic in his narrative, but with him, the drama is almost as much a matter of a clash of ideas as a clash of character. This is best revealed in the Parleyings.

Any study of the narrative techniques of Browning's later poems would remain incomplete without a discussion of the techniques used in the Parleyings. In The Ring and the Book various points of view are presented in succession, this method being an attempt to permit an inclusive perception of the centre of truth round which many points of view organize themselves. Nevertheless, as has already been mentioned, this truth emerges not so much from the monologues themselves, as from their juxtaposition with the master perspective that establishes the right judgements in the first and last Books of the poem. And at these points, Browning abandons the dramatic monologue form in order to speak out in his own voice. In the longer monologues of the later period, we have an interplay of perspectives that create multiple levels of meaning, but they are often not wholly integrated into the framework of the poem, as in the debate between the Head Servant and Sagacity in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. So the next step in Browning's experiments with form 2
closer fusion of the subjective and the objective, one which permitted multi-level perspectives to be presented, not disparately but simultaneously. In the Parleyings, he is both objective, in the sense of projecting characters external to himself with their own lines of thought, and subjective, in the sense of superimposing on their views his own particular interpretation of truth, and integrating both in a seamless web.

The form of the poem is complex. Roma A. King notes: "Browning achieves here a subtlety that evaded him even in The Ring and the Book. There are the various figures from the past, their modern equivalents and Browning himself, a complex, ambivalent, often ironic "'I'".33

Consequently, the parleyings, in spite of their overt structure as conversations between the poet and certain people of importance in their day, really becomes a clash of conflicting forces present in the mind of one man, Browning himself.

Browning speaks in his own voice, but he also manages to retain dramatic qualities in his poem.

33. The Focusing Artifice, p.243.
Chiefly, this is brought about by the dialectical exchange of arguments conducted through various subsidiary voices and the resultant frequency in the shifts in the point of view. It is the movement of the poet's mind that constitutes the dramatic action, the conflict residing in the opposition of varied mental forces. When Browning treats an idea, not in the abstract, but as a personally held viewpoint, then the drama implicit in the idea becomes explicit.

The *Parleyings*, far from being "mere grey argument" are an interesting experiment in what may be termed as the drama of ideas. The dramatic context is created by the shifting distance between narrator/author and the characters. Mostly, this distance is aesthetic and intellectual. Only on one occasion does Browning use the unreliable narrator technique ("Parleying with George Bubb Dodington") and here the distance lies between the moral norms of the narrator and the reader/author. The shifts in response from sympathy and identification on the one hand and detachment and overt satire on the other make for dramatic tension. The intellectual pattern of thoughts, ideas, speculations is superimposed upon the emotional pattern of hopes, perplexities and affirmations, further enhancing the richness of the texture.
The language of the Parleyings is in the "difficult" style that Robert Preyer says "appears regularly in association with a particular subject-matter: the mind's confrontation with perceptions that resist rational analysis" and "convey the 'feel' of the experience that baffle perception and remain portentous, tantalizing". The problem of giving form to this sense of flux is met by the structure of the Parleyings which is such as to allow the speaker to transcend time-bound perspectives. The past and the future coalesce in the present as Browning searches for really enduring patterns in human existence. And it is the creative, synthesizing faculty to which the romanticists gave the name of imagination that becomes the focal idea of the Parleyings, for Browning is of the opinion that with the help of his imaginative vision man could give meaning to his world. But Browning does not use his narrative methods to present any ideal truth. At the most he shows how the imagination may be used by the artist to evolve and apprehend truth. In the shorter narrative poems that will be examined in the next chapter, Browning shows how the imaginative rendering of factual matter can invest it with richness of texture and meaning.