CHAPTER III

THE CASUISTICAL MONOLOGUES

A characteristic feature of Browning's poetry is its penchant for special pleading, and in the later period, three long poems have their protagonists making a case for positions which are not entirely justifiable: Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Saviour of Society (1871), Fifine at the Fair (1872), and Aristophanes' Apology (1875).

The most striking feature in these poems, when compared to the earlier casuistical poems like ''Bishop Elougram's Apology'' and ''Mr. Sludge, 'The Medium','' is the significant enlargement of range. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, DeVane remarks, discusses ''almost every conceivable topic of interest in 1871."

Fifine at the Fair touches upon the poetic controversy between Rossetti and Buchanan, and includes a wide range of metaphysical subjects like the nature of perception and the existence of absolute values. Aristophanes' Apology is a reaction against the current attacks on Euripides, and as Douglas Bush points out---"it is not a mere academic dispute on the merits of Aristophanes and Euripides, of comedy and

tragedy, it embodies all that Browning passionately thought and felt about the ethical function of poetry and the conflict between flesh and spirit, sense and soul. 3

The forms in which Browning shapes these poems emerge from his belief that since moral judgements are a complex, difficult matter, a more comprehensive range of evidence must be provided on which to base those judgements. Thus, in order to establish an even balance between sympathy and judgement, Browning experiments with techniques to enlarge the scope of the dramatic monologue, so that these poems explore not just a single, limited point of view, but create a number of different perspectives which throw light on that particular viewpoint. Thus, we have in Prince Hohenstiel, the effect of a number of voices interacting with the voice of the speaker, while Fifine uses an almost cinematic technique of multifarious perspectives fading into each other. In Aristophanes' Apology, the auditor plays a more definite role than in any other dramatic monologue, so that the poem is really two monologues, representing the two sides of the debate between Balaustion and Aristophanes.

In Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Browning puts forward his own estimate of Napoleon III of France, dramatized within the framework of an imaginary apology for his career by the Emperor. That career had been followed with great interest both by Browning and his wife. DeVane points out that "the Brownings scarcely wrote a letter during the fifties in which Louis Napoleon does not figure." But while Mrs. Browning's admiration for the French Emperor remained constant, Browning's feelings underwent considerable fluctuations. In contrast to her "fanatically strident offensives for Louis Napoleon," Browning's judgements of the Prince revealed a "typical tendency to reduce every problem in human affairs to the problem of character." Mainly, his reaction was one pitying contempt for a man who, because of a vacillating and temporizing attitude had lost valuable chances.

On August 19, 1870, Browning wrote to Isa Blagden: "...morally everybody from the highest to the lowest is as blameable as he." On August 22, 1870, he was more

8. Ibid, p.344.
critical: "Not one human being could venture to approve the conduct of the Emperor—for what was ever more palpably indefensible." On October 19, 1870, the indignant continued: "...but with respect to Napoleon,—he should simply be blotted out of the world as the greatest failure on record. The 'benefits of his reign' are just the extravagant interest which a knavish banker pays you for some time till he, one fine day, decamps with the principal,—and then where are you? But there has been no knavery, only the decline and fall of the faculties corporeal and mental''; and further on in the same letter, in gentler tones: "--but who can control his fate?—and his was only to be nearly a great man''. On January 23, 1871, he again wrote to Isa: "...we all, in our various degrees, took the man on trust, believed in his will far too long after the deed was miserably inadequate to what we supposed the will; but when the mask fell and we found a lazy old and worn-out voluptuary had neglected every duty, ignored every necessity..." On April 25, 1871; "...no more bitterness

10. Ibid., p.356.
about the dear man, who, if France likes, may try and do what he can once more at the 'edifice' with all the advantages of old age and decayed faculty. The poor country seems properly to belong to the devil—and he is not, nor ever was a devil—only a weaker mortal than one's respect for human nature thought conceivable, when given such splendid opportunities for good.''

On December 29, 1871, he wrote to Miss Hlagden about the poem: "...I think in the main, he meant to do what I say, and, but for the weakness-grown more apparent in these last years than formerly, would have done what I say he did not. I thought badly of him at the beginning of his career, at pour cause, better afterward, on the strength of the promises he made, and gave indications of intending to redeem—I think him very weak in the last miserable year.''

Browning's ambivalence is best revealed in the letter he wrote to Edith Story on January 1, 1872: "...I don't think, when you have read more, you will find I have 'taken the man for any Hero'—I rather made him confess he was the opposite, though I put forward what excuses I thought he was likely to make for himself, if inclined to try. I never at any time thought much better of him than now;

11. Ibid., p.357.
12. Ibid., p.371.
and I don't think so much worse of the character as shown in the last few years, because I suppose there to be a physical and intellectual decline of faculty, brought about by the man's own faults, no doubt—but I think he struggles against these; and when that is the case, depend upon it, in a soliloquy, a man makes the most of his good intentions, and sees great excuse in them—far beyond what our optics discover.'

Thus, Browning's ambiguous attitude to his protagonist colours the poem, in which the mixture of sympathy and judgement is more pronounced than in any other dramatic monologue. For if, as Leo A. Hetzler suggests, Browning revived this poem in 1871—a poem originally conceived in Rome in 1860—because, in reaction to his impulsive proposal of marriage to Lady Ashburton, he turned to a subject dear to his wife, he may also have been motivated by an impulse to make amends for his difference of opinion with her on this issue by making a case for Napoleon that would present both the

good and the bad aspects of his career.

The structure of the poem is unique among Browning's dramatic monologues for what purports to be a self-defence before a silent, but nevertheless implicitly questioning interlocutor, turns out ultimately to be a dream-reverie. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is really in his Residenz, relieving the tension of making a crucial decision by imagining himself in exile, explaining his life's work to a 'bud-mouthed arbitress' (p.318) in a 'pork-pie hat and crinoline' (p.292) in Leicester Square. The fact that he is not really in exile is not revealed till the very end, when the sudden reversal comes as a shock, heightening the dramatic impact. Hetzler remarks that possibly 'Browning was experimenting with this complex structure in an effort to comply with Carlyle's advice to the biographer not to portray each phase of a man's earlier life in the light of his final destiny, but to report each phase as it really was, when the future was only an 'unwound skein of possibilities, of apprehensions, attemptabilities, vague looming hopes.' (p.348). The form of the dream-reverie enables Browning to present a case without committing himself to specific judgements. It also helps to present multiple perspectives, for past, present and the future coalesce in the mind of the speaker.
Browning’s technique here is what Auerbach calls "a method which dissolves reality into multiples and multivalent reflections of consciousness."\(^{15}\) It allows explorations into what Roma A. King calls a "semi-rationalized, semi-verbalized consciousness."\(^{16}\)

A further level of complexity is provided by the introduction of a debate between the Head Servant and Sagacity, in which the latter assumes the role of an alter-ego. At this point there is a shift from autobiography to biography. Hetzler points out that this device enables Browning to present all that was good about the Emperor, and also, by contrasting the right decisions made by the idealized Prince but not by the real Napoleon, enables Browning to present his criticism of a man whose indecisiveness brought about the frustration of good intentions and the failure of correctly conceived plans. Thus, the conflicting nature of the speaker and his contradictory impulses are dramatized by the structure of the poem.

As Irvine and Honan note "Deeply, Robert's political quarrels with Elizabeth proceeded not so much

---

from a conviction that she was politically wrong, as from a conviction that politics disguises the real facts of human behaviour."17 And it was in human behaviour that Browning's own interests lay; so that his treatment of the Prince in Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is "less topical and satirical than exploratory and psychological."18

The monologue does not use the crisis moment as a means of character revealment, because the Prince is shown (ostensibly) as surveying the political vista of his reign from a comparatively uninvolved perspective. What is of greater importance is the "significant historical crisis",19 which Park Honan finds operating in the case of Mr. Sludge, Bishop Blougram, Caliban and the Prince, "Browning's nineteenth century figures who have all been forcibly altered in some way by an historical situation. In each case, the personality which the speaker has been compelled to adopt is very different from the personality he once had, or would have but for his historical context; in each case there is a special contrast between these two personalities."20

17. The Book, the Ring, and the Poet, p.291.
18. Ibid., p.461
20. Ibid. .., p.138.
The Prince reveals an acute self-consciousness when he acknowledges the divergence between his ideals and his course of action. In fact, his causistry lies in his attempts to justify a course of action which he very well realizes is not quite justifiable. As he says in the beginning of the poem—''Fitter to do than let alone, I hold'' (p.293), and then proceeds for the rest of the poem to exonerate his let-alone policies. His whole argument revolves round this awareness of the duality of the actual and the potential, the flesh and the spirit. In Hohenstiel-Schwangau's attempts to justify his subjugation of the one (his ideals) in favour of the other (worldly expedience) lies his sophistry, and a further irony is introduced by his awareness that it is a finer thing to ''Live in the luminous circle that surrounds/The planet, not the leaden orb itself'' (p.303). This awareness makes his most persuasive argument suspect, for we realize that we are dealing with a man who is untrue to his own ideals.

Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau begins his monologue with a tenet characteristic of Browning—God's
infinitude as opposed to man's finite nature and the inter-relationship between the two:

...I only know
That varied modes of creatureship abound,
    Implying just as varied intercourse
    For each with the creator of them all. (p.294)

Starting with this hypothesis, he argues that the particular course of action adopted by him is in consonance with God's plan; to interfere by chopping and changing things would be presumptuous. Therefore, ''a conservator, call me, if you please,/Not a creator nor destroyer: one/Who keeps the world safe'' (p.296). He claims that if it is not his mission to light up the darkness, his helping that light to do fuller service is as worthy a task as the other, if less dramatic. The Prince makes much of this argument in order to prove that he did not thwart God's purpose in creation. But his casuistry becomes evident when he asserts that since evil is the means by which good is brought about, to tamper with evil would be an act of impunity against God's divine plan. We see here Browning's characteristic method in the casuistical monologues of giving the speaker one of his own favourite doctrines and then allowing him to reveal his sophistical character by the particular interpretation he (the speaker) gives to the doctrine.
Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau twists Browning's theory of the necessity of accepting the limitations of this finite world into an excuse for apathy and expedience. He feels that he is not to blame for his timorous, time-serving policies, even though his opponents may wish that his vision were less of an owl's and more of an eagle's. His excuse is that since his aim was to 'save' society, he has refused to risk the gains and stability of what had been accomplished, and that this was the best he could have done with the capacities granted to him.  

The Prince rationalizes his reactionary policies by arguing that idealism can never accomplish anything concrete in this imperfect world. His argument on this point are very much like Bishop Blougram's, who, as W.O. Raymond says, 'bases part of his defence on the contrast between the futility of abstract idealism and the success of a prudential and practical adaptation of one's talent and outlook to the environment and capacities of a workaday world.'

21. Cf. 'Bishop Blougram's Apology': 'My business is not to remake myself,/But make the absolute best of what God made.' (11.354-55).

As we will see later, Aristophanes uses a similar argument to justify the compromises he makes.

Pulled in opposite directions by the conflicting claims of 'least wants first' and 'Exceptionally noble causes' (p.305), the Prince vacillates. He justifies his narrow policies by arguing that a man's life is too short for grand experiments. Yet he is forced to recognize the grandeur of the 'brave thinkers', who are worth 'All that our world's worth, flower and fruit of man!' (p.306). He acknowledges:

'Tis part of life, a property to prize,
That those o'the higher sort engaged I'the world,
Should fancy they can change its ill to good,
Wrong to right, ugliness to beauty: (p.306)

and admits to have had ideals and dreams of his own. This is reminiscent of Bishop Bougram's ''Enthusiasm is the best thing, I repeat;' (1.556). Like Blougram, the Prince is condemned as a casuist because he has allowed his inner truths to be deflected. Both passively accept the situations in which they find themselves, even though they are aware of the deficiencies therein. This is entirely antithetical to Browning's belief that value lies in energy, vitality and honest confrontation of life's problems. For the limitations of the finite
world are not as incompatible with aspiration as Hohenstiel-Schwangau would have us believe. While man must of necessity accept the compromises demanded by reality, it does not preclude lofty aims and ambitions. Man must pursue the infinite even it is inaccessible. And above all, he must be loyal to his conception of truth.

That Hohenstiel-Schwangau is subconsciously aware of the unsoundness of his arguments is revealed by his assertion: "Change life, in me shall follow change to match!" (p.306). Philip Drew points out that the two alternatives envisaged by the Prince—keeping his subjects alive and giving them democratic freedoms—are not really "mutually exclusive, and that the Prince is simply inventing a powerful reason for breaking his promise."23 Like Chiappino in A Soul's Tragedy, the Prince has compromised at the expense of truth. He is a lazy opportunist, not a principled revolutionary, and is revealed as such, in spite of his claim that his opponents accuse him of indolence, apathy and vacillation merely because they have made an error in interpreting his policies.

There is bitter irony in the fact that despite his ostensible high-mindedness, the Prince has few compunctions as to the ways of silencing opposition. To his opponent's

charge that he

Leave the illogical touch now here now there
I 'the way of work, the tantalizing help
First to this, then the other opposite:
The blowing hot and cold, sham policy,
Sure auge of the mind and nothing more,
Disease of the perception or the will,
That fain would hide in a fine name!  (p.302)

the Prince retaliates with 'a wink to the police'
while making pretence of 'shrugging shoulder' (p.302).

Browning dramatizes his belief that much of
Napoleon's so-called democratic processes were really
a farce, by creating different voices which, when
juxtaposed against the protagonist's voice, become
touchstones by which to judge him. The following
lines are a typical example:

The power to speak, hear, print and read is ours?
Aye, we learn where and how, when clapped inside
A convict-transport bound for cool Cayenne.
The universal vote we have; its urn
We also have where votes drop, fingered-o'er
By the universal Prefect.  (p.303)

The third section of the poem changes from autobiography
to biography. The Prince says: ''Hear what I never was,
but might have been' (p.307), and then goes on to paint
an idealized figure who, ironically, is a figment of his
own imagination. The ironic gap between imagination and
reality is particularly evident here. Browning accurately
records the events of December 2, 1851, 'Sudden the clock
told it was judgement time'' (page 309), when the Prince President issued two proclamations, which, to use the words of Irvine and Honan, ''addressed to the people, explained the failure of the existing constitution, dissolved the Assembly and promised a plebiscite on a new constitution, of which the chief feature was to be a strong and responsible executive.''

But Browning also exposes the trickery of this political move and suggests the moral unsoundness of the Prince through the words which end the speech:

Grant them, and I shall forthwith operate—
Ponder it well!--to the extremest stretch
O' the power you trust me: if with unsuccess,
God wills it, and there's nobody to blame. (p.310)

This section is full of satire at political manipulation and knavery, at those who

...strut, prate and brag their best,
Squabble at odds on every point save one,
And there shake hands—agree to trifle time,
Obstruct advance with, each his cricket-cry. (p.309)

and also:

...craft and greed and impudence
Of night-hawk at first chance to prowl and prey
For glory and a little gain beside,
Passing for eagle in the dusk of the age,— (p.310)

This is Browning's presentation of the reality of politics as opposed to the "pattern of romance" imposed upon it by Elizabeth. 25

At this stage the casuistry of the Prince takes a different turn. He attempts to disarm criticism by showing how an imaginary Prince who is true to his ideals has also to face criticism. This section is a mixture of truth and make-believe. The Prince identifies himself with the Head Servant and claims to have always acted virtuously inspite of temptations to the contrary put forward by Sagacity. Sagacity plays the role of the worldly, practical, cynically clever worshipper of power that the idealized Head Servant could have become but did not. But Browning reveals the sophistry of the speaker by choosing three incidents from Napoleon's reign and contrasting the imagined, ideal course of action with the sordid facts of reality. For a true view of Browning's ironic stand-point, we need to be aware of the historical facts; but even without this knowledge, we have a clue as to the manner in which we are to view Hohenstiel-Schwangau's creation of an idealized self, for the

25. Browning wrote to Isa Hlagden on July 19, 1870; "...put not your trust in princes neither in the sons of men,—Emperors, Popes, Garibaldis or Mazzinis,—the plating wears through, and out comes the copperhead of human nature and weakness and falseness too!" Dearest Isa, ed. McAleer, p.341.
Prince himself is aware that it is an "unwritten chapter" in his history, i.e. has not materialized in fact.

On the matter of Italian liberation, Sagacity advises the Head Servant to leave things as they are, but the Head acts with vigour for the cause of liberty, championing war for the sake of truth alone. In actuality, however, the Prince acted not from altruistic motives but from the motives of a self-seeking politician. Irvine and Honan point out a time when "a French garrison was blocking the Italian unity which he himself had set in motion." 26 And though, in the poem, the Head Servant indignantly refuses compensation for his role in the unification of Italy, it is a fact of history that Napoleon annexed Nice and Savoy as his "snug honorarium-fee" (p.316). Further, though the Head Servant ignores Sagacity's advice to secure the throne for his heirs, Napoleon attempted to do just this. 27

27. For Browning's view on this matter, see his letter to Isabella Hlagden, dated July 19, 1870: "I never, when liking Napoleon most, sympathized a bit with his dynastic ambition for his son." Dearest Isa, ed. McAleer, p.340.
This section, with its profuse words and phrases suggestive of swift, resolute action—"Heavily did he let his fist fail plumb" (p.310), "too swift/And thorough his procedure" (p.310), "Hands energetic to the utmost" (p.316), becomes deeply ironical in the light of Hohenstiel-Schwangau's own assertion that this is the kind of ruler he might have been, but never was. The contrast between the fact and the fiction is all the more incisive.

Veering between the opposite poles of sympathy and condemnation, Browning's judgement of the Prince is coloured by indignation for the man's unsteady vision. Nevertheless, a sensitive awareness of human fallibility is, in these later poems, shared both by Browning and his monologuists. In the very last section of the poem, the Prince repudiates his own arguments, accepts the truth about his situation, and verbalizes what we have felt to be his true character all along. He is brought face to face with reality: "'Alack, one lies one's self/Even in the stating that one's end was truth," (p.319). Intentions and actions remain poles apart. The "'I'" of the ghostly dialogue is far removed from the "'I'" who realizes that "'nothing is done and over yet'" (p.319).
Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau now accepts the fact that truth is deflected by considerations of expediency and that admirable motives tend to become ineffective in practice. He admits that all his arguments defending his ends and means have been casuistical:

Somehow the motives, that did well enough
I'the darkness, when you bring them into light
Are found, like those famed cave-fish, to lack eye
And organ for the upper magnitudes. (p.319)

and again:

Yes, forced to speak, one stoops to say--one's aim
Was--what it peradventure should have been: (p.319)

Browning reinforces the irony of this last section through Hohenstiel-Schwangau's last, characteristically indecisive words: "'Double or quits! The letter goes! Or stays?'. This giveaway exposes the real truth about the Prince's character, throwing into relief the hollowness, in actual, concrete terms, of the Prince's claims to disinterestedness and patriotism. The image created of a vacillating ruler, gambling with the fortunes of his country also provides an effective contrast to the image of the resolute ruler ("'No trepidation, much less treachery'", p.316), that had been previously painted by the Prince. His apology encompasses an idea spoken by Ogniben in *A Soul's Tragedy*: "'There is truth in falsehood, falsehood
in truth. No man ever told one great truth that I know, without the help of a good dozen lies at least, generally unconscious ones'" (p.464, Modern Library Edition). Nevertheless, as with the other casuistical monologues of the later period, the portrait of the Prince is redeemed by the acute self-awareness that he reveals.

In Fifine at the Fair Browning further explores the question of attaining to the truth in a world where truth is easily deflected, through establishing the disparity between potentiality and actual achievement, between aspiration and action, the conflict between the two opposing thrusts in man—the sensual and the spiritual—and relating all these issues to the central issue of love as the one constant truth in a world of change.

Irvine and Honan remark that very nearly, the motivating principle of Browning's life in the 1870's was "his urge to restore the lost sense of union" with his wife.28 They follow Professor W.O. Raymond29 in isolating Browning's proposal of marriage to Lady Ashburton and her refusal as being the source of his feelings of

guilt and remorse. In choosing the theme of marital infidelity in *Fifine at the Fair*, Browning embarked, as it were, on a personal course of expiation, and Irvine and Honan remark that "it did much to restore Browning to himself." It is clear, therefore, that the implications of the poem range much farther than that of mere casuistry, though casuistry becomes an important means for the total development of the theme.

*Fifine at the Fair* is divided into three parts,—the prologue, entitled "Amphibian", the main monologue, and the epilogue, entitled "The Householder". The prologue is preceded by an excerpt from Molière's *Don Juan*, the last lines of which are Donna Elvire's mocking interpretation of the words Don Juan would use to allay her fears about his constancy: "...nor aught in nature can avail/To separate us two, save what, in stopping breath/May peradventure stop devotion likewise—death!". The two main ideas of the poem are thus contained in this epigraph, constancy (devotion) in love, and, as Donna Elvire doubts, but the Epilogue will prove, the possibility of an unbroken bond even after death.

The lyrical prologue is a contrast to the argumentative main monologue stylistically, but the ideas explored in the

---

main body of the poem are initially postulated here. Inspite of the limpid beauty of the lines, there is an under-current of distress, "Fancy which turned a fear" (I) at the thought of the yawning gulf that separates the living from the "spirit-sort" (XV). This gulf cannot be bridged except through man's imaginative vision, a vision provided mainly by poetic inspiration initially:

Emancipate through passion
And thought, with sea for sky,
We substitute, in a fashion,
For heaven—poetry. (XIV)

The eternal can be linked to the finite in a completer way through the power of love, the devoted love that provides stability amidst flux and remains unchanged even after death. For the speaker, however, this certainty has not yet been achieved. The dominant background imagery of Fifine is the sea, and appropriately, the speaker in the prologue is a swimmer who, through the buoyant power of the imagination feels himself in harmony with the world of the spirit, symbolized by the butterfly hovering above him and which is to him "Like soul" (IV). Roma A. King points out that "soul" here means "both
the realization of the fullest, deepest, level of one's being and also, the recognition of affinities with and participation in something outside and beyond man himself—Eternity, God."\textsuperscript{31} The speaker wonders 'If a certain soul/Which early slipped its sheath' (IX) looks down with pity and wonder at the grossness of a creature who welcomes the material world 'Land the solid and safe' (XVIII), and has no desire to gain the 'finer element' (XV) except imaginatively. The prologue juxtaposes land and sea, heaven and earth to provide a parallel to man's amphibian nature itself. Man may desire the refinements of the spiritual existence, but his nature binds him to the temporal and the material.

The main monologue explores the psychology of an amphibian, a man who realizes the value of the bond of love, and yet surrenders to the baser impulses of his amphibian nature and yearns for freedom and change. It is based on a question common to all the casuistical monologues—how is a man impelled to justify a course of action which he himself realizes is not entirely admirable? The speaker is deliberately left nameless, implying that such a man can at best be only a cipher.

\textsuperscript{31} The Focusing Artifice, p. 173.
But the assumption is that he is the legendary voluptuary and sensualist, Don Juan. The choice of such a protagonist at once gives an ironic cast to his self-justifications. At the same time, it helps Browning to view objectively ideas and lines of thought that must have had points of similarity with his own following the Ashburton affair. The paradoxical issue as Browning presents it is this: every man has in him some facets of a Don Juan. It partakes of the element of change and impermanence in nature itself. To deny it leads to hypocrisy. To attempt to rationalize it leads to sophistry. But to surrender to the impulse leaves him to confront negation and despair.

Browning's speaker is not the Don Juan of tradition. He is not, at least till the end, concerned with seduction. As has been pointed out, "he evades the depth, nature and extent of his sexuality by explaining how he is 'true'. He also evades being thought a philanderer rather than boasting of it." But it must also be mentioned that this is how Don Juan sees himself, and not always as the

reader sees him. Nevertheless, his arguments are to a large extent related to the more serious scheme of illuminating human nature: 'From a given point evolve the infinite!' (CXXIX).

The opening lines postulate the theme of marital fidelity: 'Link arm with me! / Like husband and like wife,' (l), and its role in helping man to face the illusiveness of life, where nothing appears to be permanent. Yet, the speaker is 'Frenetic to be free' (VI). Like the pennon fluttering in the wind, his 'heart makes just the same / Passionate stretch, fires up for lawlessness,' (VI). The fair is representative of the illusion that gilds the reality of life; and Don Juan makes a first exposure of his casuistry when he argues that the illusion of the fair is in itself a kind of truth because sincerely presented. He wonders what it is that makes a man fall a willing captive to what he knows is at the opposite pole of his need for stability and order. What makes him reject the 'chaste, temperate, serene' Elvire in favour of 'what splutters green and blue, this fizgig called Fifine' (XXXIII). Even as he surrenders, he sets about analyzing the reasons for the 'acknowledged victory of
whom I call my queen,/Sexless and bloodless sprite'"(XVI). The flower imagery that follows is replete with sexual connotations, as Barbara Melchiori has shown, and serves as a giveaway to Don Juan's allegedly intellectual stance; the adjectives used: 'flavorous venomed bell', ''gorgeous poison-plague'" (XVIII) reveal the insidious attraction posed by the sensuous Fifine, in spite of Don Juan's avowed preference for the 'daisy-meek'" (XVIII). This at once throws doubt on the validity of Don Juan's claim that

...because the flesh that claimed
Unduly my regard, she thought, the taste, she blamed
In me, for things externe, was all mistake, she finds--
Or will find, when I prove that bodies show me minds,

(XXVIII)

Don Juan sketches portraits of the archetypal woman as represented by Helen, Cleopatra, Saint-, Fifine, and playfully adds Elvire, the ''phantom-wife''(XXVII), with the fanciful illusion that the real Elvire has ''cast this clog/Of flesh away'" (XXIII). The masque is Don Juan's way of asserting that Elvire is not only equal to these beauties, but has predominance over them. Yet, it is clear that Fifine interests him the most, for to Don Juan, she

is, as Roma A. King notes "at once an attractive body and a symbol of spiritual freedom, an incentive to self-realization. She appeals to the speaker's elemental desire to be himself, untrammelled by conventions." \(^{34}\)

But the morality that Fifine represents is merely "self-sustainment" and Don Juan's quest for the infinite debases itself through this attraction.

Proceeding on the assumption that the urge to lawlessness is a purely intellectual experience which in no way affects his essentially inviolable regard for his wife, Don Juan compares her value to that of a priceless painting by Raphael that he might possess.

He might momentarily turn aside to "relish leaf by leaf, Doré's last picture-book" (XXXV), but in a crisis would risk everything to safeguard his "perfect piece" (XXXVI).

The lines which follow seem to merge fantasy and reality in an illusory haze with Elvire beneath a pall, "As if the vesture's snow were moulding sleep not death" (XXXVIII). These shifting perspectives in time and space leads Ryal's to call the technique of Fifine as cinematic. \(^{35}\)

34. The Focusing Artifice, p.176.
35. Browning's Later Poetry, p.60.
But they also point to Don Juan's inability to achieve stability; for him Fifine is always more real than Elvire. The Elvire created by Don Juan's imagination represents the untainted spiritual being: 

''How ravishingly pure you stand in pale constraint!/My new-created shape, without or touch or taint,/Inviolate of life and worldliness and sin'' (XXXVIII) but it is significant that he associates her with death. Reverting to reality, he eloquently describes her brown hair:'

...So part rich rillets dyed/Deep by the woodland leaf, when down they pour, each side/O'er the rock-top, pushed by Spring!' (XXXIX). His sensuous nature is deeply emphasized.

Carrying his justification forward, Don Juan expands on the proposition: 

''In the seeing soul, all worth lies'' (LV). He finds the artistic consciousness instinctively able to invest with beauty the commonplace, to strip away all the external superfluities to reach the essence of truth. The artist who tries to bring out the hidden possibilities of his medium and the lover who looks beyond the externals to the inner soul, are both trying, as Don Juan says he himself is with regard to Fifine, to find abiding value in a world of illusion and shifting appearances.
At this point we have an affirmation of the nature and purpose of art that reproduces Browning's own views:

...And this corroborates the sage,
That Art, --which I may style the love of loving, rage
Of knowing, seeing, feeling, the absolute truth of things
For truth's sake, whole and sole, not any good, truth brings
The knower, seer, feeler, beside,—instinctive Art
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby, the ultimate entire. (XLIV)

This view of art as a means of expressing the infinite is expanded to encompass the role of art as a means of giving life to what is inert and dead. Don Juan finds in creativity "a foil/For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response/To ugliness and death,—creation for the nonce" (LV). But Don Juan's artistry, concerned as it is with demonstrating the value of Fifine, does not lift him out of himself and so becomes self-defeating.

Don Juan goes on to express a belief that is found very often in Browning's poetry—it is only in rare, visionary moments that the mind can pierce through the superfluities of existence to its essence. The contrast between "'the varicolour'" and the "'achromatic white'"(LIX), is the contrast between finite experience in all its variegated colours and the white light of "'spiritual
verities in their absolute essence', as W.O. Raymond describes it with reference to 'Numpholeptos' (Pacchiarotto and How He Worked in Distemper: With Other Poems). A man can only strive to attain this ideal and await the moment of fulfilment:

...what joy, when each may supplement
The other, changing each, as changed, till, wholly, blent,
Our old things shall be new, and, what we both ignite,
Fuse, lose the varicolor in achromatic white! (LIX)

Don Juan, however, twists this idea to suit his own purpose. To reach the depths of a soul like Fifine's, for example, he argues ingeniously, 'some flesh may be to pass' (LX). That the argument is sophistical is made clear by the bee-image which is used to illustrate Don Juan's contention. The bee's flight from flower to flower making 'Matter-of-course snatched snack' is necessary, for 'unless he taste, how try?' (LX). Similarly, says Juan, if his 'soul tastes and tries/And trifles time' with Fifine, it is only to 'bring honey home to hive' (LX). Ryals is of the opinion that there is very little sophistry in Don Juan's arguments, since they do not proceed from a 'desire to deceive' his audience. One ventures to suggest that Don Juan is a casuist because he is doing a much more dangerous thing—he is trying to deceive himself.

36. The Infinite Moment, p.209.
The mood becomes serenely grave with the return to one of the key themes of the poem—the fear of approaching death. The setting sun and the tombstones where the birds twitter are symbolic of the end that awaits all in nature. But death here, as in all Browning's poetry, is an awakening into a new life, a "rise into the true out of the false" (LXIV). Don Juan's casuistical mind at once seizes on this point in order to bolster his defence. Using the analogy of the swimmer who is upborne by the water around him, but which would overwhelm him should he attempt to "slip the sea and hold the heaven" (LXV), Don Juan comes to the convenient conclusion that since man is perforce bound by his nature, he must use every facet of it to his advantage:

We must endure the false, no particle of which
Do we acquaint us with, but up we mount a pitch
Above it, find our heads reach the truth, while
Hands explore
The false below:

(LXV)

W.O. Raymond points out that "the imagery of swimming in the sea is used as an illustration of man's dealings with the false and shifting appearance of life, through which he learns to value the truth and permanence that reside in the heaven above."38 Don Juan further argues

that this working from the false to the true, from Fifine to Elvire, convinces him of the one essential truth, the reality of his own being amidst endless flux and change: 'That I am, anyhow, a truth, though all else seem/And be not' (LXXX). In a clearly discernible exercise in casuistry, Don Juan asserts that life is an endless search for truth, where the unusual and the risky venture draws more merit than the commonplace and the solidly safe. The imagery is no longer that of swimming but of navigation. The 'cockleshell' (LXXXI) that is Fifine tempts his seamanship more rigorously than the 'superior ship' (LXXXIII) Elvire. And though he asserts: 'I would the steady voyage, and not the fitful trip,—/Elvire and not Fifine,—might test our seamanship' (LXXXII), his impulses run counter to his words. Even as he speaks, he gives expression to the powerful temptation Fifine's quicksilver attractiveness poses for him. It is not always her mind that he sees:

Though art so bad, and yet so delicate a brown!
Wouldst tell no end of lies: I talk to smile or frown!
Wouldst rob me: do men blame a squirrel, lithe and sly,
For pilfering the nut she adds to hoard? Nor I.

(LXXXII)

In the face of this surrender to the forces of the temporal, Don Juan loses the tenuous certainty of the truth of his being that he had won so hardily. As
Claudette Kemper Columbus notes: "In Fifine's 'wash o' the world' all matter liquefies. The 'solid and safe' though the speaker time and again argues that firmness is possible, nevertheless never takes hold." In lines reminiscent of Arnold's ''Dover Beach'', he laments:

All false, all fleeting too! And nowhere things abide, And everywhere we strain that things should stay,—the one Truth, that ourselves are true! (LXXXIV)

But the way to truth is not through rationalizations of the fleshly path to the spirit. Don Juan is unable to overcome his casuistry. His argument comes to a full circle with Don Juan once again insisting on the essential 'truth' amidst falsity that the fair represents. He has learnt nothing from his explorations and shows how misguided he still is by again equating falsity with truth. Don Juan admires both the fair folk and Fifine for frankly admitting their falsity. But as a casuist, he seeks to depend solely on reason and so finds that knowledge dissolves into ''surmise and doubt and disbelief'' (XC).

The second circle of arguments begins again with a bathe in the sea and Don Juan's return home to smoke and think about the fair. He plays Schumann's 'Carnival', is filled with the idea that in Art as in Nature change

is inevitable, falls asleep and has a long and vaguely ominous dream. The music lifts him out of ordinary experience into a dream-world, thronged with silent and grotesquely masked figures which arouse disgust, but become less repulsive and almost pitiful when viewed from close quarters. The dream carnival becomes representative of life itself with its mixture of good and bad, hate and love, glory and shame. But just as Don Juan had previously used Browning's pet theory of the necessity of change in every sphere of life as a forerunner of progress to justify his need for change in love, so he now gives another favourite Browning theory a sophistical twist when he insists that, since life is a matter of varied experiences, every experience, moral or otherwise, has value in his attempts at gaining self-knowledge. Thus, Don Juan would satisfy his "hunger both to be and know the thing I am, / By contrast with the thing I am not," (CIII). The contrast between these lines and the almost deggeral rhythm of those that follow, "Experience, I am glad to master soon or late, / Here, there and everywhere! the world without debate!" (CIV), which brings to mind the specific situation to which Don Juan's arguments are being directed (his petty intrigues) creates a juxtaposition that is sharply ironical.
The dream represents the sum total of Don Juan's questionings on the nature of perception and subjective judgements. His awareness of the shifting changeable, even illusory nature of all tradition—in Art, Science, Philosophy, History, morality, even religion—again brings him to the problem, can man ever know anything truly? The ambiguity that surrounds him everywhere merely leads him back to the primary impulse in his own heart—his innate conviction that if there is change there is also a permanent truth that exists unchanged. But, when "the multiform subsides, becomes the definite" it is not in this strife-ridden world, but "i the blank/ Severity of peace in death" (CXIX). So much Don Juan gathers when he finds the multiform shapes of his dream world transfigured into the solidity of the Druid monument, which, in recounting his dream to Elvire, he reaches in actuality at this point. But Don Juan's casuistical mind cannot grasp fully the significance of the monument; he still believes that since change (death and the passing of time, symbolized by the Druid stones) is everywhere in nature, he will succeed in rationalizing change in love as a necessity.
But the monument symbolizes not only the reality of death but also the forces of regeneration. Browning stresses the latter aspect and Mrs. Orr comments: "It symbolizes life in its most active and perennial form. It means the force which aspires to heaven, and the strength which is rooted in the earth. It means the impulses of all being towards something outside itself which is constant amidst all variety." Thus, change need not necessarily be mere falsehood, as Don Juan mistakenly supposes. That change is reality is undeniable. But this reality can have two aspects. The one that is creative is impelled upwards; the other, the mechanistic process, is a falling-away process, an inverse movement involving material objects and mechanistic laws, a process that becomes casuistic. The latter is Don Juan's course.

Once again, Don Juan asserts the necessity of falsehood: 41

41. His contention reminds us of Mr. Sludge's argument that "every lie/Is quick with the germ of truth" (11.1323-24). Both these casuists place a great deal of emphasis on the role of delusion in life.
...truth is forced
To manifest itself through falsehood, whence divorced
By the excepted eye, at the rare season, for
The happy moment, truth instructs us to abhor
The false, and prize the true, obtainable thereby,
Then do we understand the value of a lie; (CXXIV)

He argues that the impulse towards the unchangeable truth meets obstacles in the world of the temporal. The veils of illusion have to be transcended, but they are an ever-present feature of life. Truth perforce hides behind the false and each encounter with the latter is one more step towards the former. This is the education that the soul must pass through to achieve truth and permanence. Don Juan uses these doctrines to justify his false practices, even to glory in them, and so reinforces his image as a casuist. This is especially evident in his unashamed claim that the unmasked "Ultimate" is but the sea-Fifine"(CXXV). Thus the inherent contradictions in Don Juan's claims to aim at truth and spirituality are ironically revealed. And he himself realizes that his 'poetry' has turned to 'prose' (CXXVI).

The prologue had raised the problem of the role of the imagination in approximating the true spiritual vision. Man's amphibian nature, his penchant for the earthly, always keeps his fancies and visions partial and incomplete.
Thus Don Juan finds that for all his aspirations for the infinite, he is too bound to the finite to be wholly able to transcend it. His poetry has turned to prose. His dream of rationalizing inconstancy in love and of making it appear a means of attaining a higher spirituality has proved to be a failure. His attraction for Fifine is too sensual to lift him out of the body and into the spirit. It impels him towards death (negation) rather than life. For inconstancy to the truth of love is, according to the poet's personal views, to deny oneself anchorage in life. It is the denial of the essential instinct of the soul for the One amidst the Many. Don Juan realizes that "The wanderer brings home no profit from the quest/Beyond the sad surmise that keeping house were best" (CXXIX). The thought that he has contemplated just this futile quest racks Don Juan and one can hear Browning's anguished voice in his words: "Will the saint vanish from the sinner that repents?/Suppose you are a ghost! A memory, a hope,/A fear, a conscience!" (CXXX). Ultimately, he decides to let fate bolt the door of his "'honest, civic house' 'never to wander more'" (CXXXI). In a neat link-up with the beginning of the poem, and thus completing the second circle of arguments, Don Juan points out that "The unlucky bath's to blame" (CXXXI). The image of the tower as representative
of the life of self-indulgence which Don Juan now eschews, looks forward to a similar image and situation in *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, though in the latter poem the tower symbol has different connotations. In both these poems, however, the attractions of the sensual life are strong, though fraught with dangers:

...because, though half-way down,
Its mullions wink o'erwebbed with bloomy greenness, yet
Who mounts to staircase top may tempt the parapet,
And sudden there's the sea!

(CXXXI)

Though Don Juan now resolutely wonders why the "foamflutter" of the sea should "mend or mar/The calm contemplative householders that we are?" (CXXXI), the images used in this passage "landlocked", "die", "door", reveal, as Roma A. King points out, "a tension, a spiritual restlessness that can never abide the restrictions that he affects to accept." 42

Don Juan has not reckoned with the duality of his own finite nature; for with all his incursions into the philosophic world of the infinite, he remains, a wanderer, condemned to an eternity of wandering. The shift from the transcendental to the descendental (to use Ryals terms) in the last verse is emphasized by the subtle change of rhythm with its suggestions of a debonair philanderer suavely making off for a tryst. Don Juan has found a

---

note slipped into his palm by Fifine, and making this an excuse, leaves for a further meeting with her. This contrast between his philosophizing and his actual actions is almost pathetic. Clyde de L. Ryals finds the last lines ambiguous and is of the opinion that the 'restoration of tension in the end underscores the metaphysical complexity of the poem.' But the ambiguity fades when we remember that Don Juan has, imaginatively, in the course of his argument defending infidelity, made Elvire 'slip from flesh and blood, and play the ghost' (CXXXII), and it is her fate to become a ghostly presence with a husband like him. Irvine and Honan aptly remark: 'Don Juan's ordeal dramatizes the logical and moral inconstancy of the romantic axiom that free love implies freedom of the spirit, since he revolves into eternity in sexual chains.' Philip Drew is of the opinion that the final reversal 'presents dramatically the central theme of the poem—that to abandon wilfully constancy in love is to leave oneself no certainty but death.'

43. Browning's Later Poetry, p.80.
44. The Book, the Ring, and the Poet, p.464.
45. The Poetry of Browning, p.317.
The main poem had treated as a major theme the fear of approaching death. In the Epilogue, death is accepted, even welcomed.46 "The Householder" is concerned with the polarities of life and death, and the one sure link between the two, undying, unchanging love. It presents the affirmation that had evaded the casuistry of Don Juan, in which he had been "endeavouring to joint/Together, and so make infinite, point and point:/Fix into one Elvire a Fair-ful of Fifines!" (CXXIX), all the while forgetful of the "given point" which should have been the base from which to "evolve the infinite" (CXXIX)—the fact of love.

There seems to be some disagreement among critics as to the identity of the speaker. DeVane says: "'The Epilogue, called 'The Householder', is a dialogue, jocular, yet tender, between the householder and his dead wife who comes back to visit him; that is between Browning and his wife....For Browning it is a scene of reconciliation between himself and his wife after the affair with Lady Ashburton has been put definitely behind him.'"47 Ryals on the other hand, following

---

46. Cf. Browning's letter to Furnivall, March 2, 1839: "'...Absolute success being only attainable for the body in full manhood—for the soul, in its full apprehension of Truth—which will be, not here, at all events.'" (Letters, ed. Hood, p.301).
47. DeVane, Handbook, p.369
Mrs. Orr, is of the opinion that "the speaker here is not the poet, but the speaker in the Prologue and the main monologue, the speaker I have been calling Don Juan. He is even linked through imagery with the speaker of the main body of the poem, wherein householding is frequently used to suggest permanence." Reconciling these two points of view, Philip Drew comments: "The householder, partly Juan and partly Browning himself, has just been reunited by death with his wife." and this seems the most logical view. The last lines of the main monologue had hinted that in spite of his assertions to the contrary, Don Juan will not keep his promise of returning from his meeting with Fifine in five minutes, and that when he does, he will find Elvire gone. In the Epilogue, the householder feels he has denied himself the privileges of continuing love because of his shameful experience in the world. Reassurance comes in the shape of the spirit of his dead wife, who assures him that the finite and the infinite are not as far apart as he had supposed. The Prologue had asked whether there was any possibility of continuity in love even in the after world. The Epilogue answers in the affirmative.

not even death can stop devotion. The wholly unexpectedness and poignancy of the meeting is heightened in the poem by the use of short, precise words and phrases. The contrast between the sincerity of these hurried, broken rhythms and the controlled sentence structure of the monologue is very marked.

The "fancy that turned a fear" in "Amphibian" was the fear, to quote J.L. Kendall, that "divine love may be imaginably purer than human love," 50 It is this fear that leads Don Juan to rationalize his baser impulses. The epilogue shows that this fear is unfounded. Even the bliss of the after-life is incomplete ("'And was I so better off up there?'" 1.24) until the union of two lovers is complete. For true love is the love that accepts the innate nature of the partner and loves it notwithstanding. But this can operate only under the condition of constancy. Poetic fancies cannot approximate this ideal truth, only intuition can, and Don Juan's casuistry is the result of his dependence on his reasoning faculties alone.

Thus, the point is not so much that "man's devotion can never become single and all-satisfying until he is transplanted from time into eternity", as Roma A. King opines 51.

51. Op. Cit., p.188.
but that this devotion is an enduring link between time and eternity. To deny it would lead to hypocrisy and spiritual negation, as Don Juan's monologue proves. To be defeated by the temptations that beset the course of true love in this world and so to come to doubt its validity and consequently to exalt the perfection of the next world, is again frustrating. For love bridges the gap between the here and the after. "Death is naught" (1.32) in the sense that death makes no essential difference to the quality of love that exists between two individuals. Thus, the question posed in the epigraph is answered: death does not "stop devotion."

The difficulty of assessing Fifine at the Fair as a casuistic poem lies in the fact of the frequent closeness of Juan's position with Browning's own, which resists any arbitrary labelling of Don Juan's arguments as wholly unsound. Irvine and Honan note that "Juan's yearning for personal liberty, his sensuous intensity, and impressionism, ...

52. This is a feature common to all casuistical monologues. Mr. Sludge, for example, uses Browning's favourite doctrine of the immanence of God in creation, to defend his dishonest practices. If God is everywhere, he argues, could it not be that he, Sludge, is being used by God for purposes of his own? For an excellent discussion of this point, see Isobel Armstrong's "Browning's Mr. Sludge, The Medium" in Robert Browning: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Philip Drew, pp. 212-222.
and scorn for institutions: all partake of a side of Browning's personality richly expressed from Dramatic Lyrics to The Ring and the Book.'

"Most of the consternation of Browning's readers in the years following 1872 was caused by the fact that the villain had most of the tastes, opinions and feelings upon these matters [contemporary matters] which were generally accorded to Robert Browning. The effect was that of Satan quoting Scripture." Thus Don Juan's arguments about human life as a state of probation, of evil being necessary for the apprehension of truth, of evil and falsehood being a part of the divine plan for the universe, of life as illusion as opposed to the permanence of eternity—all these ideas abound in Browning's poetry. But as Philip Drew observes, "whenever Don Juan applies his arguments to his own relationship to Fifine he is speaking disingenuously or with the intent to deceive Elvire, but elsewhere he offers as powerful arguments as Browning is able to devise." Of Don Juan, as of Bishop Blougram, it may be said that "He said true things, but called them by wrong names".

55. The Poetry of Browning, p.318.
Aristophanes' Apology is Browning's study of a poet who is forced into casuistry in order to justify his artistic methods.

Aristophanes' defence of his comic art falls into two divisions: in the one, he justifies his own poetic theory and practice, and in the other, he attacks Euripides for what he feels is an essentially unrealistic conception of poetry. His argument uses a contention common to all Browning's casuists - the necessity of adapting one's resources to the limitations of the finite world.

Aristophanes assumes the role of the preserver of the traditional order of things, as opposed to the destructive forces of 'restless change/Deterioration' (p.836) unleashed by the sophists, who would make 'all we seemed to know prove ignorance' (p.836). He attacks the 'poison-drama' (p.824) of Euripides, in which the tragic poet would 'Boast innovations, cramp phrase; uncouth song,/Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men/And women jumbled to a laughing stock' (p.838). He is sceptical of the value of the challenge that Euripides has extended to the traditional sanctity granted to gods, heroes, priests, legislators, poets, legislators, poets, and feels that 'There's left no longer one plain, positive/Enunciation incontestable/Of what is good, right, decent here on earth' (p.838). He
scornfully rejects Euripides' advice to "Discard the beast, and rising from all fours, / Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life, / Make veritable men, think, say and do" (p. 827). He satirically presents Euripides' theory of poetry:

Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—
That's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides! (p. 838)

He justifies his rejection on the grounds that the "new impossible Cloudcuckooburg" (p. 839) that Euripides envisioned got him nowhere in the world of men; and consoles himself with the thought that the tragedian rarely won a prize, while his own comedies won "applause, perhaps/True veneration" (p. 840).

But Aristophanes exposes himself as a casuist when he begins his justification by admitting that his art is a "club" as opposed to the "polished steel" (p. 822) that it ideally should be. Arguing on the premise that the deeprooted layers of ignorance and folly cannot be rectified in one life-time's work, Aristophanes justifies his crude methods on the grounds that they created a deeper
impression on the "vulgar" mob than refined argument. He reveals himself as an opportunist who ensures success by catering to his audience. His art has won him the adulation of the mob, and "What made them laugh but the enormous lie? (p.832). In a burst of casuistry, he claims that his lies have done the work of truth since "Truth's in thing not word,/Meaning not manner" (p.841). He reinforces his appeal as to the necessity of compromise by claiming that his audience restricts him—"In no case, venture boy-experiments!/Old wine's the wine: new poetry drinks raw" (p.823). But the validity of his argument is undermined by his admission that his prime concern is with success. Browning intends us to judge Aristophanes through the concept of the poet as a leader of society and a creator of value for mankind. Viewed against this lofty standpoint Aristophanes is found wanting. His comedy does not guide public opinion, but echoes it; it sets up no exalted ideal or high standards. It caters to the man in the market place and merely responds to his thoughts.

Aristophanes' attempts to sustain the old order has been a negative process. He has lost touch with the creativity of art and is content to patch and "vary vintage-mode" (p.824). Throughout his justification
there is evidence of Aristophanes' awareness of inadequacy, made the more obvious by his attempts to shift blame from himself to society. Concerned as he is with championing 'truth', he yet is uncomfortably cognizant of the fact that his way of 'flagellating foe' with 'gibe and jeer' which 'leers condonation too' (p.832) differs markedly from the passionate sincerity of Euripides, whose 'balled fist broke brow like thunder-bolt,/Battered till brain flew' (p.832).

In a more direct way, Aristophanes' casuistry is exposed by Balaustion who takes up his arguments one by one and shows their hollowness. She points out that the Comedy practised by Aristophanes has emphasized man's baser nature without making it 'the nobler spirit's vehicle' (p.852) and has used the doubtful method of telling exaggerated lies in order to point by contrast to the truth. This method has not been successful—though Aristophanes satirized warmongering, war continues; the statues at which he flung mud, still stand. She quotes various passages from Euripides to show how the latter had attained nobler ends than his opponent by far more civilized means. Essentially, therefore, the question around which the argument develops is one of ends and means. Euripides strives to see good in evil,
beauty in ugliness. Aristophanes would banish evil through hate. There is evidence in plenty of Aristophanes' disdainful attitude to the people he caters to—'who think men are, were, ever will be fools' (p.831). Thus his failure on the ethical side lies in his inability to establish a bond of sympathy with his fellowmen or to have compassion for human frailty. His failure on the artistic side lies in his compromising attitude to his art. Aristophanes' approach is very similar to Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau's who finds man's brief life-span inadequate for the realization of ideals, and so opts for immediate gain in the form of ''sustainment'', thus compromising the very ideals he is aware of. It is not enough in the Browning canon to have lofty ideals. Man must aspire vigorously to attain, scorning worldly consequences, even if achievement falls short of the summit.

Euripides had believed in the continuity of the poetic tradition: and had dared to experiment with new forms and concepts, ''Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two/Down to the level of our common life,/Close to the beating of our common heart'' (p.879). The realism of Euripides aims at structuring a more relevant and hopeful world for man: (''Because Euripides shrank not to teach,/if
Aristophanes, on the other hand, stands for the common coarse-as-clay/Existence" (p.844), but his realism is negative, because he has taken his stand on grounds lower than truth. The climax is reached with Balaustion's words: "Friend, sophist-hating! I know worst sophistry/Is when man's own soul plays to its own self false,/Reasons a vice into a virtue," (p.852).

In 1881, Browning wrote to Swinburne: "Indeed I am no enemy of that Aristophanes—all on fire with invention—and such music!..." and a close reading of the poem makes clear the fact that Browning is not without sympathy for Aristophanes' point of view. As in the other casuistical poems, the feeling emerges, to quote W.O. Raymond, that "no creature, however mean, is without a case or a cause that has not latent in it a germ of truth, even though encrusted with error." Aristotle's ideals are not dissimilar to those of Euripides:

I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
--Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour in volley, just on him
Who, all his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed truth,—

(p.832)

57. The Infinite Moment, p.142.
Even Balaustion is forced to admit that Euripides had not entirely been successful. Though he had admitted the possibility of seeing truth from a number of planes, he had held on to a single plane, the High and Right. Though Balaustion does not admit it directly, she is fleetingly aware that Euripides' dictum, "Raise soul, sink sense" (p.829) may have been a denial of man's dual nature. Thus, Browning gives us another perspective to help us in our judgements. In fact, he shows Aristophanes himself as having a finer perception of this duality: he can envisage a higher stage of poetic development than either he or Euripides attained, one which incorporated "august head and enthroned intellect, /With homelier symbol, of asserted sense,—/Nature's primal impulse, earthly appetite." (p.289).

The tension created within Aristophanes by idealism on the one hand and cynicism on the other, gives his apologetics a forcefulness of such convincing intensity that Browning often hastens to provide a very obvious exposure of his casuistry. Hoxie N. Fairchild has called this device the "giveaway."58 In Aristophanes' Apology, the translation of the "Herakles" acts as the initial giveaway, but, significantly, of both the protagonists. The monologues of Balaustion and Aristophanes have been

---
58. Hoxie Neale Fairchild, "Browning, the Simple-Hearted Casuist", in University of Toronto Quarterly, April 1949, p.234.
coloured by their own predilections and idiosyncrasies. Balaustion has no sympathy for Aristophanes' point of view, for she sees no need, as Browning himself put it in the letter previously quoted, for magnanimity towards Euripides' opponent, while Aristophanes' self-justification (in which, as DeVane observes, he is chiefly concerned with satisfying his own conscience about his conduct towards the tragic poet'), 59 becomes all the more vehement because he smarts under the supreme insult of Euripides' indifference to his jibes:

No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure--naught to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek and onion plait. (p.824)

So that, in the structural framework of the poem, the ''Herakles'' is, as Ryals points out, ''the objectification and resolution of different points of view.'', 60 In a mad frenzy, Herakles has butchered his wife and children, but whereas Oedipus blinded himself and sought exile, the wise Athenian Theseus consoles Herakles with the commonsense truth that no man can be stained with guilt by deeds done in ignorance and welcomes him to Athens. Thus, Balaustion's idealistic conception of Euripides is shown to be a distortion,

60. Browning's Later Poetry, p.104.
for Euripides here shows the destructive, animalistic forces within man at its most terrifying; while Aristophanes’ charge that Euripides 'left no longer one plain positive/Enunciation incontestable/Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.' (p.838) is shown to be an exaggeration, for in the 'Herakles', Euripides has shown the healing value of the simple virtues—pity, friendship, fortitude.

The final giveaway, which is more conclusive, comes to the end, where we are told how Buthukles flung the 'choric flower' (p.879) of the Electra and so saved Athens from destruction, while the Peirian bulwarks were demolished to the strains of comic dance and song. Mrs. Orr is thus partially correct when she opines that Aristophanes' Apology is 'more conclusive than the other casuistical poems, and the only one in which the question raised is not in some degree left open.' At the same time, one must be careful in not arbitrarily linking the opinion of the speaker with the poet's opinions. To a certain extent, it is true that Aristophanes stands condemned when he asserts in the end that the poet must 'remain the man nor ape the Muse!' (p.874), when it is contrasted

with Browning's assertions in other poems about the necessity of aspiration. On the other hand, characteristic of the later poetry in general, is the awareness of the subjective nature of judgement: and in the conception of an "imaginary Third" (p.873) who would "take in every side at once, / And not successively,--may reconcile/The High and Low in tragicomic verse!", (p.873) Browning gives us the material for a more tentative judgement of both poets.

Thus, it may be seen that even as he makes a case for a position that is suspect, Browning shows a more sensitive awareness of human fallibility than is discernible in the earlier casuistical monologues, and of the difficulties of attaining to the truth. These later monologuists are not only impelled to justify their positions, they show a remarkable acceptance of the fact that their positions are not, in fact, admirable, thus lending greater complexity to their arguments. Each one, in the end, is forced to accept his nature, not in the complacent fashion of Rlougram or in the unashamed manner of Sludge, but, one feels, guiltily, for the very process of their justification has confronted them with a selfhood which they recognize is ideal, but which they cannot sustain.