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Music in the Poetry of Robert Browning

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June 1994

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate
Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

This thesis attempts to characterize the musicality of Robert Browning's poetry. There has been much debate about whether or not Browning may be said to be a musical poet, but neither side has effectively characterized the musicality or lack thereof in his poetry. This study does not concentrate on Browning's "philosophy" of music, nor on the musical allusions in his poetry. Instead it attempts to identify aspects of Browning's art that share an affinity with music.

First, the state of music in nineteenth-century England is briefly discussed, followed by a discussion of Browning's musical background and an attempt to identify some general characteristics of musical poetry. The balance of the study is devoted to a discussion of the musicality of ten poems, among them "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha". Emphasis is placed on these last two poems' ability to approximate a musical form: the toccata and fugue in the first, and the fugue in the second. The study concludes with a more general discussion of music in Browning's poetry.

Précis

Cette étude est un essai à caractériser la qualité musicale de la poésie de Robert Browning. On avait essayé de répondre à la question si on peut dire de Browning qu'il est un poète musical, mais les répondants n'ont pas démontré d'une façon adéquate si sa poésie est musicale ou non. Cette étude ne se concentre pas sur une philosophie de musique de Browning, ni sur les allusions musicales dans sa poésie. A la place, elle tente d'identifier les aspects de l'art de Browning qui ont une affinité avec la musique.

En premier lieu, l'état de la musique en Angleterre au dix-neuvième siècle est discuté, suivi par un discours sur la formation musicale de Browning, et par un essai à caractériser de la poésie musicale. La balance de l'étude est dédiée à un discours sur la musicalité de dix poèmes, entre autres "A Toccata of Galuppi's" et "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha". Beaucoup d'attention est mise sur la manière dont ces deux derniers vers rapproche une forme musicale, une toccata et fugue pour le premier et une fugue pour le deuxième. L'étude prend fin avec un discours générale sur la musique dans la poésie de Browning.

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Stop playing, poet! May a brother speak?
'Tis you speak, that's your error. Song's our art:
Whereas you please to speak these naked thoughts
Instead of draping them in sights and sounds.

Robert Browning, 'Transcendentalism: A Poem in Twelve Books'

Preface

Although it is well known that Robert Browning had a strong interest in music, he is often accused of being unmusical in his poetry; and if he is said to be musical, the musicality of his poetry is either not demonstrated or poorly discussed.¹ The present study is an attempt to characterize the musicality of Browning's poetry in order to point up an aspect of his art that is too often misunderstood.

The first chapter briefly surveys the critical reception of the musicality of Browning's poetry, from approximately 1850 to 1950. It is shown that although some critics concede his poetry to be musical and others to be emphatically unmusical, there is little consensus on the meaning of the term "musical poetry". An attempt is then made to more clearly define "musical poetry", using Northrop Frye's definition as a base. The concepts introduced here are applied in the second and third chapters.

The second chapter examines the musicality of a handful of poems chosen from Browning's four important volumes of short poetry: Dramatic Lyrics (1842), Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845), Men and Women (1855), and Dramatis Personae (1864). The poems are selected in order to demonstrate a progression from a simple use of musicality in poetry to a very sophisticated use. The poems studied are: "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr", the first two stanzas of "The Pied Piper of

¹ Previous general studies of the relation of music to Robert Browning and his poetry include: Gay, Heath, Hollander ("The Music of Music"), Wendell Stacy Johnson, Joyce, Mendl, Ormerod, Pietch, Ridenour, Schoffman, and Vlock-Keyes. Studies of the use of music in "A Toccata of Gallupi's" include: Ford, Harden, and Charles W. Johnson. The present study attempts to bring an understanding of music in Browning to a new level.

Hamelin", "My Star", "Women and Roses", "James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window", "Youth and Art", and "Andrea del Sarto". Particular emphasis is placed on the last two.

Browning's three great music poems are: "Abt Vogler", "A Toccata of Galuppi's", and "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha". The first does not rely on a sophisticated use of musicality, being instead more concerned with conveying a "philosophy" of music and art in general. The third chapter concentrates on "Toccata" and "Master Hugues", the two Browning poems that most intimately combine a sophisticated use of musicality with thoughts on music and its relation to human existence.

Finally, as an afterword, two more poems, "A Serenade at the Villa" and "Flute-Music with an Accompaniment", are briefly discussed as being indicative of an early and late account of Browning's shifting views on the place of music in poetry.

The critical approach used in chapters 2 and 3 shares a strong affinity with aesthetic criticism as defined by Helen Vendler:

The aim of an aesthetic criticism is to *describe* the art work in such a way that it cannot be confused with any other art work (not an easy task), and to *infer* from its elements the aesthetic that might generate this unique configuration.... Both ideological and hermeneutic (or interpretation-centered) critics want to place the literary art work principally within the sphere of history and philosophy, while an aesthetic critic would rather place it in the mimetic, expressive, and constructivist sphere of the fine arts--theater, painting, music, sculpture, dance--where it may more properly belong....

(2-3)

A discussion of the musicality of the poems is an attempt partly to characterize Browning's art. Because of all the importance placed on Browning's philosophy and religious views, the present study attempts to provide a fresh view of Browning's poetry by largely ignoring such hermeneutic concerns and concentrating on aesthetic ones.

I would like to thank my friend John David Hickey for the time he spent reading and commenting on my thesis. More importantly, I would like to thank professor Kerry McSweeney for his time, his patience, and his valuable guidance. His skill as both a teacher and a critic have influenced me greatly, and much of what follows is a result of his inspiration.

Chapter 1

At the end of one of Robert Browning's late volumes, The Two Poets of Croisic (1878), there is a short, often neglected poem that serves as epilogue. Often referred to as "What a pretty tale you told me", this poem is about a woman recalling a tale about a singing contest told to her by a man, presumably her husband. The contest was originally described in classical Greek poetry, she says, and is reminiscent of Virgilian contests. In reminding her listener of the tale, the woman says of one of the contestants:

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
 Sing but play the lyre;
 Playing was important clearly
 Quite as singing: I desire,
 Sir, you keep the fact in mind
 For a purpose that's behind. (13-18)

This "fact" is important to fully comprehend the story. For although the contest described is a singing contest, the lyre accompaniment proves to be such an essential feature of the performance that the singer is in danger of losing his prize when one of his lyre strings breaks. Without a proper accompaniment, the song is worthless.

The "fact" that the accompaniment must not be dissociated from the song is as important for the reader of Browning to keep in mind as it is for the addressee and the contest judge of "What a pretty tale". Browning has been praised as a great moralist and philosopher, whose poems contain elements of moral and philosophical truths; early readers of Browning decided that their task was to identify and remove the

granules of truth from the husk of the poetry.² Because so much emphasis was placed on Browning's teachings, little attention was given to his poetic technique; but, as "What a pretty tale" warns, the accompaniment to the song is as worthy of notice as the song itself. Thus Browning's poetic technique will herein be examined; my focus is on Browning as a skilled player of the lyre.

After the wife of "What a pretty tale" has finished recounting the story of the singing contest, and after she has drawn an analogy between the prize-winning singer and a poet she knows (presumably her husband, the listener), she begins to doubt the effectiveness of her music/poetry analogy: "But you don't know music! Wherefore / Keep on casting pearls / To a--poet?" (103-05). This quotation undoubtedly exemplifies a

² In the preface to Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher (1891), Henry Jones writes: "... I have endeavoured to give a connected account of Browning's ideas, especially of his ideas on religion and morality, and to estimate their value" (ix). Mrs. Percy Leake, in The Ethics of Browning's Poems (1901), writes: "To find [Life's] true meaning should be our meat and drink, and it is to those who are searching for the meaning of Life that Robert Browning appears as a seer and a true prophet, revealing to us the inward meaning of our everyday life" (12). Even in the second half of the twentieth century does Browning's religious views continue to hold a place of importance. In the preface to The Central Truth: The Incarnation in Robert Browning's Poetry (1963), William Whitla writes: "I desire to show the significance of the Incarnation in Browning's artistic unity.... The Incarnation affects Browning to the depths of his being as a man. It is in his poetry that we can discover the extent of its penetration into his experience" (v-vi). Also of note are the reasons behind the formation of the London Browning Society. F. J. Furnivall, one of the founders, wrote: "[The Browning student] will wish, by conference with other students, by recourse to older scholars, to learn more of the meaning of the poet's utterances To this end *The Browning Society* has been founded" (Peterson, Oracle 10). He also wrote:

Our main reasons for starting the Society were, that the manliest, strongest, deepest, and thoughtfulest Poet of our time had had nothing like due study and honour given him; that he needed interpreting and bringing home to folk, including ourselves; that this interpretation must be done during his life-time, or the key to it might be lost; and that we could not get together the workers we wanted, except by forming a "Browning Society." (Peterson, Oracle 10-11)

playful sense of humour on the part of the wife, and this humour is conveyed by suggesting that a poet, especially an unmusical poet, is as contemptible as swine. Rather than read this as an invective against poets less gifted than Browning, one might better understand it as Browning making a humorous yet self-deprecatory comment.³ Browning is here having the wife accuse the husband of exactly what many critics have accused Browning: that he is unmusical.

In an anonymous review of his Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (1845), Browning is said to possess "genius", but a genius accompanied by "great and obvious faults"; for example, deficiency "in the musical ear for meter and rhyme which by so many is mistaken for the essence instead of the mere form of poetry" (Robert Browning: The Critical Heritage 110). Later, in an unsigned review of Bells and Pomegranates (1841-46), G. H. Lewes echoed this sentiment with more conviction: Browning "is neither a deep thinker nor a musical writer.... He has not yet learned to take due pains with his subject, nor to write clearly and musically" (Heritage 121-22). The question of Browning's profundity was raised frequently during the next century and a half; the abundance of studies on his "philosophy" have been attempts at an answer. Browning's clarity, however, has never been much of a point of contention, for it is almost unanimously agreed that his language is complex and often obscure.⁴ The musical quality of his poetry was the topic of some

³ This supposes that the husband of the poem is Browning himself and the wife is Elizabeth Barrett. Such a biographical reading is not necessary to the poem, but it does not devalue the poem nor the Brownings' relationship. If anything, it increases the tenderness of an already tender poem.

⁴ It should be remarked, however, that some of Browning's poems, such as "What a pretty tale", use a language that is conversationally simple. Yet even in these poems exists a Browningsque turn of phrase

intense debates at the end of the nineteenth century, but Lewes's opinion was shared by most critics during much of Browning's career. Even so, there was little agreement about whether its lack of musicality was an excusable fault or a grave offense.

The concept of the music, or musicality, of poetry has not yet been defined for use in this discussion. A working definition will be attempted at the end of this chapter. In the meantime, since the term was used frequently without any detailed, or even cursory, indication of its meaning during the Victorian period, it will remain so for the present.

In matters of poetic language and the music of poetry, Browning was often compared with Tennyson. The latter's poetry was often taken to be the icon of beautiful, musical poetry, at least when Browning's poetry was being discussed. In the words of Justin McCarthy (writing in 1880):

It is, perhaps, only natural that ... the one poet should be profoundly concerned for beauty of form, and the latter almost absolutely indifferent to it. No poet has more finished beauty of style and exquisite charm of melody than Tennyson. None certainly can be more often wanting in grace of form and delight of soft sound than Mr. Browning. (Heritage 468)

A similar opinion is held by R. H. Hutton (in 1889):

Browning is rough and ungainly; Tennyson smooth and stately.... Browning almost gasps out his meaning, omitting half the articles and particles which weave speech into a flexible texture; Tennyson touches and retouches the form till it is no less perfect, or even more perfect, than the thought

that results in some degree of complexity.

or emotion to be expressed Tennyson treats words and all their associations with the utmost sympathy and reverence; Browning tumbles them about and rolls them over almost as a tempest does the rocks of an Alpine valley (Heritage 507)

Where Tennyson's language was considered fluid, mellifluous, and melodious, Browning's was harsh, abraisive, and dissonant.

However harsh Browning's language was taken to be, it was more often than not considered an excusable fault. Some went so far as to say that Browning's dissonance is a new type of musicality. McCarthy said that even though Browning "seems sometimes as if he took a positive delight in perplexing the reader's ear with harsh, untuneful sound", "The plain truth is that Mr. Browning is a great poet.... He strikes an iron harp-string" (Heritage 468-69). Oscar Wilde said:

it was but rarely that he could sing.... There are moments when he wounds us by monstrous music. Nay, if he can only get his music by breaking the strings of his lute, he breaks them, and they snap in discord, and no Athenian tettix, making melody from tremulous wings, lights on the ivory horn to make the movement perfect or the interval less harsh. (Heritage 524-25).⁵

⁵ The word *tettix* refers to a cicada, or cricket, and was taken directly (prior to Wilde) from the corresponding Greek word. At the risk of eulogizing Wilde, he is here referring directly to Browning's "What a pretty tale" and the word *tettix* is thus entirely apt to refer to the cricket in a poem about an ancient Greek singing match. Wilde suggests, as I have, that this poem is self-reflexive of Browning's concerns over his poetry. Crickets and "What a pretty tale" will be further discussed in chapter 3 in relation to "A Toccata of Galuppi's". Park Honan briefly discusses the above statement of Wilde ("Iron String" 82-84).

Whether Browning is said to be playing upon a harp with iron strings or upon a lute with one broken string, the implication is that he does play music. His music is, however, undoubtedly a different type than that of Shakespeare, Milton, or Tennyson. This view, shared by McCarthy and Wilde, is probably the most sagacious estimate of the musicality of Browning's poetry to be found during the nineteenth century.

Less astute estimates of Browning's musicality can be found to represent the two polar opposites of critical reception. An unsigned review (dated 1890) of Browning's Complete Works reads:

He has also, when he lists to use it patiently and with loving intensity of care and consciousness, the highly educated musical sensibility that can teach how to make verse tread with the airy foot of a dancer, swing lightly as a bird on a bough, or move with the massive march of an army, the solemn sweep of a procession. (Heritage 515)

This is among the highest praise for the flow of Browning's verse. At the other pole, Dr. Frederick James Furnivall, "the man who formally institutionalized" Browning (Irvine and Honan 499) by co-founding the London Browning Society, argues against music in Browning's verse:

On this point of music the instinct of men was generally right, and it had decided that Browning was not a musical poet.... His [Browning's] changes of rhythm, metre, and ryming [sic] in the same poem, were often quite wonderful; but his (Dr. Furnivall's) belief was that Browning very often varied these because he found at a certain point that to go on in the way he had started was too great a demand on the plastic power he possest.... However popular it was among

devotees to take a man's weak point--in Browning, want of music--and say, "Weak point! Nonesense! It's one of his strongest," yet Dr. Furnivall would not give in to this, but would protest that it was for other qualities than melody that Browning's poetry had a claim to greatness, and a right to ask that its readers should be content with strength, depth, thought, rather than any full allowance of music. (Furnivall 2:149*)

Both Furnivall and the anonymous author of the review of Complete Works agree that the rhythm of Browning's poetry is worthy of attention; but while the one refuses to call Browning a musical poet, the other says that he was possessed of a "highly educated musical sensibility".

These opposing views may seem difficult to reconcile, but they are not. The difference between them lies mainly in a lack of agreement as to what musical poetry really is. In Anatomy of Criticism, Northrop Frye, always skilled at clarifying different usages of the same term, attempts to identify two types of musical poetry by contrasting Browning with Tennyson:

This technical use of the word musical is very different from the sentimental fashion of calling any poetry musical if it sounds nice. In practice the technical and the sentimental uses are often directly opposed, as the sentimental term would be applied to, for example, Tennyson, and withdrawn from, for example, Browning. (255)

Frye then quotes eight lines of Tennyson's "Oenone" and eight of Browning's "The Flight of the Duchess" and compares the poets' use of rhythm:

Both passages repeat sounds obtrusively, but the repetitions in Tennyson are there to slow down the advance of ideas, to compel the rhythm to return on itself, and to elaborate what is essentially a *pattern* of sound. In Browning the rhymes sharpen the accentuation of the beat and help to build up a cumulative rhythm. The speed and the sharp accent in Browning's poetry are musical features in it (256)

Thus, according to Frye, the "*pattern* of sound" in Tennyson--a pattern arising largely from his use of vowels--is musical, but musical in the sentimental usage of that word. On the other hand, Browning's effect of increasing the rhythm of his lines through the use of rhyme and sharp accent is musical in the technical usage of the word. Frye thus concludes that Tennyson is not truly a musical poet, and that Browning is:

When we find a careful balancing of vowels and consonants and a dreamy sensuous flow of sound, we are probably dealing with an unmusical poet. Pope, Keats, and Tennyson are all unmusical. This term, I need hardly observe, is not pejorative When we find sharp barking accents, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, and long lumbering polysyllables, we are probably dealing with *melos*, or poetry which shows an analogy to music, if not an actual influence from it. (Anatomy 256)

This definition of musical poetry is directly opposed to Furnivall's claim that Browning's poetry is not musical because it lacks melody: "His verse was *staccato*, not *legato*, as a rule; and for melody you must--save exceptionally--have *legato*" (Furnivall 2:149*). Frye claims that

if verse is *legato*, it is usually unmusical; if it is *staccato*, it is usually musical. Obviously, Furnivall is using the term "musical" in what Frye calls a sentimental fashion. The anonymous reviewer of Complete Works uses the concept of musical in a way that shows similarities with Frye's definition of the technically musical: by saying that Browning's verse can "tread with the airy foot of a dancer ... or move with the massive march of an army ..." the reviewer is noting not so much how Browning is able to modify his poem's rhythm in order to achieve a desired effect as he is noting how Browning's rhythm is effective in itself, which is partly the distinction Frye is making.

It is thus clear that Furnivall's understanding of musical poetry was a sentimental understanding; and in denying any music in Browning's poetry, he is denying it on the basis of that understanding. The anonymous reviewer, Wilde, and Justin McCarthy all use a more technical sense of what musical poetry is when they admit that Browning's poetry is musical. An iron-stringed lyre and a lute with a broken string are descriptions that intimate the "sharp barking accents, crabbed and obscure language, mouthfuls of consonants, and long lumbering polysyllables" that constitute Frye's definition of *melos*.

Frye further characterizes technically musical poetry by saying: "The use of *melos* in poetry does not, of course, necessarily imply any technical knowledge of music on the part of the poet, but it often goes with it" (Anatomy 257). Browning's case is an example of one where the poet does have technical knowledge of music, a great deal of knowledge. Perhaps a reason for Browning's slow rise to popularity is that he was writing technically musical poetry during a time when few people had any background in the technology of music.

England is said to have undergone a musical renaissance about the year 1880. As a result of this renaissance, English music and musicology was to find its place in world of Western music, after having been significantly absent since the Baroque times. Among the events which mark this renaissance, George Grove published his Dictionary of Music and Musicians (1879-80), the Royal College of Music was founded in 1882, Arthur Sullivan was at the height of his career with the productions of, among others, his operettas HMS Pinafore (1878), The Pirates of Penzance (1879), The Mikado (1885), and The Yeomen of the Guard (1888), and Edward Elgar was slowly rising out of the orchestral pit, where he played violin, to a place at the podium where he would conduct his own works (Kennedy 280, 283-84, 293-94). The English folk song was also rising in popularity, and became a subject of professional interest with such great English composers such as Holst, Butterworth, and Vaughan Williams (Kennedy 281-82).

Such was the state of music at the end of the Victorian period. Its state at the beginning of the period was, however, a different matter, for a thing must be dead before it can be reborn. There are conflicting reports of exactly to what extent music was "dead" during the early Victorian period (approximately 1830 to 1860). Kennedy argues that the reason "Native talent among composers was thinly spread" was "the lack of a real musical background--few concert-halls, hardly any professional orchestras, no operatic tradition of any substance, poor educational facilities, and a general feeling among the populace that music was of little real importance" (269). Dent emphasizes the fact that, though English musical talent was scarce, foreign talent was

welcome: "It was a period when England was regarded abroad as a definitely unmusical country, but one in which all foreign musicians might be certain of making their fortunes.... The English, even in 1830, were not an unmusical nation, but a very large proportion of the nation was musically uneducated..." (252). Nicholas Temperley, one of the few scholars currently researching English music in the nineteenth century, emphasizes that English musical talent was not barren, but that it was less exciting when compared to European talent and thus has not survived through the years as well:

Music was part of the fabric of Victorian life in all classes and in many contexts and situations, although the achievement of British composers were modest. Because music in performance is as evanescent as conversation, and most scores still await modern revival, knowledge of Victorian music today is less developed than knowledge of the other arts. ("Music" 518)

Although the exact degree to which England may be said to have been without music is debatable, it is agreed that English musical education was minimal. What education there was emphasized, if not dealt solely in, singing. Choral music was thought to be vitally important in promoting a sense of nationality and a more fervent devotion to God. Among all the other societies founded in the nineteenth century, the "Society for Improving Church Music (1846) and many diocesan choral associations were founded to improve the singing of both choir and congregation" (Drain 150). Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-76), "The outstanding figure in English music in 1850" (Kennedy 272), may very well have made more of a memorable name for himself had he not devoted

so much of his time reforming the church choir at Leeds Parish, where he was employed as organist (see Horton for an account of his stay at Leeds). His results, however, were that his choir "was of an unusually high standard" (Kennedy 272), and provided a model for other church choirs. As the improvement of the church choirs progressed, the singing abilities of the congregation followed: singing became more important and more wide-spread. "Choral singing was recommended not only for schoolchildren but also for the working classes, as an innocent recreation promoting temperance and cooperation" (Drain 150). New methods of teaching singing were researched and introduced, the most important of which is the tonic sol-fa system, established in the schools in 1870, which did not require the students learn the conventional musical notation (Temperley, "Music Education" 522). By the 1880s, the English population at large had an understanding of music, at least of singing, greater than a mere passive enjoyment of it. The English were better equipped to think critically about music than they had been prior to 1850.

It must be said, however, that singing was not the only form of music in which people engaged prior to 1880. Piano playing was probably second only to singing, but it was largely restricted to young women; and a proficiency at the piano was mainly a social accomplishment, a method for women of making one's self more attractive to young men (Temperley, "Music" 519; Gay 211). Young men, on the other hand, were expected to be able to sing a song or two and discuss the latest fashionable music concert, but no more: "That a gentleman should become a real professional musician remained utterly unthinkable until almost the end of the Queen's reign" (Dent 253). There were a few who desired

to seriously study music theory and composition, but they met with many obstacles. If the musically inclined person "was a man, he could not find ... a circle of young male intellectuals who valued music highly as one of their serious interests. If she was a woman, it was taken for granted that she was incapable of attaining anything important" (Temperley, "Music" 519).

In early Victorian years, with a scarcity of people who possessed a modicum of musical education and interest, Robert Browning (1812-89) was an anomaly. According to Gay, he "was a man extraordinarily well educated musically; no other literary Englishman of the century had such a thorough knowledge of the science" (211). Browning himself is reported to have said in a conversation in later years: "'I was studying the grammar of music ... when most children are learning the multiplication table, and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music'" (Griffin and Minchin 16). The actual profundity of his knowledge of music has, however, been the topic of a century-long debate: one side of which emphasizes biographical evidence, the other emphasizes the poetic evidence.

If interest in music is something that can be passed down from parent to child like an heirloom, then Browning received his love of music from his mother and kept it hanging close to his heart throughout his life. Mrs. Browning is said to have been "a sympathetic and accomplished musician who loved to sit at the piano in the gloaming when, perhaps, ... the spell of music is most subtle and most potent" (Griffin and Minchin 15). One of Browning's earliest childhood memories was listening to his mother play Charles Avison's Grand March in C (Griffin and Minchin 15-16), a march that became a significant factor to

his later development of a philosophy of the temporality of art. John Relfe, a one time student of the composer of the Grand March, was one of the two private music instructors Browning had as a child. From Relfe, who claimed to teach his students "'not only Thorough Bass, but the whole arcana of the science, so as to completely analyse any regular composition'" (Griffin and Minchin 16-17), Browning learned music theory;⁶ from Johann Leopold Abel he learned piano technique (Schoffman 12; Mendl 142); and was also instructed in voice, violin, and violincello (Gay 213). His learning was such that he writes to Elizabeth Barrett: "I have always been jealous of my own musical faculty (I can write music)" (Kintner 1:95). He is reported to have said: "I was so fond of music, even as a child that when I was nine years old I should have been very indignant if you had told me that I was going to be anything else than a musician" (Maynard 140). We know that he adapted poems to music of his own composition, such as Donne's "Go and catch a falling star" (Orr 41), but these songs were destroyed (Gay 213).⁷ During his adolescence, he "thought seriously about becoming a composer" (Joyce, "Music Poems" 75) and considered writing an opera (Gay 213). It seems that unless he was overly proud of his knowledge of music, he would have been able to write an opera, or any other musical composition; but whether or not he could write music of great artistic

⁶ "Thorough Bass", often called figured bass, is a complex notation used to understand the harmonization of any composition, and to aid in harmonizing a melody (as well as being a short-form notation for an accompaniment). Counterpoint and the concepts revealed through an understanding of figured bass are probably the two most important elements to know for a person to compose music.

⁷ A setting of Tennyson's "The Ballad of Oriana" composed by Browning exists in manuscript form. It was sold to a private collector at an auction in 1922 and has not been made available to the public (Schoffman 40-41).

merit is an unanswerable question.

It is reasonable to conclude that a person who is confident enough in his technical knowledge of music to contemplate writing an opera is a person who knows whereof he speaks when he uses musical terms in his poetry. But Browning's critics are not always reasonable. Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, a composer of considerable merit whose work includes musical settings of Whitman and Tennyson (Kennedy 286), is said to have uttered the most severe opinion of Browning's competency with regards to music:

There was a most interesting gathering in Coutts Trotter's rooms at Trinity, when Joachim, Grove, Robert Browning, and Hueffer ... had a warm controversy on the subject of Beethoven's last Quartets. The member of the party who talked most and knew least about the subject was, curiously enough, Browning. I remember remarking *sotto voce* to my neighbour that his arguments explained to me that the true reason of the obscurity of many references to music in his poems was the superficiality and exiguity of his technical knowledge. When Jebb was writing his masterly Greek translation of "Abt Vogler," he too became well aware of this weakness, and was able with infinite skill to gloss over the solecisms of the original. "Sliding by semitones till I sink to the minor," is indeed the refuge of the destitute amateur improviser. (from Pages of an Unwritten Diary, quoted by Greene 1096)

Another famous, and lengthy, invective was published in the Boston Evening Transcript on June 3rd, 1887, but was not signed. In reference to the seventh stanza of "A Toccata of Galuppi's", and in particular the

mention of "sixths diminished", it reads:

The 'plaintive' minor thirds, the suspensions with their resolutions, the 'commiserating' sevenths, all show musical understanding. The diminished sixths, however, make one stare! Mentioning diminished sixths in this off-hand way is rather like casually speaking of breakfasting off roc's egg as a matter of every-day occurrence. We wonder how many real diminished sixths Mr. Browning has met with in the course of his musical experience. We will wager he never found one in any composition of Baldassare Galuppi. (quoted by Greene 1097)

The reviewer concludes that though Browning's use of technical terms is faulty, his poems on the subject can still be enjoyed by those with a good deal of musical knowledge:

But where Browning shows himself most truly musical is where he speaks of music untechnically ... his sympathies are not with the musical populace but with the aristocracy of the art.... We, for one, doubt very much whether any one ever got a clearer musical idea of a composition from reading what Browning has written about it.... But, surely, what he has written on music can be read with delight by all music-lovers, and need awake no contempt in the breast of the most thorough musician. (quoted by Greene 1097-98)

Of Browning's barbarous use of musical terms in his poetry, his gravest seem to be: the above mentioned "sixths diminished", the term "mode Palestrina" from "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha", and the phrase "Sliding by semi-tones, till I sink to the minor" from "Abt Vogler". It is concluded that since none of these three instances reflect a profound

knowledge of music, Browning's knowledge of the topic was spurious. John J. Joyce successfully argues that all three supposed musical fallacies are entirely coherent within each poem. The danger lies in taking the terms too literally; one must allow for a poetic/musical licence. For instance, "Sliding by semi-tones, till I sink to the minor", even though modulation by semi-tones from a major key to a minor key may be "the refuge of the destitute amateur improviser", is more properly understood as a poetic utterance that uses the figure of upward and downward movement that is developed in the poem. Thus Vogler's music *sinks* to the minor after having *climbed* to heaven (Joyce, "Music Poems" 79). Joyce's conclusions about the interpretation of music terms in Browning's poetry are worth recalling: "Musical terms ... must be considered in light of their general (literary) as well as their purely technical meanings.... Musical references must be considered in light of their potential reference to other elements in a poem" ("Music Poems" 87).

Once one has been convinced that Browning is able to use technical music terms in his poems in a way that enhances the poetry, one may then proceed to discover how music plays a significant role in his poems. It will be helpful to examine first what music meant for Browning on an aesthetic level. One of the best sources for such an examination is his late poem, the Parleying "With Charles Avison", in which Browning uses an analogy to better explain the difference between Soul and Mind, and music's relation to the two. He calls Soul "the unsounded sea" (161) and Mind the worker who "Lays stone by stone until a floor compact / Proves our bridged causeway" (155-56). Mind builds a solid bridge over

the sea of Soul, without actually being able to hide or tame the sea. Mind has no control over the Soul, "whose lift of surge,/ ... lets emerge,/ ... Feeling from out the deeps" (161-63). Mind produces Knowledge and Soul produces Feeling; but Mind and Soul, Knowledge and Feeling, cannot of their own be reconciled. To reconcile these two is the role of the arts: "To match and mate / Feeling with knowledge ... / ... / This were the prize and is the puzzle!" (185-95), "All Arts endeavour this, and [Music] the most / Attains thereto" (198-99). Art, and music in particular, have the ability to give a degree of permanence to Feeling, are able to arrest the motion of a wave in the sea of Soul and give it solidity to allow the Mind to contemplate it and use it to build the bridge of Knowledge. But, what Browning finds so lamentable, is that the solidity is only temporary; for a feeling, once captured, will quickly break free of the grasp that holds it. Also, the same work of art eventually loses its ability to give temporary solidity to feeling, for all art comes into and passes out of fashion. But none is more transient, in this sense, than music: "Music's throne / Seats somebody whom somebody unseats, / And when in turn--by who knows what new feats / Of strength,--shall somebody as sure push down" (323-26). When once Handel was able to inspire the English Soul to Feeling, now Wagner is and Handel cannot.

This concept is the reason that Avison's March is so central to Browning's conception of music. The March was once able, Browning theorizes, to produce in its listeners powerful feelings of nationality and camaraderie. It is now, in Browning's time and even more so today, virtually unknown and if played, would probably be regarded as simple, trite, and lacking an ability to produce emotion in its listener. But,

for Browning, the March, outdated though it may be, represents perfection, at least to the extent that anything earthly can be perfect. It is in the key of C major, which Browning has Abt Vogler call the "common chord", and it only modulates to the dominant key (G major). In its simplicity, it comes close to the "perfect round" of Heaven, while other pieces in different keys and with plenty of modulations, are the "broken arcs" that aspire to perfection.* It is thus able to transcend fashion, to a certain degree. And it is for this reason that Browning's fancy, as it flew back in time, chose the March as an important work, and brought it back as a finch carries a piece of rag back to its nest during the month of March.

Thus, although the most transient of the arts, music is the most powerful. According to Browning, music "... is the highest of the arts ..., on the ground of its supreme capacity for the revelation of spirit or meaning" (Wenger 205). Browning says: "I state it thus: / There is no truer truth obtainable / By Man than comes of music" ("With Charles Avison" 137-39). But poetry, Browning believes, is also able to convey Truth. In his Parleying "With Christopher Smart", he postulates that Smart's "Song to David" was written at a point in Smart's life when Truth and Nature appeared to him in their purest forms (during his

* Browning states that the March is in triple time (lines 86-87), and often emphasizes the fact that it is a march. Three beats to a bar make for a strange march, for if one is marching, one wants the accented beat to always correspond to a particular foot (e.g. the right foot), but with a march in triple time, the accented beat continually alternates between each foot. The result is a somewhat awkward, syncopated march. Interestingly, though, triple time was considered, during medieval times and early Renaissance, to be "perfect" because the three beats appropriately represent the Holy Trinity--every other time signature (i.e. in two or in four) was thought to break this perfection (and thus four beats are represented by a broken circle that resembles the letter 'C'). Thus the fact that the March is in triple time, though awkward as a march, brings it closer to perfection.

alleged madness), and that is why Smart's "Song" is so well able to convey thoughts of Nature:

Was it that when, by rarest chance, there fell
 Disguise from Nature, so that Truth remained
 Naked, and whoso saw for once could tell
 Us others if her majesty and might
 In large, her lovelinesses infinite
 In little, ...

.

So did you sing your Song, so truth found vent
 In words for once with you? (140-64).

Throughout his career, Browning was always anxious to have his poetry convey Truth as purely as possible; here he is bestowing on Smart's "Song" his greatest praise. And it is no idle coincidence that Smart is said to "sing" his "Song"; the "Song to David" is a very musical poem. Frye observes that "with its pounding thematic words and the fortissimo explosion of its coda," the poem "is a musical *tour de force*" (*Anatomy* 257). Indeed, the poem ends with a great Baroque climax. Its last three stanzas are worth quoting here in order to exemplify this characteristic (although the whole poem should be read for the full effect of the ending), and because such a climax plays an important role in many of Browning's poems.

Glorious the sun in mid career;
 Glorious th' assembled fires appear;
 Glorious the comet's train:
 Glorious the trumpet and alarm;
 Glorious th' almighty stretch'd-out arm;

Glorious th' enraptur'd main:
 Glorious the northern lights astream;
 Glorious the song, when God's the theme;
 Glorious the thunder's roar:
 Glorious hosanna from the den;
 Glorious the catholic amen;
 Glorious the martyr's gore:

Glorious--more glorious is the crown
 Of Him that brought salvation down
 By meekness, call'd thy Son;
 Thou at stupendous truth believ'd,
 And now the matchless deed's atchiev'd,
 DETERMINED, DARED, and DONE. (499-516)

A full musical-poetic analysis of Smart's poem is not within the scope of this study,* but a few remarks on the topic should perhaps be made. The climax here is largely due to the repetition of the short phrases, each beginning with "Glorious". Rather than being boringly repetitive, the lines create an expectancy of resolution: one wonders for how long such a device can be sustained, and when the break in the pattern comes

* Just as the musical nature of Browning's poetry has received little attention, so the influence of Smart's poetry and his concept of musical poetry has also received little or no attention. That Smart was very concerned with the musical aspect of poetry is evident from his Jubilate Agno, which contains lines such as:

For the spiritual music is as follows.
 For there is the thunder-stop, which is the voice of God direct.
 For the rest of the stops are by their rhymes.
 For the trumpet rhymes are sound bound, soar more and the like.
 For the Shawn rhymes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.
 For the harp rhymes are sing ring string and the like.

(Fragment B, 582-87)

("Glorious--more glorious is the crown"), the effect is like a great *fortissimo* after a *crescendo*. Also, the strongly alliterated words in the poem's last line are like the punctuated tonic chords that sometimes end a piece of music after the final cadence (Beethoven uses this effect at the end of most of his symphonies). It gives the sense of a full completion.

It is thus reasonable to conclude that, given Browning's belief that music is the art best able to convey Truth in an unadulterated form, and given that Browning believes Smart's poem to be able to convey a pure form of Truth, and given that Smart's poem is very musical (i.e. it uses musical effects), its success, in Browning's eyes, is largely due to the fact that it is musical. If Browning aspires to convey Truth in his poetry, he must aspire to write musical poetry, that is, poetry that comes closest to imitating music. The lyre playing is quite as important as the singing. By accomplishing this, Browning will be able to meet Mind to Soul due to the power of music, and will benefit from the greater degree of permanence poetry has over music.

One task remains prior to a close study of the music in some of Browning's poems: the attempt to define "musical poetry". Browning's knowledge of music has been called superficial, and his poetry has been called unmusical. Joyce helped refute the first accusation, and Frye the second. But Frye's defence of the musicality of Browning's verse, the technically musical as opposed to the sentimentally musical, only partly accounts for the extensive use of music Browning made in his poetry. Frye's discussion of Browning's music relies heavily upon the rhythm of his poetry. But to say that Browning's poetry is musical

because he is able to use rhythm to his advantage is almost as simplistic as saying that Tennyson's poetry is musical because he is able to use the sounds of vowels to his advantage. One must therefore attempt to identify some of the various formal elements in Browning's poetry that allow one to call it "musical".

Musical poetry is poetry that conveys to the reader the sense that it approximates or imitates music. The term "music" is here generally meant for instrumental music: the relation of vocal music to poetry is a considerably different problem, and one which does not shed as much light on Browning's poetry as does the problem of the relation of instrumental music to poetry. When one says that Tennyson's poetry is musical (and Browning's is not) or when Frye says that Tennyson's poetry is sentimentally musical, one is generally drawing a relation between the poetry and vocal music. The implication is that the poetry is well suited to be set to music and sung with an accompaniment. One might wish to call this "lyrical poetry" because of its direct association with the lyrics of music. "Musical poetry" is not poetry that is specifically well suited for musical adaptation, but is instead more directly imitative of music (with an emphasis on instrumental music rather than vocal).

There are many ways in which poetry may approximate or imitate music. Frye has indicated that rhythm is a big factor. Indeed, establishing a rhythmic pattern and then varying it, by a new rhythm or by a tempo shift, is a common device in both music and poetry. And, just as music can produce melodies that can be scanned with the standard metrical scansion of poetry, so poetry can produce rhythms that can be said to be in the various musical time signatures. Even though the

metrical rhythm--e.g., iambic pentameter--is preserved, the time signature of the rhythm may change--e.g., from duple time to triple time. (A very interesting use of such a shift will be seen in chapter 3 in connection with "A Toccata of Galuppi's".) The usual effect of such a shift is a change in the tempo (from slow to faster or fast to slower), which in turn allows for a change in mood. Although most poets use rhythm to their advantage, Browning is among those who is able to produce both overt and subtle effects through his manipulation of rhythm.

Another standard device used in poetry and music alike is the *crescendo*, or the use of differences of intensity. Medieval and early Renaissance music was often void of any intensity markings (e.g., *piano*, *forte*, *fortissimo*), and the performer was free to interpret the intensity as he or she desired. In the same way, since poetry almost never has intensity indications, the reader is free to change the intensity of his or her reading as he or she sees fit. The poetry may, however, contain various elements that dictate how loudly or quietly the poem should be read, and the performer of the poem is required to pay attention to such intensity indications. For example, Shakespeare's "But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?" is to be recited, or read, more quietly than "Follow not, I'll have no speaking, I will have my bond." The actual elements that indicate at what relative intensity the line is to be read vary widely; but most often the surrounding lines play an important role. And it is the succession of lines that allows for an increase or decrease in intensity. Just as most musical compositions may be described as a series of small climaxes with one main climax dominating the structure of the whole piece, so a

poetic composition may also contain a series of climaxes with one climax dominating the others. The poem "My Star" is constructed on a great *crescendo* (from medium loud to very loud) followed by an immediate change to a soft intensity.¹⁰ The end of "Master Hugues" contains a great *crescendo*, upon which much of the interpretation of the poem hinges. It is important to note that the presence of the *crescendo* in each of these poems is at least partly independent of the performance of the poem; that is, the reader of the poem does not impose the *crescendo* upon the poem, but instead the poem directs the reader to interpret the lines as a *crescendo* (although allowance must be made for some differences in interpretation). The main method by which a climax is achieved is through a building of tension by expectancy followed by a release of that tension. One of the aspects of Browning's musicality is his ability to indicate intensity and intensity changes in his poetry such that they are largely independent of the contingencies of interpretation.

In the use of final cadence, few poets can rival Browning. Such a device, although essential to music, is less common to poetry than intensity and rhythm. The manner in which a poem or a musical composition ends is very important in that it has a large influence over the final impression with which the reader or listener is left. Just as a poem and a piece of music can each be said to work towards a climax, so each can be said to work towards a final resolution, a resolution that may be coexistent with the climax or may possibly result from a lack of resolution. A cadence is normally a succession of two or three

¹⁰ Musically speaking: a *crescendo* from *mezzoforte* to *fortissimo* followed by a *subito piano*. See chapter 2 for a full explanation of the use of intensity in "My Star".

chords that end a musical composition or a section of a composition. Depending on which cadence is used, it can produce a sense of completeness: the perfect cadence is the most common and the one best able (most agree) to bring music to a close. Other cadences are the imperfect, the plagal, and the deceptive, of which only the deceptive is not recommended for closing a piece of music. A *coda* is a prolonged cadence: a coda signals to the listener that the end is approaching, but the finality of the ultimate chord is delayed (sometimes for a very long time) in order to produce a greater sense of completion when the final chord is played--recall the expectancy created by the repeated "Glorious" at the end of Smart's "Song to David". The manner in which poetry may imitate a coda is more easily understood than the way in which it may imitate a cadence. Browning's poetry, however, can successfully imitate cadences, at times some rather complex cadences, and the effect is always very interesting--the final cadence of "Youth and Art", discussed in chapter 2, is a particularly good example. That Browning was very concerned about cadences and codas can be seen from a letter he wrote to Elizabeth Barrett:

To Corelli nothing seemed so conclusive in Heaven or earth as this [three bars of music]. I don't believe there is one of his sonatas wherein that formula does not do duty. In these things of Handel that seems replaced by [three bars of music]--that was the only true consummation! Then,--to go over the hundred years,--came Rossini's unanswerable *coda*: [four bars] which serves as a base to the infinity of songs, gone, gone--so gone by! (Kintner 1:523-24)

It seems that to Browning, the final cadence of a piece of music is the

final statement the piece makes about man's relation to art, nature, man, and God.

It has been said that musical poetry relies on a relationship with instrumental music, and that sentimental musical poetry relies on a relationship with the lyrics of a song. But it is sometimes interesting to discuss a poem as imitative of a song, and not just the lyrics of a song. The rhythm, dynamics, and cadences of a poem together may sometimes convey the impression of a song (*canzon, lied, aria*). On a simple level, the impression may be that the poem is meant to be a vocal utterance; and on a complex level, the impression may be that the poem conveys the sense of listening to someone sing and even hearing an instrumental accompaniment. Robert Langbaum sees an analogy between a song and a dramatic monologue, traditionally different in kind than song lyrics (183; the discussion of "Andrea del Sarto" in chapter 2 more closely examines this analogy). But song is not the only musical form that poetry may emulate. With a deft handling of poetic and musical-poetic devices, any form may theoretically be emulated. (The manner in which a poem may emulate a fugue is central to chapter 3.) A composer may choose to represent water by his music, and the method he uses for such a representation is not set but is contingent upon his creative desire. So too a poet who wishes to represent a musical form in his poetry may choose to do so in any manner he wishes. Consequently, the study of a poetic representation of a musical form must necessarily be without predetermined notions of how the representation must be accomplished. Instead, the poem itself must be the final authority on how to represent a specific musical form.

A successful emulation of a complex musical form would seem to be

the summit of the musicality of poetry. At this point, the poem may be viewed as a musical piece rather than a literary one. For obvious reasons, most poetry does not aspire to this summit, but remains well within the domain of literary composition. In the following chapters, therefore, the poems discussed will be viewed as poems that successfully imitate, in one way or another, musical effects.

Chapter 2

An adept manipulation of rhythm is often held to be the single most important factor that gives poetry its musical quality. Northrop Frye says: "The chief characteristics of musical poetry are continuity and stress accent" (Sound and Poetry xv). By using the term "stress accent" rather than rhythm, Frye emphasizes the fact that standard, Classical scansion does not normally indicate whether or not the poetry may be said to be musical: for instance, poetry written in strict iambic pentameter may be very unmusical. Frye indicates that iambic pentameter often carries a four-stress accent that dominates the pentameter; and it is this accent, Frye says, that is reminiscent of musical poetry ("Lexis and Melos" xvi-xvii). The result of examining stress accent rather than standard scansion is that a number of features become more apparent, such as tempo and caesura.

As a simple example of the difference between stress accent and standard scansion, Browning's "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr" can be used. The following shows the accented syllables (indicated by italics) for the first stanza of this poem. The first example shows the accents of standard scansion and the second shows the stress-accents:

As I <i>ride</i> , as I <i>ride</i> ,	As I <i>ride</i> , as I <i>ride</i> ,
With a <i>full heart</i> for my <i>guide</i> ,	With a <i>full heart</i> for my <i>guide</i> ,
So its <i>tide rocks</i> my <i>side</i> ,	So its <i>tide rocks</i> my <i>side</i> ,
As I <i>ride</i> , as I <i>ride</i> ,	As I <i>ride</i> , as I <i>ride</i> ,
<i>That</i> , as I <i>were double-eyed</i> ,	<i>That</i> , as I <i>were double-eyed</i> ,
<i>He</i> , in <i>whom</i> our <i>Tribes confide</i> ,	<i>He</i> , in <i>whom</i> our <i>Tribes confide</i> ,
<i>Is descried</i> , <i>ways untried</i>	<i>Is descried</i> , <i>ways untried</i>

As I *ride*, as I *ride*.

As I *ride*, as I *ride*.

The difference between the two is fairly obvious: the stress-accent scansion reveals the powerful two beats in every line that are not evident with standard scansion. These beats are different in kind than the stressed syllables in that if a syllable does not represent a beat, it is not necessarily unaccented. Thus the word "Tribes" does not receive a strong beat, but remains an accented syllable. The second rhythm better represents the way the poem is read, especially if read aloud. It is important that each stressed syllable occur at equal time intervals, and since scansion cannot fully convey this, writing the poem using musical notation is helpful in showing where each beat falls. Appendix A more clearly shows the regular beat of the poem than does the above transcription. This regular double beat is the most important sound feature of the poem for it successfully imitates the horse's gallop and, through its incessant regularity, the continuous nature of the unbroken gallop. The standard scansion allows for a breaking of the gallop--most notably in the sixth line--which does not conform to the speaker's insistent phrase: "As I ride, As I ride."

Browning's use of rhythm goes beyond the mimetic effects of "Through the Metidja" and "'How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix'". The regular rhythm of the latter, although excellent in recalling the rhythm of a horse's gallop, is a less sophisticated musical device than the rhythm of the former, where the rhythm forces the reading rather than the reading giving rise to the rhythm. In "The Pied Piper of Hamelin", Browning's use of rhythm is more musically sophisticated. The result is a deft handling of cadence, caesura, and tempo.

Although not all lines of "Pied Piper" have four beats, a general four-beat rhythm is heard throughout. Some lines have only three beats, and the fourth beat can be read as a pause or rest. The following is a transcription of the first two stanzas of the poem with an asterix inserted to indicate where a rest occurs to complete the four-beat rhythm:

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick, *

By famous Hanover city; *

The river Weser, deep and wide,

Washes its wall on the southern side,

A pleasanter spot you never spied;

But, when begins my ditty, *

Almost five hundred years ago, *

To see the townsfolk suffer so

From vermin, * was a pity. *

Rats! * * *

They fought the dogs and killed the cats,

And bit the babies in the cradles,

And ate the cheeses out of the vats,

And liked the soup from the cooks' own ladles,

Split open the kegs of salted sprats,

Made nests inside men's Sunday hats,

And even spoiled the women's chats

By drowning their speaking

With shrieking and squeaking

In fifty different sharps and flats.

(Appendix B contains a more detailed rhythmic analysis of these stanzas.) The first two lines, being only three beats long, offer a pause at their ends. The effect is to keep the pace very moderate in anticipation of the next three lines. Being four beats each, these lines run into each other without pause, causing an increase in the tension of the story-telling. The tension achieves a small climax at the line "A pleasanter spot you never spied", which climax is effective because the line is soon to be undermined by the description of the omnipresent rats. After this small climax, the lines return to three beats except for line eight which enjambes nicely with the next line ("To see the townsfolk suffer so / From vermin") causing a telling emphasis to be placed on the word "vermin". This last line of the first stanza may be said to be only two beats long because there is a caesura after "vermin" resulting from the emphasis placed on that word and the contrast with the off-hand remark that follows ("was a pity").

These variations from the standard four-beat, tetrameter verse structure allow for a more interesting rendition than an unvaried rhythm. If the poem is read aloud, the tone and inflection of the reader's voice are controlled by these rhythmic variations. The second stanza, a favourite of young and old readers alike, is exemplary of the playfulness Browning often brings to his use of poetic techniques. The monosyllabic line "Rats!" prepares the reader for what is to come. There are three beats of pause (or rest) associated with this line, which causes a tremendous emphasis to be placed on the monosyllable and allows the reader a great intake of breath (mental and/or physical) in preparation for the remainder of the stanza. The next ten lines contain no caesuras and are thus read in one exhalation (figurative and/or

literal) of breath. The result is that the tempo increases; and, if read aloud, the volume level also tends to increase. The two short lines ("By drowning their speaking / With shrieking and squeaking") add to the effect of the increasing tempo, partly because they are half the length of the surrounding lines and partly because the rhythm changes from dotted triplets (iambs and trochees) to simple triplets (anapests, amphibrachs, and dactyls). The increased tempo and the increased loudness are indicative of the increased commotion caused by the presence of the rats and the loud "shrieking and squeaking" that results. They are also indicative of the increased excitement of the poem's narrator, and the excitement tends to be infectious when the lines are read. In the stanza's last line, the tempo and intensity climax to a point of dissonance, textually indicated by the reference to the "sharps and flats".

The rhythm in "Pied Piper" is not directly mimetic, as it is with his horse-galloping poems, but intimates more subtle effects, such as the costernation of a town infested with rats. This second stanza is an excellent example of what Frye defines as musical poetry, for he says:

when we find sharp barking accents, long cumulative rhythms
sweeping lines into paragraphs, crabbed and obscure language,
mouthfuls of consonants, the spluttering rumble of long words,
and the bite and grip of heavily stressed monosyllables, we
are most likely to be reading a poet who is being influenced
by music. ("Lexis and Melos" xiii)

The stanza in question contains a fair example of every instance Frye mentions except for the "crabbed and obscure language" (for which Browning is otherwise notorious). In fact, such a large amount of

Browning's work adheres to Frye's definition of musical poetry that the title of Poet Influenced by Music should be given to Browning uncontested, if it were not for the fact that Frye's definition is incomplete. As has been noted, a broader definition is needed in order to take into account the musicality of poetry that results from factors other than the dissonance of rhythm and consonants. Many of Browning's poems may be said to be much more musical than "Pied Piper" and for reasons different from those indicated by Frye. The balance of this chapter examines the musicality of a handful of these poems.

The increased tempo and loudness that occurs in the second stanza of "Pied Piper" is mainly the result of the shifting rhythm and the "mouthfuls of consonants". Similar *crescendos* occur in other Browning poems, sometimes as a result of different causes. The short lyric "My Star", an exceptional but neglected poem, contains an instance of such a *crescendo*. In "My Star", the speaker describes a twinkling star that appears to be throwing forth both red and blue rays of light. But this spectacle can only be observed by the speaker; when his friends attempt to see the red and blue rays streaming from the star, the spectacle stops and the star becomes as any other star. The moment of brilliance of the red and blue twinkling star seems a manifestation of something supernatural: a manifestation of Truth, or Love, or God. Its earthly equivalent is that of a bird in song and a flower in bloom. It is a purely personal manifestation: only to the speaker of the poem is this insight revealed.

The phenomenon of the star that shines both blue and red is easily explained: it is due to chromatic aberration. While the twinkle of a star is mainly a product of atmospheric conditions, the red and blue

dartle is mainly a product of the perceiver. Chromatic aberration is the observable result of the physical property that different wavelengths of light, when passing through a lens, refract at different angles; and because red light has the largest wavelength of the visible spectrum and blue has the shortest, red and blue colouring results. It most often occurs as a result of corrective eye lenses, or a poorly formed eye; and thus it seems that Browning's speaker has less than perfect eyesight. Chromatic aberration depends on a number of factors; and it is not unlikely that when two people view the same object, only one will see the aberration; and if one of the viewing parameters is changed even only minutely, it is possible that neither will see the aberration. When viewing a star, chromatic aberration will make the star appear as if it were continually changing colour: at times white, red, or blue. Due to the nature of the aberration, therefore, the "dartling" star phenomenon is wholly contingent on the viewer, and thus a personal experience.

The speaker of the poem delights in the fact that he alone can see the phenomenon: try as they might, his friends cannot see this exceptional star. The speaker appropriates it as his own and develops a deep love for the one star. Even though he knows nothing of the star, except that it darts forth coloured rays, the star represents a sort of spiritual anchor for him: his friends must continue their search for something on which to stay their minds.

Due to the fact that it is frequently overlooked, here is "My Star" in its entirety:

All that I know
Of a certain star

Is, it can throw
 (Like that angled spar)
Now a dart of red,
 Now a dart of blue;
Till my friends have said
 They would fain see, too,
My star that dartles the red and the blue!
Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
 They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
 Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it.

Line 9 wherein the star reveals itself in all its prismatic glory, is the poem's climax. The eight preceding lines build to this climax in the same way music crescendos to a climax. "All that I know / Of a certain star" is very restrained in that the speaker is suppressing his enthusiasm. By indicating that there is but one thing about the star of which he is sure, his words convey the sense that he is being objective in his perceptions, which counters the intensely subjective nature of the phenomenon. His enthusiasm is not concealed but suppressed for the sake of empirical truth. The next lines, "it can throw / (Like the angled spar)" further indicate a desire to suppress enthusiasm by the use of the parenthetical simile. Rather than compare the star to a splendid, brilliant jewel, it is passingly compared to a spar, a baser form of sparkling mineral. The enthusiasm of the speaker is showing more clearly, and the tension is rising. The next two lines describe in plain terms the unusual characteristic of the star. The use of repetition ("Now a dart of red, / Now a dart of blue;") causes increased

tension in the second of the two lines, because the second "Now" receives a heavier emphasis than the first and "blue" is emphasized as a contrast to "red". Up to this point, no real caesura occurs, and the semicolon of line 6 is but a brief interruption due to the building tension and the immediacy of the following lines: both rhythmically immediate and as a temporally dependent clause. Lines 7 and 8 further hint at the importance of the star by suggesting its desirability. The rising tension is finally released in line 9, "My star that dartles the red and the blue!" where the star is fully revealed. The line conveys the great enthusiasm the speaker has for his star, and does so mainly through the use of the exclamation mark, the fact that it is twice the length of any of the preceding lines, and through the prolonged crescendo that precedes it. The first eight lines can be read with an ever quickening pace and a rising tone, which will fully bring out the climax of line 9 and the splendour it describes.

The mood of the poem then changes from increasing enthusiasm to a peaceful, almost coy, sense of fulfillment or completion. The heavily punctuated stop and the end of line 9 prepares for this change in mood that occurs immediately in line 10. The colon and the semicolon of line 10 represent two full caesuras and the comma, a partial caesura. The effect is one of quiet and peace. There is no regret in this line that the star, bird, and flower have stopped revealing their respective glories: the moment was beautiful in itself and consequently the speaker is not left with an insatiable desire for more. The conversational tone (characterized in the poem mainly by "All that I know", "Till my friends", and "What matter to me") returns in lines 11 and 12, after having been absent in lines 9, 10, and 11. Yet, the peaceful tone

remains, as evidenced by line 11 with its alliterative 's' on three of the four accented beats: "solace", "-selves", and "Saturn". The result is a long, flowing, *stringendo*-like line that is in direct contrast to the shorter, crisper lines that began the poem. The last line presents the speaker's interpretation of the spectacle of the star, presents it in a remarkably unspectacular language. The final phrase, "therefore I love it", is powerful in its simplicity: with a caesura immediately preceding it and a partial caesura following "therefore", these four words are very slow in rhythm and thereby are better able to convey the importance of their sentiment.

The poem does not use splendid or florid language to convey the importance of the spectacle described. Instead it uses conversational language and a somewhat off-hand tone; and achieves its effect through the tension and release of tension that results from the structure of the lines and sentences. The immense *crescendo* to line 9 followed by the *subito piano* of line 10 is the main device used to convey the splendour of the star (in line 9) and its importance to the speaker (in line 13). But the splendour is not characterized as diamond-clear rays streaming from a brilliant star, it is instead broken prismatic hues dartling from a more earthly-like star. In the same way, the speaker does not apostrophize the star (in the manner of "Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art" and "O Star (the fairest one in sight)"), but relates to it on a baser, more pragmatic level of language. The verb "dartle" (of which the Oxford English Dictionary cites this poem as the first recorded use) can be understood as a baser form of "stream forth" or "radiate", and thus more appropriate to the poem. Instead of being conveyed through words like "diamond" and "radiate", the beauty of

the spectacle is conveyed through the use of musicality.

The poem "Women and Roses" does not build to a climax. Instead, it has two contrasting rhythms that play against each other and produce an effect similar to, but more complex than, the effect of the horse-galloping rhythm poems. This poem has three-lined, trimeter stanzas alternating with nine-lined, tetrameter stanzas. Its dominant image is three concentric rings of women circling about a central rose tree. The description of the women circling the tree evokes thoughts of a wild dance ("Round and round, like a dance of snow / In a dazzling drift") and the incessant rhythmic beats emphasize this continuing dance. But the last line of every even-numbered stanza breaks the four beat rhythm by having only three true beats: "And all to one cadence, / They circle their rose on my rose tree." The two beats of "rose tree" imply a stumbling halt to the dance. The whole of the last line has the feel of being elongated when compared to the lines before it, giving the impression of the dance slowing down before it halts. The poem then returns to a three lined, trimeter stanza which is characteristically slower than the tetrameter stanza because of the implied fourth beat rest at the end of each line. The shorter stanzas are thus a counter-movement to the longer stanzas: they are a slow, halting rhythm that counters the faster, incessant rhythm; they are an antistrophe to the strophe. Thus the rhythm of the poem contains the implication that the women, during the shorter stanzas, change their direction and dance about the rose tree in a slower, contrary motion.

Because the poem opens with a short stanza, the slow, halting tempo is the dominant tempo, interrupted periodically by the faster, more continuous tempo. In the odd-numbered stanzas, the speaker reflects on

that which he possesses: his rose tree. In the even stanzas, the speaker yearns to possess that which he cannot: the women of the past, present, and future. His desire for the woman past is that of one who appreciates the beauty of the art of past ages: another man's art. His desire for the woman present is that of one who partakes of another's beauty: it is a sexual desire. His desire for the woman future is that of one who wishes to create beauty: the embodiment of the artist's desire. But the speaker cannot achieve the love of any of the women: to love the first, one must die or resign one's self to a cold, unresponsive love; to love the second, one must become imprisoned; to the love third, one must be an artist or creator. The thwarted desire is reflected in the stanza's return to a slower three beat line that retains the feel of a four beat line, thereby intimating a sense of dejection: "They circle their rose on my rose tree." In the same way, the last line of each three line stanza anticipates the movement of the nine line stanzas because it contains a fourth beat that is not emphasized: "*Bees pass it unimpeached.*" In the same way, when contemplating the roses on his rose tree, the speaker feels the desire for the women rise in him and thus he begins to describe his desire. Thus the interplay of possession and desire in the poem is heightened by the slow and faster rhythms, as well as the implied movement/countermovement of the dance.

Another example of a poem which achieves a climax through the building of tension and its release, as seen in "My Star", is the first poem of "James Lee's Wife": "James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window". This lyric bears a striking resemblance to the lyrics of many nineteenth-century songs, such as those of Schubert and Schumann. The

poem is brief, of a singular subject and mood, and places James Lee and his Wife within a subjective natural world; three important characteristics shared by most all of the lyrics of Schubert's Die Winterreise.¹¹ A discussion of the poem as it relates to a typical song reveals some interesting aspects of the poem and its construction.

The three stanzas are of seven lines each where every line is written in dimeter. If one were to add an eighth dimeter line at the end of a stanza, then it could be rewritten as a tetrameter quatrain, which it otherwise very nearly approximates. Thus the stanza form of the poem approximates that of tetrameter quatrains where the last line of each quatrain is only a half line. It is this variation from a standard form of song verse that gives rise to the tension and release of tension that constitutes the poem's climax. When one reads the last three lines of the first stanza:

The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged:
Summer has stopped

one expects another line of two beats of which the second beat rhymes with "deranged". Instead, there is a blank line or a period of silence. This causes a great deal of emphasis to be placed upon the last line ("Summer has stopped") thereby underlining the abruptness of the stop, the abruptness ("but a day") of the change that has come to the natural world and the world of James Lee's Wife. There is something that is

¹¹ I believe that the complete poem "James Lee's Wife" has a unique relation to the nineteenth-century romantic song cycle; but such an argument is long and complex, and is beyond the scope of this study. It is worth remarking, however, that the British composer Arthur Somervell set five of the nine lyrics of the poem to music, thereby creating an actual song cycle out of this poem.

missing, something incomplete, something unresolved.

The same thing occurs at the end of the second stanza. The Wife asks what the changing year will bring, and she is answered by silence. Both interrupted stanzas create a desire for a resolution: what will the autumn bring? if the bird is estranged, will James Lee become estranged as well? This desire for a resolution is similar to the reader's expectant desire for a completing eighth line, and thus is the tension built.

The tension is released in the third stanza. The questions arising from the first two stanzas are answered only in part: all things have their place, the Wife shall not herself become estranged from James Lee. And the desire for a completed stanza is fulfilled. The last three lines:

And for thee--(oh, haste!)

Me, to bend above,

Me, to hold embraced

cause a considerable emphasis to be placed on the second "Me". Through the indication of excited emotion ("oh, haste!") and through the repetition of the word, "Me" becomes the climactic moment in the poem. These last three lines are an effort on the wife's part to indicate to her husband that she wants him to pay her more attention, not to become estranged. This is her last effort to renew or recapture the married life she wants. Thus the emphasis on "Me" is as a reminder to her husband of her existence and her love for him. There is no sense of bitterness here: the poem ends not abruptly nor in an arrested manner, but as if it were complete. Musically, this can be explained by the emphasis on "Me". If one were to sing the lines, or to recite them by

paying strict attention to time, the second "Me" could be held for the length of one of the other dimeter lines. In this manner, the phrase "to hold embraced" then becomes the resolving eighth line of the stanza, because the second "Me" is give two full beats. In this manner, the first two stanzas are resolved by the complete third stanza, and "Me, to hold embraced" is both musically and poetically the climax and denouement.

For "James Lee's Wife Speaks at the Window", the fact that there are two missing beats in each stanza, when one compares the stanza to the typical tetrameter quatrain, reflects the subject of the poem and helps indicate a method for reading, or singing, the poem. The climax arises not as a result of shifting rhythms, but out of the expectancy created by the missing beats. The song-like quality of the poem is a quality that is further developed in the other poems that make up "James Lee's Wife", as well as in other poems of Browning, such as "Youth and Art".

The love poem "Youth and Art" is perhaps best described by the much overused oxymoron "bittersweet". The speaker of the poem, an acclaimed singer, sweetly expresses bitter regret at a love that "might have been". Browning's verses are short, simple, and highly expressive without being too florid; yet the emotion described behind the words is profound, complex, and not easily expressed. How does a poet express the satisfaction of having attained a goal to which one had been striving and for which one had been sacrificing? how express the joy of meeting someone from one's youth who strove and sacrificed along side of one, from whom one drew emotional support even though words were perhaps never exchanged? how express the frightening determination that one

would be willing to renounce everything one has attained for a chance at capturing the youthful love that was always just out of reach? how express the bitter sense of pragmatic wisdom that the lost moment is not to be found again? how express the hidden despondency that fills one when one realizes that one's life, though filled with success, is unfulfilled? The bittersweetness of the poem is conveyed to the reader largely through the use of musicality.

"Youth and Art" may be essentially a lyric, but it is also a dramatic monologue; as with most of Browning's monologues, there is some difficulty in determining the proper tone of the speaker's voice. If one were to recite "My Last Duchess", what tone of voice does one adopt when performing the following lines: "She had / A heart--how shall I say?--too soon made glad, / Too easily impressed; she liked whate'er / She looked on, and her looks went everywhere" (21-24)? Does one give forth to rage at the last phrase ("her looks went everywhere"), or does one remain aloof while conveying a sense of sarcastic anger, or does one recite it innocently thereby allowing the auditor to identify the implied anger? The same dilemma faces the interpreter of "Youth and Art". The first line of the poem can be read as a gratuitous comment void of undue sentiment, and as such it is coherent with at least the first three stanzas of the poem. But when it is read with the emotional power of the last two stanzas, it becomes an expression of great regret that sharply contrasts with the gay tone of the rest of the first three stanzas. If this line is read with the overpowering sense of regret, then that regret carries through, so that the lines "You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished" and "I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered" are robbed of their great energy and sprightliness. If the

line is read in keeping with the gay tone, then it is robbed of its intense emotional effect, an effect rendered so effectively through the punctuated "once only". One might choose to shift abruptly one's interpretative tone between the first and second lines, but that would only induce vertigo in one's audience.

The solution to this interpretive problem lies in the concept of an "undertone". The undertone of a poem is related to its tone in the same way the accompaniment of a song is related to its melodic line, or the way the music of the song (i.e., the accompaniment and the melodic line) is related to the words of the song (i.e., the poem or text).¹² For example, one of Schubert's songs, "Die liebe Farbe" (text by Wilhelm Müller), begins:

In Grün will ich mich kleiden,
 In grüne Tränenweiden:
 Mein Schatz hat's Grün so gern.
 Will suchen einen Zypressenhain,
 Eine Heide von grünen Rosmarein:
 Mein Schatz hat's Grün so gern.

The tone of this is sweet and pleasant and is reminiscent of a courtly love tradition. These lines are free of anything that might disturb the peace, except for perhaps the reference to the willow tree. But when these lines are understood in the context of the rest of the poem and the whole of the song cycle, they adopt a tragic tone, for the speaker here fully realizes that the woman to whom he is devoted loves someone

¹² The term "song", unless otherwise specified, refers to a sung melodic line with an accompaniment, usually piano but occasionally orchestral. The lieder of Schubert and Schumann are prime examples of "song".

else (and thus the reference to the willow is particularly poignant). There is thus a sorrowful, tragic undertone in these lines that Schubert makes more prominent by scoring the poem in a minor key and writing a simple yet highly emotional and dramatic piano accompaniment. The sharp contrast between the words that are sung and the melody and accompaniment to which they are sung results in a particularly effective and beautiful piece of music.

In Browning's poem, there is of course no musical accompaniment, but there is the undertone that achieves a similar though more subtle effect. The sense of regret intimated by the first line is carried through the poem in its undertone even though the tone shifts quite radically. This is a way of explaining that the overall tone of the poem is one of regret even though many of the verses are sprightly and gay: just as the speaker adopts a smile to mask her emotion, so the poem's sprightliness in its rhythm and rhyme masks the power of the dramatic situation. For example, the lines of stanza ix ("For spring bade the sparrows pair") speak of the sweet rebirth that comes with spring, a rebirth of energy, life, and love; but when these lines are heard against the undertone of regret, they emphasize the emptiness caused by the yet unborn and never to be born energy, life, and love possessed by the speaker of the poem and her one time neighbour. And when the tone of the poem becomes that of regret and thus concordant with the undertone, as it does briefly in stanza x, both tone and undertone work together to produce a heightened sense of regret so that when the tone shifts again, as it does in stanzas xi and xii where it becomes playful and brimming with coquetry, the undertone of regret can be heard more loudly. In this sense, the tone and undertone draw upon

each other and build up in intensity until they climax at the end of the poem.

Before examining the end of the poem, an attempt should be made at answering a question previously asked: With what tone does one read the first line? The surface tone of the poem is of a playful gaiety that is changed into regret in a few instances. The gaiety is achieved through the choice of words, such as "thumbed, thrust, patted and polished", and through the verse form. The short lines and the abab rhyme contribute greatly, but the fact that all second and fourth lines in a stanza have a feminine ending rhyme (a two syllable rhyme with an accent on the penultimate syllable) conveys a sense of playfulness. The tone of regret is achieved through the use of well-placed caesuras, which interrupt the sprightly lines, and the use of a short motif, whose first occurrence is in the first line. This line should thus, to achieve its full effect, preserve the sense of gaiety while emphasizing the undertone of regret. The first line is thus gay in spirit but tantalizingly indicative of more powerful emotions. These more powerful emotions are more clearly glimpsed in stanza x, where the sense of regret briefly rises to the surface and then disappears again. The first two lines, "Why did not you pinch a flower / In a pellet of clay and fling it?" are very playful but the sense of regret is present, because of the implied statement: our lives would have been better had you thrown the flower. The second two lines, "Why did not I put a power / Of thanks in a lock, or sing it?", through the use of parallel construction, start out just as playful, but end on a different note. The presence of the comma in the last line causes a brief but important caesura. The result is that the last three words ("or sing it?") are

emphasized in a way that their counterpart in the second line ("and fling it?") are not. In stanza viii, she expresses a playful sense of regret that her neighbour did not take notice of her when she practiced her art; in stanza x, in the last three words of stanza x, she expresses a sense of regret that she did not use her art to properly attract his attention. And the regret she expresses here has lost its playfulness: she is bitterly serious for an instant before she changes tone and once more becomes teasingly playful. It is important to note that the parallel for the last three words "or sing it" of this stanza is in the first line of the poem: "once only". Both have a medium-strongly accented syllable followed by a strongly accented syllable followed by a weakly accented one; also, both are preceded by a short, yet telling, caesura. Both trisyllabic phrases allow the undertone of regret to be heard over the tone of (false) gaiety.

The use of the trisyllabic phrase as a motif for the momentary revelation of deeper regret occurs twice more in the poem. In stanza xvi, the speaker most fully characterizes the life that might have been: "We have not sighed deep, laughed free, / Starved, feasted, despaired," The absence of these actions from her and her friend's lives leads her to conclude that she and her friend have not "--been happy". Instead of a simple comma separating these three syllables from the rest of the verse, a dash is added which prolongs the caesura and allows the tone to make a more pronounced and meaningful shift. The list of the missing elements of life ("sighed deep, laughed free, / Starved, feasted, despaired") is arranged in such a way that the emotional power of each element is greater than the one it follows (i.e. when one experiences despair, one experiences a more powerful emotion than when

one feasts after starving, which is in turn more powerful than starving, etc.). As a result of this arrangement and of the metrical rhythm of these lines, the tempo increases until it is abruptly interrupted by the dash. The trisyllabic motif that follows is thus all the more accentuated by the fact that it arrests the climax. It is here that the speaker makes her most candid admission; it is here that the undertone is heard most fully, without the eclipsing noise of the surface tone.

The surface tone returns in the concluding stanza, but after the arrested climax of stanza xvi, the tone of stanza xvii is somewhat altered from what it was prior to the climax. A degree of gaiety is still present but all frivolity and coquetry are gone. The tone of the last stanza is a forced smile that attempts to hide the tears which fall upon wrinkled cheeks:

And nobody calls you a dunce,

And people suppose me clever:

This could but have happened once,

And we missed it, ...

The poem could effectively end here: the phrase "And we missed it" encapsulates the tenor of the speaker's sentiments. Instead, the poem ends with the superlative phrase "lost it for ever." This phrase imitates the trisyllabic motif that has thrice occurred ("once only", "or sing it?", "been happy"), but significantly differs from it. The motif in the rest of the poem relies on contrast with its surroundings in order to achieve its effect; but here the contrast is not as marked. Just as the tone of the first stanza is not as full of the gaiety of the previous stanzas, so too the contrasting undertone of regret is not as present. In this stanza, tone and undertone are more fully coherent

with one another and may be said to exist harmoniously. The result is that there is a sense of true completion at the end of the poem: the dissonance which exists for most of the poem is partly resolved. The first phrase "lost it for ever" intimates both the dissonance and the harmony. Its cadence brings the poem to a full close, and a discussion of this phrase as an imitation of an actual musical cadence illuminates the dissonance and harmony with which this phrase is charged. By analogy, the word "lost" is the dominant chord and the word "ever" is the tonic chord. The unaccented words "it" and "for" are passing notes between the two chords. This progression from dominant to tonic implies full completion: the word "ever" implies an irrevocable finality that is not as fully conveyed if the poem's last line were: "And we missed it, lost it." The addition of the trisyllabic motif "for ever" emphasizes the fact that the opportunity can not ever be found. Because of the dominant to tonic cadence, it also emphasizes the completion of the thought and the end of the poem. The word "lost" is resolved by the word "ever", and the poem does not end unresolved. But "ever", because it is disyllabic and because the first syllable is more heavily accented than the second, is analogous to a chord with a suspension that is resolved on the second syllable. The bitter regret that is conveyed by "ever" is thus explained by the dissonance of the suspension and the delayed resolution. Browning's use of the cadence here achieves an effect similar to Corelli's typical cadence of which Browning said: "nothing seemed so conclusive in Heaven or earth" (DeVane 258). The phrase "lost it for ever" is the culminating statement on the love of the speaker, and is concordant with the poem's undertone. Here, the undertone is most fully evident, as is the dissonance created by the

speaker's attempt to remain gay when regret rises to the surface.

There is some value associated with reading "Youth and Art" as a song. The words of the speaker and the tone associated with them are the lyric line, and the undertone of the poem is the accompaniment that both hinders and helps the vocal part. The fact that the speaker is a singer is more than a pleasant coincidence. By confessing her feelings after so many years, she is finally "singing" her thanks to the man who inspired the feelings. She regrets that the love was never and can never be fulfilled, but she is glad she has some fond memories to keep with her. The "bittersweet" quality of the poem is heightened by the fact that she need no longer regret that she never confessed her love, she can only regret that the confession came too late.

Much of the effect of "Youth and Art" relies on the use of the short, rhythm-based motif. "Andrea del Sarto" also uses motif as a musical device, but uses it in a manner that is more complex and more sophisticated than in "Youth and Art". There is, in "Andrea", a repetition of theme and a repetition of words more pronounced than in Browning's other dramatic monologues.¹³ Robert Langbaum has indicated that a "superabundance" of words inherent in Browning's dramatic monologues is directly related to the lyrical element of the monologues:

... it is just the gratuitous nature of their utterance that constitutes the speakers' "Song," for the speakers of dramatic monologues *burst* into utterance in the same sense that the verb is used in connection with song. Just as in opera the

¹³ An exception to this statement might be made for "Fra Lippo Lippi" where a pleasurable repetition of the word "Zooks!" and the recurrence of Lippi's song "Flower o' the broom" do much to characterize the speaker. But the use of repetition in "Lippi" is markedly different than in "Andrea" in that it does not achieve as great a result.

singer only wants occasion to burst into an aria the expressiveness of which can hardly be justified by the dramatic situation; so in the dramatic monologue the dramatic situation is less the adequate motive than the occasion for a total outpouring of soul ... (183)

There is in Andrea's "total outpouring of soul" a seemingly gratuitous repetition of key words, phrases, and themes; which contributes greatly to conveying to the reader a sense that Andrea's utterance is lyrical and song-like in nature.

Rhythm as a musical-poetic device is not as present in "Andrea". The reason is that a manipulation of rhythm is best used for "fast" musical poems: poems where a tempo increase leads to a climax. A "slow" musical poem relies upon other devices than rhythm to achieve a musical texture. Frye says, "Naturally the most difficult musical poems to identify as such are the slow movements, and the attempts of musical poets to give continuity to slow movement ... have a particular interest" ("Lexis and Melos" xvi). "Youth and Art" is better characterized as a slow poem because its tempo does not increase to a climax and is closer in effect to a persistent *andante* tempo than an *allegro*. Its slow movement is maintained largely as a result of the recurring short motif. But with Frye's warning duly noted, the musical nature of "Andrea" can be examined, especially as a slow-movement poem.

When Browning was working on the poems of Men and Women, he said in a letter: "I am writing a sort of first step toward popularity (for me! 'Lyrics') with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see" (letter to Joseph Millsand, Feb. 24th 1853, Irvine and Honan 335). It seems obvious to say that "Andrea" and "Lippi" are the

two great painting poems of Men and Women, and that "Toccata" and "Master Hugues" are the two great music poems. While this is true, Browning's comment should not be restricted to these four poems, but it should be understood in the context of all the poems of Men and Women. So, while "seeing" is an important aspect of "Andrea", "hearing" is also important. The poem is appropriately described as a "twilight-piece", and an analogy can be made between the poem and a portrait of a man immersed in a silver-gray light.¹⁴ But, as a "twilight-piece", an analogy can also be made between the poem and a *nocturne*, or any other dusk/evening musical composition. The movement of the poem very well approximates the flow of many standard slow movements of nineteenth-century music. The general musical paradigm is: an established slow rhythm which intermittently gives way to faster moving sections. The faster sections are always arrested by a return to the slow rhythm. But each time the slow rhythm gives way to a fast section, the rhythm of the fast section is faster than the rhythm of the previous fast section. The tendency to become faster and the tendency to remain slow contrast with each other until a climactic fast passage is reached followed by a return to the slow rhythm.¹⁵ The interplay of faster moving passages

¹⁴ Andrea del Sarto's painting, the "Portrait of a Young Man" (Florence, Uffizi, Galleria degli Autoritratti no. 1486), the alleged self-portrait, may very well have been the main source of inspiration for Browning's poem.

¹⁵ There are innumerable examples in Western music of such slow movements, or similar movements. If each successive letter of the alphabet represents a rhythm faster than the one preceding it, then the general paradigm described can be represented as: ABACADA. Most of Mozart's orchestral slow movements can be represented by the preceding or by: ABA, or more often, ABACABA. The slow movement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony--a particularly appropriate example to keep in mind when reading Browning's poem--can be represented by something to the effect of: ABACADBEAFBA. It must be noted that an increased rhythm does not always entail an increased tempo in music. For example, a phrase

with the background slow movement is present in "Andrea", and is a musical-poetic device amid the visual-poetic devices the poem also uses.¹⁶

The effect of the contrasting faster and slower passages in "Andrea" is similar to that of the contrasting dance movements of "Women and Roses". But that which is achieved in "Women and Roses" through the use of alternating rhythms is achieved in "Andrea", not through the use of rhythms, but through the use of alternating moods. Andrea's mood shifts throughout the poem, and the words and phrases he uses are indicative of his moods. The poem opens with short, emphatic phrases that contain imperative verbs ("do not let us", "bear with me", "Sit down"). Ten lines later, the phrases become longer and less structured, and the number of verbs and their power have been significantly reduced:

I often am much wearier than you think,
This evening more than usual, and it seems
As if---forgive now---should you let me sit

consisting of half-notes in *andante* movement is rhythmically slower than a phrase consisting of sixteenth-notes in the same movement.

¹⁶ The visual aspect of the poem has been previously discussed, but not very extensively; see for example "Eve and the Virgin" in King. The musical aspect has, to my knowledge, not been studied. King has, however, made a few remarks about the music of the poem, the most interesting of which is:

the rhythmic pattern of the poem becomes a part of the meaning much more profoundly than by merely echoing the sense. Though irregular, the poem is "unmusical" only if judged by Spenserian and Tennysonian standards. Closer to the Wyatt-Donne tradition, Browning uses a line basically conventional in that it has a predetermined number of syllables and stresses, but breaks with the musical [i.e. Tennysonian] tradition in the placement of syllables within the line, proposing to relate closely what is felt and said with the manner of saying it, to use rhythm both to create and to support meaning. The absence of a strong sensuous movement ... emphasizes Andrea's passivity. (19-20)

Here by the window with your hand in mine
 And look a half-hour forth on Fiesole,
 Both of one mind, as married people use,
 Quietly, quietly the evening through,
 I might get up to-morrow to my work
 Cheerful and fresh as ever. (11-19)

The weariness that is present in these lines is largely absent from the three lines that open the poem. Even as Andrea indicates that cheerfulness might be restored on the morrow, his weariness is very present because the line that immediately precedes this thought ("Quietly, quietly the evening through") does much to slow down the pace of the lines, due mainly to the repetition of "quietly", and thus preserves the sense of weariness. These two contrasting sections demonstrate a principle that is more fully developed in the rest of the poem.

The weariness of Andrea is evident throughout: at times it is only faintly heard through his speech, at other times it is the main element. Andrea's weariness is thus akin to the undertone of regret in "Youth and Art" and to the slow dance rhythm associated with possession in "Women and Roses". Just as the slow rhythm of the latter poem periodically gives way to a faster, contrasting rhythm, so too does Andrea's weariness give way to a mood of greater ambition. Andrea's desire to fully possess Lucrezia is partly characteristic of his ambition. The following lines have a general tone that contrasts with the tone of the lines (11-19) that precede them:

My serpentine beauty, rounds on rounds!

.

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon,
 Which everybody looks on and calls his,
 And, I suppose, is looked on by in turn,
 While she looks--no one's: very dear, no less. (26, 29-32)

The tone of these lines is one of praise: even the phrase "my everybody's moon" sounds like a high form of praise, higher than "my moon" and "My face". So even though Andrea acknowledges that Lucrezia is not wholly his, that everyone calls her his own, the manner in which he phrases his thoughts emphasizes that she is his. Andrea is characteristically trying to grasp a heaven that is closed to him: Lucrezia cannot be wholly his but he likes to think that she is. The lines are thus an instance of Andrea's ambition. And this ambition is countered immediately after when Andrea says:

A common grayness silvers everything,--
 All in a twilight, you and I alike
 --You, at the point of your first pride in me
 (That's gone you know),--but I, at every point;
 My youth, my hope, my art, being all toned down
 To yonder sober pleasant Fiesole. (35-40)

. . . days decrease,
 And autumn grows, autumn in everything.
 Eh? the whole seems to fall into a shape
 As if I saw alike my work and self
 And all that I was born to be and do,

A twilight-piece. Love, we are in God's hand. (44-49)

Andrea here admits that Lucrezia's pride in him is gone, and that his youth, his aspirations, and even his art are but a shadow of what they

once were: he sees his life as a "twilight-piece". He has submitted himself to God's will. This section clearly characterizes his weariness and resignation, and contrasts directly with his desires to grasp and possess. The imagery in this section (silver, gray, twilight) is important because in what follows it becomes a motif for his weariness. But if one looks back to the section that precedes this section, one realizes the appropriateness of the comparison of Lucrezia with the moon, for the moon is the essence of a silver-gray twilight. Thus although that section speaks of desire and ambition, an intimation of weariness sounds through.

The whole of the poem continues with this interplay of weariness and resignation--the slow moving passages--with pride and ambition--the faster moving passages. As the poem progresses, the sense the reader gets of Andrea's pride and ambition becomes more and more intense as Andrea reveals more of himself; and when the poem returns to a passage of weariness and resignation, these are also communicated more intensely due to sharper contrast with the ambition passages and to the increasingly poignant echoes of earlier weariness passages.

Most of the slow passages contain some use of the twilight imagery first presented in lines 35-49 and thereby echo this early passage. Some examples are: "All is *silver-gray* / *Placid* and perfect with my art" (98-99), "Too live the life grew, golden and not *gray*, / And I'm the *weak-eyed* bat no sun should tempt / Out of the grange" (168-170), "See, it is settled *dusk* now; there's a *star*" (208), and "Only let me sit / The *gray* remainder of the *evening* out, / Idle, you call it" (226-28).¹⁷ Some of the faster passages of pride and ambition are characterized by a

¹⁷ All italics here are not in original.

contrasting imagery of gold, for example: "In that humane great monarch's *golden* look" (153), "The jingle of his *gold* chain in my ear" (157), "Such a *fire* or souls / Profuse" (160-61), "Let my hands frame your face in your hair's *gold* / You beautiful Lucrezia that are mine!" (175-76), "When the young man was *flaming* out his thoughts" (186), "instead of mortar, *fierce bright gold*, / That *gold* of his I did cement them with!" (217-18), and the implied gold in the reference to the "Four great walls in the New Jerusalem" (261).²⁸

The slow passages are also characterized by an increased use of sentence fragments and self-effacing comments, such as: "and it seems / As if--forgive now--" (12-13), "And had you not grown restless ... but I know-- / 'Tis done and past" (166-67), "If really there was such a chance, so lost,-- / Is, whether you're--not grateful--but more pleased" (201-02), and "This must suffice me here. What would one have?" (255). The faster passages have a lot of repetition of single words or phrases, such as: "Treat *his own* subject after *his own* way, / Fix *his own* time, accept too *his own* price" (6-7), "--Dream? *strive to do*, and agonize *to do*, / And fail in *doing*. I could count twenty such / on twice your fingers, and not leave this town, / Who *strive*--you don't know how the others *strive* / To paint" (75-74), "Yet do *much less*, *so much less*, Someone says, / (I know his name, no matter)--*so much less*! / Well, *less* is more, Lucrezia" (76-78), and "And, best of all, *this, this, this* face beyond, / *This* in the background" (162-63).

Thus characterized, the slow and fast passages in the poem are, for the most part, easily recognized. The main distinction between the two

²⁸ For a discussion of the use of gold and silver in the poem, see D'Avanzo. Two brief discussions are found in Cook (273-74), and less interestingly, in Melchiori (101-103).

is that the former use the twilight motif while the latter use repetition within themselves.¹⁹ This is very appropriate because each fast passage reveals a new instance of Andrea's ambition and pride, an instance associated with a particular aspect of his life, and thus each fast passage is distinct in itself. Each slow passage returns to the same sense of weariness and resignation that pervades Andrea's present mood. Thus the slow passages are linked together and form an underlying theme which is broken upon by the distinct, faster passages; and it is this which so closely resembles the typical construction described earlier of a slow movement of eighteenth- or nineteenth-century symphonic music. Andrea's mood of weariness and resignation periodically gives way to a mood of pride and ambition, only to return to the weariness and resignation. It must be noted that the difference between the slow and faster passages is not a difference of rhythm, as it is in "Women and Roses", but is a difference of mood and a few poetic devices (motif, repetition, and phrasing). "Andrea del Sarto" thus presents a very sophisticated musicality in that it does not in any way

¹⁹ Park Honan has also noted the use of repetition in "Andrea del Sarto". He says: "In the monologues at hand marked repetition of words almost always has something to do with the speaker's revelation. Probably the most extensive use of it is made in *Andrea del Sarto*" (*Browning's Characters* 212). Honan's explanation for the extensive use of repetition is different from the that of the current study:

Andrea's repetition suggests spiritual as well as physical debility; the relatively simple words repeated deprive his speech of an intellectual air and reflect the dominance of Andrea's mood over his whole being Andrea is of course revealed at a particularly weary moment for him; but he reviews his life at this moment, so that the lassitude and moodiness partly conveyed through word repetition have the effect of seeming to be lifelong and inherent characteristics (*Characters* 213)

Honan's emphasis is on the characterization of Andrea; while mine is on the effect the repetition has on the poetic technique, which in turn characterizes Andrea.

rely on rhythm and beats.

The last fifty lines or so of the poem, in keeping with the climax of a slow symphonic movement, present slow and faster passages alternately in quick succession. The quick alternation of the passages emphasizes the "fastness" of the fast passages and the "slowness" of the slow passages; ambition and resignation, pride and weariness are set against each other resulting in mutual emphasis. This builds to a climax in the poem which corresponds to line 243, the line before a break in the stanza paragraph. The crescendo starts with: "Come from the window, love,--come in, at last, / Inside the melancholy little house" (211-12), which is indicative of Andrea's ambition to possess his wife (note the characteristic use of repetition: "Come from", "come in", "Inside"). Then follows: "oft at nights / When I look up from painting, eyes tired out" (214-15), which is indicative of Andrea's twilight weariness. This gives way to: "The walls become illumined, brick from brick / Distinct, instead of mortar, fierce bright gold, / That gold of his I did cement them with!" (216-18), which is indicative of Andrea's pride in his past glory. The poem continues in this manner until Andrea questions, as a last effort to achieve full possession of Lucrezia, "Ah, but, what does he, / The Cousin! What does he to please you more?" (242-43). There is also a sense of resignation here due to the fact that Andrea voices his understanding that the cousin possesses Lucrezia more than Andrea himself does. Andrea's desire to possess and his understanding that he does not possess are not more fully expressed nor contrasted than here. What follows is a denouement or resolution of the climax.

After the climax of line 243, the next two lines return to a slow

movement, but the weariness and resignation are somewhat transformed in that there is a greater sense of peace and satisfaction here: "I am grown peaceful as old age to-night. / I regret little, I would change still less." The implication is that something has happened between lines 243 and 244, something that is able to transform weariness into peace. Throughout the poem, each occurrence of a faster passage set against the underlying slow movement is indicative of Andrea's attempts to grasp something beyond his reach--in general, the possession of Lucrezia: much as the music of a slow movement can be understood to attempt to grasp at a more fully realized climactic moment. After his final attempt, "What does he to please you more?", Andrea no longer attempts to possess Lucrezia, but has instead convinced himself that he need not or can not possess her any more than he does. Instead of attempting to grasp something beyond his reach, he contents himself with keeping what he has. At the same time, he accepts his past life, accepts the possibility that he will never have the glory for which he wishes, and hopes that the afterlife will reward him with his due glory. In this last part of the poem (line 244-67), there is a marked absence of silver imagery: the silver twilight (line 35-36) has given way to "settled dusk" (208), which in turn has given way to the peace of the night. The troubled music of the evening, which became more troubled as the last hints of light failed, is now done and only a few echoes linger to disturb the night.

Although light and dark, shade, *chiaroscuro*, are important elements to the poem, the varying movement of the poem is also important: it is a poem to be both seen and heard. "Andrea del Sarto" is one of Browning's great achievements and one in which musical effects are used in an

interesting and sophisticated manner. And while music plays an important role in this, one of the great art poems of Men and Women, music plays an even more significant role in the two great music poems of the same collection.

Chapter 3

Of the poems studied in the previous chapter, only "Youth and Art" is thematically concerned with music. The theme of unfulfilled love, however, is more central to the poem, and the theme of music is justly eclipsed by it. In Men and Women are two poems that are both concerned with music thematically and very musical in their effects. "A Toccata of Galuppi's" and "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" both have a place on the list of the best monologues Browning wrote, a list which also includes "Andrea del Sarto". But apart from being great monologues, these two poems, "Toccata" and "Master Hugues", are central to any study of the musicality of Browning's poetry. They both attempt to imitate a specific musical form, and succeed very well. And the manner in which they imitate a musical form is intimately involved with the character of the monologuists and the themes developed in the poems. For these reasons "Toccata" and "Master Hugues" are the best representatives of Browning's art in regard to the musicality of his poetry. But prior to a detailed study of these poems, a third music poem, often grouped with "Toccata" and "Master Hugues", should be mentioned. "Abt Vogler" is a poem that is intimately concerned with music; but although an interesting poem, it is not very musical.

Although it does not succeed on as high a level as do "Toccata" and "Master Hugues", "Abt Vogler" is able to convey a sense of a musical form: in this case the improvisation. The improvisational nature of the poem is achieved through the use of only a few devices. The lines of the poem are long: those of fourteen syllables dominate, but the length varies from twelve to seventeen syllables. The metrics of the lines are

irregular, as are the placement and number of stress accents. These irregularities are suggestive of irregular music: music that does not conform to strict time or phrases, such as the music of an improvisation. There is also an irregular and at times seemingly excessive use of alliteration, as lines thirteen to sixteen demonstrate:

And one would *bury* his *brow* with a *blind* plunge down to hell,
Burrow awhile and *build*, *broad* on the roots of things,
 Then up again *swim* into *sight*, having *based* me my palace well,
Founded it, *fearless* of *flame*, *flat* on the nether springs.

The insistent, heavy alliteration is reminiscent of forceful, heavy chords as opposed to a flowing melodic line. Both the alliteration and the rhythm have together been taken to be successful musical features of the poem, and as a result W. S. Johnson says that "Abt Vogler" is full of musical sound effects, though not formal effects (205-06). But as seen earlier, alliteration and rhythmic variation occur extensively elsewhere in Browning and potentially produce a much greater sense of musicality: the rhythmic motif of "Youth and Art" and the alliteration in "Andrea" are both more sophisticated instances of musicality. Because the form of a musical improvisation is without specific constraints, a free use of rhythm and alliteration is only less directly suggestive of the music than if the form imitated were a toccata or a fugue, in which case rhythm and alliteration must be more deftly handled if they are to convey a sense of musicality.

The other device that contributes to intimate the music of an improvisation is allusion. A composer who is extemporizing will often include scraps of phrases from various works he or another has composed. Allusion, however, is normally not used extensively; and when it is, it

is mostly without any specific reason or artistic purpose. "Abt Vogler" contains a number of allusions, including the reference to the story of Solomon in the first stanza, the echo of 2 Corinthians in the ninth stanza ("of houses not made with hands!"), and the echo of Smart's "Song to David" in the last stanza ("I have dared and done").

There are two other, more important, allusions; both refer to pre-nineteenth-century conceptions of music. One is to the concept of building a palace through the use of music. In the second stanza, Vogler suggests that as he played, the keys (the music notes or chords) built a palace. A similar example of this can be found in Milton, when in Book 1 of Paradise Lost the golden palace of Pandaemonium rises out of the ground:

Anon out of the earth a fabric huge

Rose like an exhalation, with the sound

Of dulcet symphonies and voices sweet.... (1:710-12)²⁰

There is also the tradition of Creation being sung into being. Such is described at the beginning of Dryden's "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day":

From harmony, from heav'nly harmony

This universal frame began:

When Nature underneath a heap

Of jarring atoms lay,

²⁰ Alastair Fowler's note to the above lines of Paradise Lost begins: "Pandaemonium rises to music, as Thebes to the sound of Amphion's lyre, since in the Renaissance it was believed that musical proportions governed the forms of architecture ..." (84). As enlightening as this is, music's presence here is not solely as a result of a relation to architecture. In Book 7 of the poem, the angels sing during the creation: "And touched their golden harps, and hymning praised / God and his works, creator him they sung" (7:258-59). In the Book of Job (38:7), the morning stars are said to have sung during the creation. There is thus a more intimate relation between the process of creating, demonic or celestial, and music.

And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high:

"Arise, ye more than dead."

Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry

In order to their stations leap,

And Music's pow'r obey. (1-10)

The image here of the four elements flying to their respective places is similar to the image of Solomon and the angels, or Vogler and his notes. The other allusion is to a tradition that is similar to that of creation through music: it is that music is thought of as the bridge between heaven and earth, and consequently the establishing of heaven on earth, on the final day, will be accomplished through music. In the Book of Revelations, the Second Coming is accompanied by the trumpets of angels. Dryden incorporates this into his poem:

So, when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And Music shall untune the sky. (59-63)

Vogler says that while he was playing his music,

...the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best, in my passion, to scale the sky:

.....

For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.

(27-28, 32)

As his music climbs to heaven, some of heaven's perfection descends and touches the earth. Music's power of creation and revelation (i.e., the

ability to "untune") are what allow Vogler to conclude that music is the most powerful of the arts, that musicians are the select few whom God "whispers in the ear".

The allusions in the poem are important in that they provide an intellectual context for Vogler's thoughts. They also help illumine some of the poem's lines, such as in the twelfth stanza: "Well, it is earth with me" and "Sliding by semitones, till I sink to the minor,-- yes, / And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on alien ground".

Although somewhat suggestive of the nature of a musical improvisation in that they are drawn in and played upon by Vogler's thoughts, these allusions do not contribute to the musicality of the poem as much as they do to the concept of music presented by the poem. The poem's musicality as such does little to contribute to the characterization of Vogler or to the aesthetics of the poem. Although "Abt Vogler" is interesting for its discussion of music and the other arts, for its portrayal of Vogler, for its use of alliteration and allusion, and for other reasons, it is not a very musical poem. "Toccata" and "Master Hugues", however, are very musical poems, to a degree beyond that of any of the poems studied in the previous chapter.

"A Toccata of Galuppi's"

There are two opposing, musical forces at work in "A Toccata of Galuppi's": the tendency towards regularity, and the tendency towards irregularity. A set metrical rhythm with rhythmic variations is a standard device that can be manipulated to produce a tension between

regularity and irregularity. Browning's "Toccata" uses this device; but the regularity/irregularity dichotomy is present in other ways as well, not only formally but also in the subject matter of the poem. A close examination of this dichotomy reveals important aspects of the poem that have not yet been fully examined.

Browning's "Toccata" contains not only a toccata-like passage, but also a passage that imitates a fugue.²¹ An explanation of the presence of the fugue can be supported by an understanding of the musical term *toccata*, which can also be understood to represent the dichotomy between regularity and irregularity. Just as the term *sonata* can refer both to a musical piece in three movements adhering to certain conventions and to a single movement organized by specific structuring elements, so *toccata* can refer both to a composition of more than one movement and to a single movement within this composition. But unlike the sonata, the toccata is not a dominant genre in Western music; consequently (or perhaps because of this fact) it is not nearly as well defined a form as is the *sonata*. As a result, the conventional elements of the toccata are not as easy to discuss.²²

²¹ The presence of the fugue in "Toccata" has only, to the best of my knowledge, been mentioned once before. Marne A. Dezso has characterized stanza viii as being either a "quasi-fugal section" or an improvisational section, both of which are typical of a toccata (62). It seems as if every person who has commented on the toccata nature of the poem has identified this stanza as the best example of toccata-like poetry. Dezso also claims that it is toccata-like, but specifically fugal or improvisational in character. I claim, for reasons explained hereafter, that stanzas xii to xv are a poetic representation of a fugue. The present study is therefore original in attempting to draw a relation between "Toccata" and the toccata and fugue form.

²² My discussion of the toccata will be largely based on the toccata as it was used at the end of the Baroque period, notably as it was used by Bach. Due to the facts that Bach was and is the most known of the Baroque keyboard composers, and that Galuppi's keyboard pieces were written shortly after Bach's death, I feel that the late Baroque

As a term referring to a composition with more than one movement, a toccata is usually made up of an introductory passage and a fugue movement (as with Bach's numerous 'preludes and fugues'). Very often, an extra movement, such as a *canzonetta* or an *adagio*, will occur before the fugue and will be typically slower and more lyrical. Occasionally, a second fugue will be present, preceded by another slow-moving passage. Thus a toccata will usually have between two and five movements. The fugue movement of the toccata is distinguished from other fugues by a greater degree of complexity and normally requires great dexterity on the part of the performer. A *ricercare* style fugue emphasizes intellect and exercises the composer's skill; a *toccata* style fugue emphasizes ornament and exercises the performer's skill.²³ The same distinction can be used to distinguish the prelude of a 'prelude and fugue' from the introductory movement of a toccata: from the performer's point of view, the latter is normally faster and more complex than the former. This introductory movement of a toccata, itself called a toccata or a toccata movement in the same way that the first movement of a sonata is called a sonata movement, is loosely structured, and often understood to be a warm-up movement for the performer in preparation for the more important fugue that will inevitably, although not necessarily immediately,

understanding of the toccata is the most important in relation to Browning's poem.

²³ As a result of Bach and other late composers who used the term *ricercare*, the term has come to imply "a severe fugue with archaic mannerisms" (*Grove* 15:838). A *ricercare* fugue is thus much more pedantic than a toccata fugue; the toccata was originally an attempt to break away from a form that was considered too strict. "The *ricercare* and *canzona* idioms intermingled in the course of the 17th century, and a third kind of fugue emerged, from the keyboard TOCCATA. Originally the toccata was a purely decorative, improvisatory keyboard piece, but fugal passages were sometimes inserted into it for contrast" (*Grove* 7:14).

follow. It is in fact directly related to the prelude of a 'prelude and fugue'.²⁴ An analogy can be drawn between the toccata movement and the warm-up of an orchestra prior to a symphony. The idea is that an instrumentalist will normally practice the most difficult passages he or she will be performing, as well as perhaps the favoured passages, prior to the execution of that symphony. Thus the performer of a toccata, and arguably the audience, is given an opportunity to play through some very difficult passages prior to the difficult, but more important, fugue.

When referring to a toccata, of which the fugue is the most important element, the term toccata connotes a high degree of order, often to the degree of great complexity. When referring to the introductory movement, the term toccata connotes a high degree of disorder, often to the degree of bafflement. In choosing to write a poem about a toccata of Galuppi's, rather than one of his sonatas for which he is better known,²⁵ Browning has at his fingertips a concept that is suggestive of both order and disorder, regularity and irregularity.²⁶

²⁴ "The idea of the 'prelude and fugue' ('toccata and fugue', 'fantasia and fugue'--the word fantasia now stood for a type close to the toccata) originated with the idea of including fugal passages in the toccata" (Grove 7:15).

²⁵ It is interesting to remark that no true toccata pieces written by Baldassare Galuppi have been found. A few of his works were titled "Toccata" in some manuscripts, but are now more aptly called sonatas. Browning writes in 1887: "As for Galuppi, I had once in my possession two huge manuscript volumes almost exclusively made up of his 'Toccata-pieces' ..." (letter to Mr. Spaulding, June 30th, quoted by Greene 1099). These contradictory facts cannot be properly resolved, but that Browning was familiar with fugue is definite, and that he was familiar with Bach's 'Toccata and Fugue's is highly probable.

²⁶ The fact that a fugue was necessarily present in a toccata by the eighteenth-century can be supported by the following: "Bach's organ toccatas are either works in which the toccata and fugal elements are closely linked ...; or they are large independant movements in strict

Much has been said concerning the similarities between the auditory texture of a toccata movement and the sprightly lines of Browning's poem.²⁷ As enlightening as such commentary is, an important musical aspect of the poem has been overlooked: there is a marked difference between the quick-moving lines of the first part and the slower-moving lines of the second part.

To call the lines of Browning's "Toccata" irregular would be inaccurate because their rhythm is by and large preserved throughout. There is, however, an interesting interplay between iambs and anapests that may be termed irregular. The main source of irregularity in the poem comes from the short phrases and the quick succession of images. The latter's effect can be seen in stanza three where a host of images flash by in succession: sea, streets, arches, bridges, a host of images brought to mind by a reference to Shakespeare's Shylock (gold, for instance), houses, shops, and carnivals. The presentation of the musical, or auditory, ideas or sounds in stanza vii is similar to the

rhythm preceding a fugue ..." (Grove 19:19). "Some pieces known as 'toccata and fugue' were called simply 'toccata' by their composer ..." (Grove 7:15).

²⁷ John E. Schwiebert says, "Dipodic rhymed triplets, with the complex fingerings they require, provide a verse counterpart to the difficulties of this musical form [i.e. the toccata]. They tax the poet's virtuosity by testing his ability to work colloquial rhythms into a meter inherently inhospitable to natural speech patterns" (15). Eleanor Cook says, "The rhythm is light (a toccata is a 'touch-piece') but steady and persistent. Its faint beat may hasten or retard or simply accompany the thought, but always regulates it like the quiet ticking of a clock. For a poem in which the passage of time is important, the effect is a happy one. Rhythm suits theme too: no crisis, anguish, vehemence; no crescendos or fortissimos" (173-74). Wendell Stacy Johnson says, "There is instead a contrast between the consistently light and rapid toccata form of the poem and the moods, both musical and personal, that it touches on.... [The lines] create a lively voice which can only speak ironically when it speaks of age and death. And so the liveliness of the toccata triumphs over the mortal substance which it uses" (204).

presentation of the images in stanza iii. And in stanza eight, the quick exchanges of dialogue between the two Venetians are presented in a fashion similar to that of iii and vii. Together, stanzas vii and viii are the best example of the use of short phrases resulting in irregularity.

What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on
sigh,

Told them something? Those suspensions, those solutions--"Must we
die?"

Those commiserating sevenths--"Life might last! we can but try!"

"Were you happy?"--"Yes."--"And are you still as happy?"--"Yes.

And you?"

--"Then, more kisses!"--"Did *I* stop them, when a million seemed so
few?"

Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!

Stanza vii has a total of eleven caesuras or end stops, and stanza viii has eight occurrences. These two stanzas best suggest the rather erratic quality of a toccata movement. The lack of definite interconnectedness between phrases and ideas, the short phrases set off against the longer (e.g. line 24), the sprightly rhythm as well as the more drawn-out lines (e.g. "'tis with such a heavy mind") all are reminiscent of a toccata movement. It is important to note that vii and viii, the poem's most toccata-like stanzas, occur when, in the mind of the speaker, Galuppi starts to play. Stanza vi presents the hush of the

audience as Galuppi commences playing. The end of the piece occurs in ix when the "octave struck the answer", thus resolving the "dominant's persistence". As such, vii and viii are an apt representation of the toccata movement, except for the resolving chord, which is delayed until the beginning of the ninth stanza.

That this toccata movement is directly related to the character of the Venetians is suggested by the reference to butterflies in stanza xiii. Galuppi's phrase, "Butterflies may dread extinction" refers back to the question of one of the phrases of the Venetians ("Must we die?"), thus making explicit the analogy between the flighty, trivial, and ephemeral Venetians and the butterflies. But the conversation between the two Venetians in vii and viii is not, of course, independent of the speaker: it is the speaker's understanding/appreciation of Galuppi's music that brings this conversation to mind. For the speaker, the conversation and the personalities behind it are a product and reflection of the toccata movement. The music causes the speaker to imagine the conversation and its flighty conversants; and the butterfly-like personalities are thus a result of the butterfly-like music--the toccata movement being just as flighty, trivial, and ephemeral as are the imagined Venetians. Such a characterization of the toccata movement is not without justification, for a toccata will often seem to be lacking in substance when heard by an ear attuned to more standard forms of baroque, roccoco, and classical music. But the speaker is not condemning Galuppi; he has nothing but admiration for the music that is to follow.

The butterflies of stanza xiii are directly contrasted with the cricket mentioned in xii. Whereas the butterflies are said to dread

their own deaths and then die, the cricket is able to survive when all around him is gone. In likening Galuppi to a cricket, the speaker praises the composer for having achieved a kind of immortality. But there is a further use of the cricket in "Toccata": it can best be pointed up by observing the use of a cricket in other poems of Browning's.

The epilogue to The Two Poets of Croisic, sometimes titled "What a pretty tale you told me", uses a cricket as one of its central images. In this poem, the cricket represents the rescuer that saves the artist's song from dissonance or triviality. The cricket that settles upon the lute in place of the broken string not only prevents the singer's song from going away; it also allows that song to achieve a higher degree of sound quality: "Why, we took your lyre for harp, / So it shrilled us forth F sharp!" (59-60). Just as this cricket will sound forth an F sharp whenever it is called for, so the woman will supply to the poet the "'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass / Asked the treble to atone / For its somewhat sombre drone" (100-02) and thereby help prevent the poet's verse from becoming too "gruff". In both cases, the cricket, with its monotonous droning, fills an important vacancy. But it is this monotonous droning that for Browning seems to be the most important characteristic of the cricket.

This distinguishing feature of the cricket can also be seen in book 3 of The Ring and the Book, when Guido is likened to a cricket:

And now his harping on this one tense chord
 The villa and the palace, palace this
 And villa the other, all day and all night
 Creaked like the implacable cicala's cry

And made one's ear-drum ache: ... (3.313-17)

Also, in Book 11, Guido likens his accusers to crickets:

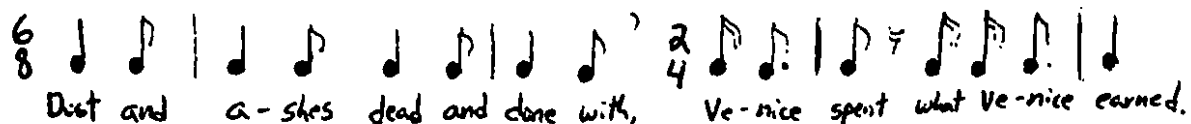
Still the same answer, still no other tune
 From the cicala perched at the tree-top
 Than crickets noisy round the root,--'t is 'Die!'
 Bids Law--'Be damned!' adds Gospel,--nay,
 No word so frank,--'t is rather, 'Save yourself!'
 The Pope subjoins--... (11.1780-85)

Here the cricket's sound does not prevent a song from becoming gruff, but instead is gruffness itself. With its monotonous drone, the cricket is undesirable and must be stopped. Thus, in "What a pretty tale", the regularity of the cricket's sound is a necessary complement in achieving full harmony, while in The Ring and the Book it is an empty and annoying sound that tends to destroy harmony ("his harping on this one tense chord").

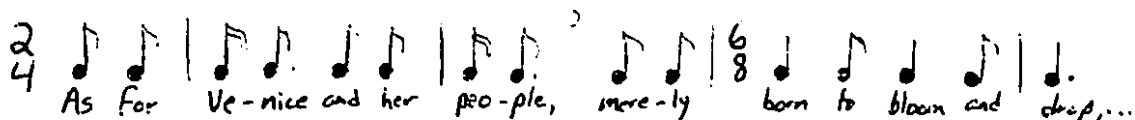
In "A Toccata of Galuppi's", the cricket is the voice of Galuppi himself; its incessant droning is the phrase, "Dust and ashes" (which occurs at lines 35 and 43). The analogy between Galuppi and the cricket is particularly provocative. In "What a pretty tale you told me", one of the crickets repeats "Love, Love, Love"; in The Ring and the Book, one of the crickets repeats "Be damned, Be damned, Be damned"; in "Toccata", the cricket repeats, through Browning's use of musical devices, "Dust and ashes, Dust and ashes, Dust and ashes." If one considers that this phrase is not the only phrase sounded by Galuppi in stanzas xii, xiii, and xiv, i.e. is not "one tense chord" but one of several themes, the cricket simile loses its effect. However, Galuppi's speech (lines 35 to 43) is a representation of a fugue movement in the

same way that lines 19 to 24 are a representation of a toccata movement. Just as a toccata can be understood to be a warm-up for a fugue, so stanzas vii and viii are the flighty, trivial, and ephemeral introduction to the stable, substantial, and ubiquitous fugue.

Understood as part of a fugue, the phrase "Dust and ashes" is akin to the main theme, or principal idea, of the fugue presented by the first voice. As this voice presents the other themes, the first theme is picked up by each of the other voices in turn, producing the effect of having "Dust and ashes" repeated, and emphasized, again and again. This effect is partly achieved through a repeated use of the phrase pattern of "Dust and ashes" in the phrases "dead and done with", "Bloom and drop", and "mirth and folly". It is also partly achieved through repetition of the initial "d" sound of "Dust": dead, done, doubtless, discerned, degree, dread, die, and drop. Most importantly, the phrase "Dust and ashes" is echoed throughout by the use of rhythmic shifts. In order to make evident the complex rhythm of the line, the first line of this fugue passage can be written in the following manner:



The first half of the line moves at a naturally slower rate than does the latter half. The initial vowel sound of "ashes" and the vowel sound of "done" are much more drawn out when compared to the vowel sounds of the words of the second half. It is the word "Venice" that is mainly responsible for the rhythmic shift, because its initial syllable is very short and thus the word cannot naturally be said the same way that "ashes" is said. This rhythmic shift is evident in other places within the fugue, most notably in line 40:



Here the rhythmic shift is brought about by the contrast of the short vowel sounds of "Venice" and "people" with the long vowel sounds of "born", "bloom", and "drop". The effect is a return to the same rhythm as that of the initial theme of the fugue ("Dust and ashes, dead and done with"). It is in this way that the main subject of the fugue recurs throughout the fugal passage, even though the words are not explicitly repeated.²⁸

One of the important aspects of a fugue is its resolution. The voices come in one by one, the themes combine, the voices combine, and a state of near cacophony is attained only to be resolved into a cadential phrase and final cadence. The search for this solution is the *ricercare* aspect of a fugue.²⁹ Stanza xi of Browning's poem describes an intellectual process that bears certain resemblances to the fugue:

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

The juxtaposition here of the speaker's search for a secret of nature with the fugue's search for a proper resolution is particularly

²⁸ It is important to note that the rhythmic shifts examined above cannot be detected by standard metrical analysis. The above two lines do not exhibit any metrical variation, even though the rhythmic variation is present.

²⁹ The term fugue describes "the 'fleeing' or 'chasing' of voices characteristic of fugue ..." (Grove 7:9). In the same way, the term *ricercare* describes the search for a final state: the themes and voices are initially separate, but they search for a state wherein they are resolved into one.

appropriate: both are effective foils to the Venetians' and the toccata's frivolity. The regularity of the fugue and of the speaker's intellect is set against the irregularity of the toccata and the Venetians' fancy.

Robert C. Schweik has successfully emphasized the fact that one has good reason to question the authority of the poem's speaker: Browning "is careful to suggest that what Venetian 'life' Galuppi's music evokes for the speaker is a product of the speaker's own highly subjective and simplistic response" (133). One notices that the speaker calls Galuppi "Baldassaro" when his first name is actually Baldassare. Schweik suggests that the reference to "Shylock's bridge with houses on it" is inexact because in Shakespeare's play, Shylock spoke of the commercial district of the Rialto and not the bridge over the Rialto river, also that this bridge has small shops upon it rather than houses (133). The key phrase in the poem that suggests that the reader should call into question the speaker's authority is: "I was never out of England--it's as if I saw it all". This line is indicative of a degree of arrogance on the part of the speaker as well as an insular *naïveté*. Thus, with the help of Schweik, the reference to "sixths diminished" can be understood as an inaccuracy on the part of the speaker, rather than on Browning's part.

The speaker is claiming for himself a degree of sophistication in his ability to interpret Galuppi's music, undermined by his evident lack of sophistication. Interestingly, the speaker projects a lack of sophistication onto the imagined Venetians. In stanza six, the speaker describes the Venetians as being very restless when the music is played:

Well, and it was graceful of them--they'd break talk off and afford

--She, to bit her mask's black velvet--he, to finger on his sword,

While you sat and played Toccatas, stately at the clavichord?

The woman is distracted; the man fingering distractedly upon his sword in imitation of the toccata is an example of a habit that is often considered to be a simplistic appreciation of music. And the emphasis of the gracefulness of the Venetians in their refraining from talking during the performance is consciously ironic on the speaker's part. As a sophisticated person, then, the speaker looks upon the Venetians and the toccata movement with a certain degree of contempt. The commiserating phrase "Life might last! we can but try!" does nothing to console the speaker: it is too simple and trivial. And, at this point, the speaker is not in need of any condolence.

But when Galuppi's fugue plays, no condolence is offered. The fugue is much more in tune with the speaker's mind: both emphasize the intellect and the search for truth. But while the toccata movement finds resolution, the fugue, although specifically searching for a resolution, does not. "Dust and ashes" is the principal theme of the fugue, but not its resolution. The various themes of the fugue (the dead Venetians, the immortality of the soul, the relation of the sciences to man's striving for truth and perfection, the value of being productive in a transient life, and the worth of kissing) are not resolved into any definite pronouncement upon the meaning, or the meaninglessness, of life. At least, the speaker does not hear the resolution.

The last stanza ends the poem effectively, and this conclusion is very subtle in ending a poem that deals primarily with unresolvable concepts. If one is to read the end of the last line of the poem as one

would read the end of the last line of each of the other fourteen stanzas, the rhythm would be:

I feel *chilly* and *grown old*.

The pull of the iambic rhythm is very strong here, but such a reading does not take into account the spirit of this last line. A more appropriate rhythm would be:

I feel *chilly* and *grown old*.

The substitution of a pyrrhic foot and a spondee for the two iambs causes a great amount of stress upon the word "grown" and an even greater amount upon the word "old". The effect is that of a musical cadence, where "grown" is the dominant, or possibly subdominant, chord and "old" is the tonic chord, which in this case can also be called the resolving chord. With this resolving chord, the fugue and the toccata as a whole have found the resolution for which they were searching.

This resolution is very subtle: so subtle that it has been overlooked. Eleanor Cook says that in the poem, "there is no real resolution. The music approaches its end without affirmation; the clock simply stops and the delicate rhythm is left haunting the air, complete yet cut off" (174). This is true of Galuppi's fugue as perceived by the speaker, for the speaker ends his discussion of the fugue at the point where the principal theme is recapitulated. The implication is that the fugue continues to sound as the speaker makes his final remarks on Galuppi's music. The persistence of the dominant phrase is not answered to until the final cadence. This tacit resolution is akin to the resolution of the Venetians' frivolity: in both cases mortality is the resolving chord. Even though the speaker understands Galuppi's fugue to assure him that he will not die, the emphasis on "grown old" indicates

that he has every reason to dread his own extinction.

The distinction between what the speaker understands the fugue to say, i.e. "you will not die" (immortality), and what Browning implies that the fugue actually says, i.e. all voices grow old (mortality), is one of the keys to the character of the speaker. The first few stanzas of the poem subtly establish the fallibility of the speaker, and this fallibility is extremely important in understanding the last few stanzas. The speaker interprets Galuppi's fugue as a reflection of his own thoughts: the soulless frivolity of the Venetians is ephemeral; the reasoned intellect of the speaker is eternal. He then mourns the death of the Venetians; but it is a mourning for lost beauty, not lost souls. This fact is emphasized by the ambiguity of the word "gold": it refers to the golden hair of the Venetian women, and also to gold necklaces that possibly also rested on their bosoms.³⁰ The speaker's own butterfly-like nature is here showing through the screen of his comments on Galuppi's music. It is important to note that the speaker's presentation of the assuredness of the Venetians with their mock-praise of Galuppi's music is closely related to the speaker's own praise of the music: "I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind". This implies that the speaker is really no better than the imagined people he criticizes: he really has not properly heard the composer's music at all; he has not fully taken Galuppi's meaning. The speaker is characterized with a false sense of self-assurance in his ability to interpret music and people. Outwardly, he prizes science and intellect

³⁰ Browning's poem "Gold Hair: A Story of Pornic" is about a beautiful girl with golden hair who, after she has died and after her coffin has been disinterred, was found buried with gold coins hid amid her hair. Physical beauty and material wealth are linked in this poem in much the same way they are in "Toccata".

over kisses and pleasure; but his inner self is attracted to beautiful women and golden objects.

Ralph Rader has suggested that the rhyming couplets of Browning's "My Last Duchess" serves to alert the reader to the patterned intention of the Duke's seemingly inadvertent speech ("Dramatic Monologue" 139). It has been seen that a similar technique is used by Browning in "Toccata": the implicit music in the poem serves to more fully characterize the speaker. The musicality of the poem, just as the prosody of "My Last Duchess", can be understood to be a device that helps inform the reader of the dramatic persona beyond what the persona relates through the monologue or soliloquy. By imitating the toccata and fugue form, two opposing aspects of the speaker's character, his surface and inner personalities, are revealed in this, one of Browning's great music poems.

"Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha"

Like "Toccata", "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" also successfully imitates a musical form, this time the fugue; but it does so in a different manner. In "Toccata", the sound patterning of the words is the main force responsible for the successful imitation of music; in "Master Hugues", the use of sound is secondary to the use of motif.

In 1702, J. C. F. Fischer, a composer contemporary with J. S. Bach, published Ariadne musica, "a collection of preludes and fugues in many of the keys" (Grove 7:15). The title of the collection is of interest here, for it is indicative of a relation of music to the Ariadne myth

and the labyrinth of Crete. The relation operates on two levels: the first has to do with the fact that the preludes and fugues were written "in many of the keys" (Grove 7:15). The concept of the "well-tempered clavier", the concept that a harpsichord or clavier could be tuned such that it is possible to play upon it in any given key, was very intriguing to composers and musicians during the first part of the eighteenth century. In order to explore the possibilities of such a revolutionary keyboard, Bach wrote two series of twenty-four preludes and fugues, each series consists of a prelude and fugue in each of the keys, both major and minor. (These series are known as "Das Wohltemperierte Clavier".) Fischer's Ariadne musica, although not exploiting the possibilities of every key, was no doubt meant to explore the "well-tempered"ness of the harpsichord. Its title thus arises from the analogy of the music's travelling through many keys and a person travelling through a labyrinth. Such a concept is similar to and better explained by an understanding of harmonic progression. The music starts in a particular key, and then travels forth into proximate keys. As the music passes from one key to another, it may remain close to the key in which it began, or it may travel further and further from its original home key. When it finds itself in a key that is foreign to the home key, it returns back by either retracing its steps or by finding a different path that will also bring it back to the home key, the point of origin. This progression through the harmonies is thus like a trip through a labyrinth: in venturing forth, one might get lost in the complexities of harmony, but with the proper amount of cunning, one will be able to eventually find one's way back.

The second reason why the title Ariadne musica is appropriate to a

collection of preludes and fugues is the nature of the fugue. As we have seen, the resolution of a fugue is an important aspect of the piece: it is equivalent to finding one's way out of the labyrinth. During the exposition of the fugue, each voice enters the fugue in the same manner, by way of the subject or *proposta*. Each enters, one at a time, and then each finds its way through the music. During the development, everything becomes amazingly complex and the reality of the *proposta* is seemingly altered. It becomes elusive, making brief appearances here and there among the voices. It may also appear in disguise--making its appearance transposed into another key, or in reverse, or even upside-down. Meanwhile, through harmonic progression, the voices as a whole move further and further away from the key in which they began. The resolution of the fugue brings the harmony back to the home key while the *proposta* normally reappears, this time in an easily recognizable form and sometimes presented by all voices. The voices are in proper harmony with each other, and have found their way out of the labyrinth.

Bach was familiar with Fischer's Ariadne musica, and wrote a short piece for the organ titled "Kleines harmonisches Labyrinth".³¹ The piece is divided into three parts. The "Introitus" is in the style of a prelude with complex harmonic progressions and a toccata-like passage. It begins in C major and ends in C minor. The "Centrum" is a short, three-voice fugue that also contains complex harmonies due to the great amount of chromaticisms in the *proposta*. It does not begin in any well-

³¹ "Little Harmonic Labyrinth", BWV 591. The score can be found in the Bach-Gesellschaft, vol. 38, pp. 225-26. The authorship of this piece is normally attributed to J. S. Bach, but the debate has not been resolved. Such a fact is, however, unimportant here.

defined key, due to the chromaticisms, but the key signature indicates C major. Interestingly, the key signature changes to C minor shortly after the beginning of the fugue. It ends in G major. Up until this point, the piece conducts itself in the manner of a typical prelude and fugue written in C major. The fact that the fugue ends in G major indicates that something has gone wrong: the harmony has been so complex and has gone so far from the home key of C major that it has become lost and could only find its way back to G major. This is why Bach adds a third part. The "Exitus" is a slow-moving piece that successfully returns the composition to the key of C major. Once this key has been reestablished, the work as a whole can end properly: the labyrinth has been solved.

That Browning was familiar with Bach's "Kleines harmonisches Labyrinth" is possible, but not likely.³² That he was familiar with the tradition that draws an analogy between the fugal form and the labyrinth is almost certain. When asked about allegorical interpretations of his poetry, Browning said of "Master Hugues":

that he had no allegorical intent in his head when he wrote the poem; that it was composed in an organ-loft and was merely the expression of a fugue--the construction of which he understood ... because he had composed fugues himself: it was an involved labyrinth of entanglement *leading to nothing*--the only allegory in it was the possible reflection of the

³² Presently, with Bach's reputation firmly established and with the availability of mass produced recordings of all of Bach's works, this piece remains obscure. I can only assume it was even more obscure at mid-nineteenth century, although Bach's popularity among the English was growing (Kennedy 272). However, with Browning's penchant for obscure knowledge, there is a non-negligible possibility that the poet had come upon this piece at least once during his life.

labyrinth of human life. That was all ... (Altick 1)

By stating that "Master Hugues" is both "the expression of a fugue" and "an involved labyrinth of entanglement", Browning is drawing upon the same tradition that Fischer and Bach had during the eighteenth century. By stating that "Master Hugues" is a labyrinth "*leading to nothing*", Browning provides an important key to understanding the poem. In that the poem does not arrive anywhere, it is much like Bach's "Little Harmonic Labyrinth" without the final "Exitus": it enters the maze and travels through many twists and turns; but just as it approaches the end, it takes a wrong turn and gets lost.

To say that something gets nowhere, one must be able to say that it attempts to get somewhere. Where a fugue attempts to arrive at a final chord where all voices join harmoniously, "Master Hugues" attempts to arrive at a point where the organist is able to properly understand Hugues's fugues. The organists's question, "What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?" is the subject of the poem and the *proposta* of the fugue the poem represents. The solution to this question corresponds to the resolution of the fugue. The subject is reiterated in the second stanza ("Let's have a colloquy, something to quote"), and reappears, in one form or another, throughout the poem. The third stanza introduces the counter-subject or *risposta*: "Fast they extinguish the lights." This provides a witty counterpoint to the search for illumination of the *proposta*. At this point in the poem, after the subject and counter-subject have been exposed, "Off start the Two on their ways." A search for illumination and a knowledge of impending extinction play off each other throughout the poem. This can be seen for instance in stanza xi ("Well then, speak up, never flinch! / Quick, ere my candle's a snuff")

and in stanza xxii ("Is it your moral of Life?" and "Death ending all with a knife?"). The *proposta* and *risposta* are handled most adeptly in the final stanza. "While in the roof, if I'm right there" indicates that the organist is on the verge of total illumination, while "Lo you, the wick in the socket!" indicates that the light has finally expired. "Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!" is an attempt to attain a different form of illumination, while "Down it dips, gone like a rocket" is a confirmation that the source of light has been completely extinguished. The last line of the poem, "Do I carry the moon in my pocket?" combines both the illumination and extinction themes into one image; thus, in a very vague sense, resolving the *proposta* with the *risposta*. This interplay of the subject and counter-subject is like the backward and forward throwing of the shuttle that weaves a complex web, the labyrinthine web of the fugue.

The *proposta* of "Master Hugues" is never properly resolved in itself; the organist never is able to determine the import of Hugues's fugue. There are two possible explanations for this: the first of which is that the meaning is too well obscured by the thick web of the fugue. The erudite nature of the fugue is what strengthens, blackens, and thickens the labyrinthine spider-web of its music. The fugue form emphasizes intellectual complexity over lyrical quality; and according to the organist, Hugues's fugues are so intellectually complex that they are almost indecipherable. The number twelve fugue (referred to in stanza vii) is characterized as a hard masterpiece; and the fugue in F minor (referred to in stanza xxvi) "taxes the finger" and is said to be "no trifle for pipe and for tabor", certainly intended as an

understatement.³³ The music is so formally complex that the "truth and nature" of the music has been overshadowed. The organist is thus frustrated at his inability to peer through the obscurity of the music.

The other possible explanation as to why the organist is powerless to determine the meaning behind Hugues's fugue is that no meaning is to be found. The organist does not recognize this possibility because he believes that there is "truth" to be found behind everything. He is over-zealous about determining the spiritual moral behind every physical phenomenon. Even when he thinks of the analogy between the fugue and the web, he is unable to think that the fugue might simply be a web in itself, neither obscuring nor illuminating anything. Both Abt Vogler and the speaker of the Parleyings believe that music has the ability to express the inexpressible. The poor organist of "Master Hugues" believes that he should be able to put into words that which music expresses. It is not enough for the organist to believe that Hugues had intent, he must unequivocally know that intent: "I believe in you, but that's not enough: / Give my conviction a clinch!"

There is a persuasive indication in the poem that there is indeed no real "truth and nature" hiding behind the web of the fugue. But before this indication is fully revealed, it is helpful to leave the poem for a moment in order to see what Browning had to say about Master

³³ It is entirely possible that the F minor fugue and the number twelve fugue are the same piece. When preparing to play the F minor fugue, the organist says he will "try again", possibly meaning that he will play through "hard number twelve" once again; or that he will try once more to understand Hugues's "mountainous fugues" by attempting another fugue, thereby indicating that the two fugues are distinct. I think that only one of Hugues's fugues is being referred to in the poem, mainly because both fugues are five-voice fugues (as seen by stanzas xiv and xxvii) and five-voice fugues are generally a rarity. As interesting as this debate is, it does not have a great impact upon the poem.

Hugues. Browning said that had Hugues "been meant for the glorious Bach it were a shame ... indeed; I had in my mind one of the dry-as-dust imitators who would elaborate some [uninteresting subject] for a dozen pages together" (letter to Spaulding, June 30th 1887, published in Greene 1098). By stating that Hugues is a "dry-as-dust" imitator of Bach confirms the notion that Browning believed that good music contains truth and nature, and also intimates that Hugues's music is not good music and thus his music does not conceal truth and nature behind its web. Such a conclusion is subtly hinted at in the poem in many places. The reference to the Danaïdes in stanza xvi is the organist's exclamation resulting out of his frustration at understanding the workings of the voices of the fugue when it appears to him that their labour is in vain. The exclaimed apostrophe is also indicative of the endless, useless toil of the organist in trying to discover Hugues's intent. Every time he tries to remove some water from the lake of Hugues's fugue, the water is immediately lost and his efforts wasted. The line of stanza xviii, "*Est fuga, volvitur rota*" (It flies, the wheel turns round), refers to the turning of the voices of the fugue around the *proposta*. It has been suggested that this line is reminiscent of Ixion turning on his wheel (Turner 337), but it is better understood as a reference to a pin-wheel rocket. One must keep in mind the continuous circular interplay of the illumination and extinction themes; and when one couples this with such adjectives as "crepitant", "explosive", and "strepitant" (which, in stanza xvi, describe the voices of the fugue), as well as the description of the candle in xxix as a rocket that has expended itself, one then realizes the appropriateness of the image of a pin-wheel rocket as a description of the fugue. The rocket spins round,

as do the voices of the fugue, and weaves an array of sparks that neither conceals nor reveals anything. Like the task of the Danaïdes and like the task of the port organist, the rocket expends much energy without any resultant accomplishment. There is no meaning behind all the clamor.

The enigmatic saints mentioned in stanzas v and vi are another indication that Hugues's fugues lack a hidden meaning. Like the voices of the fugue, the saints are involved in a circular interplay: "Saints go their rounds ... / Up nave, down chancel, turn transept about". The image of the saints silently marching round the moon-lit church and forever wiping and polishing the ever-recurring dust and rust is an Inferno-type image that is perfectly coherent with the images of the Danaïdes and the pin-wheel rocket. But the task of the saints has a purpose: they eternally remove the obscuring elements (the dust and rust) that hide the true nature of the objects in the church. In other words, they attempt to make everything in the church appear right. In a similar fashion, Browning's names for the saints, "Aloys and Jurien and Just", are chosen such that they appear right, even though they are not names of actual saints.³⁴ If the reader of "Master Hugues" attempts to

³⁴ Various interpretations of "Aloys and Jurien and Just" have been given but none of them are wholly satisfactory. The Browning Cyclopedia suggests that these names refer to helpers of the sacristan (Berdoe 267). It has been suggested to me that the names refer to the mice and the rats. Both these interpretations do not add anything to the understanding of the poem, and the general consensus is that the names refer to the saints (Turner 336). If one were to assume that "Aloys" is a shortened form of "Aloysius" and "Just" of "Justus", then two of the saints will have been identified. However, "Jurien" continues to pose a problem. There is no entry for "Jurien" (or anything resembling that name) in either Butler's Lives of the Saints or the Christian Encyclopedia. I am led to believe that the names "Aloys and Jurien and Just" were purposefully chosen in order to closely resemble actual saint's names, such that they would be deliberately misleading.

determine to whom Saint Jurien refers, he will be, like the poor organist in his attempts to determine the meaning of the fugue, at his wick's end before he realizes that Saint Jurien, like the meaning of Hugues's fugue, does not exist. The poem is thus not so much about the truth concealed behind the web of man's efforts as it is about the concept that man's efforts can create the illusion of a truth. There are no saints who supervise the moon-lit church; Hugues's face is not hidden within the pipes of the organ; the "crank pedal" of stanza ii does not really need to be repaired, it does not exist; and, the true meaning of Hugues's music does not exist. All can be reduced to an ignis fatuus: they are elements of partial, yet ellusively false illumination.

But Browning's poem does not propound a nihilistic philosophy. Hugues is merely a "dry-as-dust imitator" of Bach whose "trifling subject" has no substance: "--Nothing propound, that I see". It is thus understood that a fugue of Bach does conceal "truth and nature" behind its web, that Palestrina is able to give to his listeners "a glimpse of the far land" of Heaven, because such were good composers. This is coherent with the Browning's understanding of music and art as discussed in the parleying "With Charles Avison": "I state it thus: / There is no truer truth obtainable / By Man than comes of music." Hugues music, unable to convey the "truer truth", does not represent good music.

But with Browning's technique of obscuring in order to illumine, with his complex development of two opposing themes, with his broadening, thickening, greatening, deepening, and lengthening poem, one is left to wonder, "But where's music, the dickens?" "Toccata" imitates a toccata and fugue on a word-patterning level. Such a complex level is

not present in "Master Hugues" but the poem does imitate musical effects in a different manner. For a poem that delights in humorous wit throughout, its use of music is coherent with the jocular aspect of its tone. In stanza xxvi, when the organist decides once more to play the F minor fugue, the words clearly indicate that the key is an F key. In little over three lines, there are eleven occurrences of the 'f' sound: clef, 'Faith, trifle, for, for, Four, flats, F, Friend, fugue, and finger. It would be misleading to say that these imitate the F minor key; instead, they are a humorous answer to the organist's question, "what's the clef?" Just as the answer to his question, "What do you mean by your mountainous fugues?" is to be found within the complex themes of the poem, so the answer to this question is to be found in the words of the poem. The repetition of the 'f' as an indication of the key of the fugue bears some resemblance to the extensive use of onomatopoeic words in the poem (stanza xvi contains some good examples), but should not be taken to be much more than a playful use of words.

Most of the witty passages in the poem, such as the repetition of 'f's or lines such as "Hugues, the composer of note", do not, as with Hugues's fugues, conceal some deeper, hidden meaning. For example, the first line of stanza iii, "See, the church empties apace" is a fore-echo of the sieve in stanza xvi. The people that quickly leave the church are analogous to the water that streams from the sieve. This can be taken to be representative of the view that the church's efforts are nothing but eternal, useless toil. But there is nothing in the poem that helps support this: the comparison is thus simply a witty remark, one strand of the complex web of the poem, one turn in the labyrinth

that leads to a dead-end.

Another witty use of words is one of the main sources of music in the poem. The first line of the poem, "Hist, but a word, fair and soft", contains the dynamic indication of the fugue. The phrase "fair and soft" translated into Italian yields *sereno e piano*, which is perfectly coherent with standard dynamic indications of musical pieces.³⁵ Its occurrence in the opening line indicates that the poem is to be read (or to be played) serenely and quietly. These dynamics are ironic for a poem that imitates a fugue, because fugue, which is valued for its musical complexity rather than its musical expressiveness, does not normally have any dynamics at all--a fugue is normally played at a uniform, medium-loud level. The dynamics are ironic to a further degree because the poem does not stay serene very long: the complex humour and wit quickly take over. Also, the soft, *piano* dynamic is taken over as the poem gradually becomes, as it were, louder. As Hugues's fugue becomes explosive and strepitant, so does the poem.

Indeed, the last two stanzas contain a great crescendo. Stanza xviii passes from a rather restrained and self-conscious "I advise [at my risk]" to an unrestrained and blatant "I unstop the full organ, / Blare out" The crescendo is taken further in the next stanza, where the organist's frustrated efforts at divining Hugues's intent become transferred to increasingly voiced anger against the sacristan:

³⁵ In his discussion of "The Flight of the Duchess" already referred to, Northrop Frye says that the paranthetical phrase "(To get on faster)" (occurring at line 828) is very enigmatic unless understood to be analogous to a musical indication of the tempo, such as *più mosso* (Frye, *Anatomy* 256). This phrase occurs at a point when the rhythm of the poem seems very much to increase. Thus "fair and soft" and "(To get on faster)" are two good examples of the use Browning made of dynamic indications within his poetry.

While in the roof, if I'm right there,
 ... Lo you, the wick in the socket!
 Hallo, you sacristan, show us a light there!
 Down it dips, gone like a rocket.
 What, you want, do you, to come unawares,
 Sweeping the church up for first morning-prayers,
 And find a poor devil has ended his cares
 At the foot of your rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs?
 Do I carry the moon in my pocket? (141-149)

Lines 145 to 148 excellently convey the increasing anger of the organist. The first, with its short phrases, shows him so angry he is stumbling on his words. Lines 147-48, one long phrase, show him more in control of his speech but so angry that he almost spits out the words, as seen by the wonderful phrase "rotten-runged rat-riddled stairs". The final lines show that he is not thinking very coherently by asking such a crazy, unanswerable question. This line is the climactic *fortissimo forte* of the poem. It is a direct contrast to the *sereno e piano*, "fair and soft", that was established in the first stanza.

But if a crescendo to a *fortissimo forte* is a very rare thing in a fugue, what is the effect of it ending a poem which imitates a fugue? The answer is two-fold. First, although a fugue does not have a climax in its sound level, it does have a thematic climax; and the crescendo is a good way to indicate the climax, even though it is already indicated by the very complex weaving of the *proposta* and *risposta* in this last stanza. Second, the large, climactic, final crescendo is typical of expressive Baroque music: Palestrina, a late Renaissance composer who

brought music into the Baroque era, distinguishes himself from his contemporaries by partly breaking free of the rigid forms and rules of composition, and allowing a greater degree of expressiveness in his music. The poem thus does end in the "*mode Palestrina*" that the organist wants: in abandoning his didactic analysis of the didactic fugue, the organist unstops the full organ and allows his emotions to take over. The eternal, trivial, useless task has been abandoned. The labyrinthine fugue has given way to an emotional grand Baroque climax, and the poem ends with a definite sense of completion. Without the climax, the poem could only break off, leaving the reader with a sense of incompleteness and the failure of the organist's efforts to illumine the fugue. But with the "fair and soft" dynamics at the beginning, Browning allows himself the opportunity to represent a great climax and thus ends the poem properly.

The organist's search for the meaning of Hugues's music is a result of his poor illumination. His candle, almost completely used up, casts more shadows than it does light. By attempting to illumine the fugue, he only succeeds in obscuring it. But the question remains: why does he concern himself so with Hugues's fugues? The answer lies with the statement of stanza iv: "not a response / Get the church-saints on their rounds!" The saints, whose business is to clean and polish, are left unnoticed by all. This is symbolized in the poem by the parenthetical reference to them. Hugues, on the other hand, whose business is to blacken and obscure, receives the undivided attention of the organist. If Hugues's music contained an easily accessible truth, then the organist would not stay after hours playing and theorizing about the music. But music which conceals rather than reveals is more interesting

to the listener because of the challenge involved. Such is the nature of the fugue, and such is the nature of Browning's poetry. If Browning were blatantly to reveal truths in his poetry, rather than only hint at them, then his poetry would not be as interesting to read.

That Browning was concerned with the revelation and obscuration of truth in his poetry can be seen in his second letter to Elizabeth Barrett. Browning writes:

your poetry must be, cannot but be, infinitely more to me than mine to you--for you *do* what I always wanted, hoped to do, and only seem now likely to do for the first time. You speak out, *you*,--I only make men & women speak--give you truth broken into prismatic hues, and fear the pure white light, even if it is in me" (Kintner 1:7)

Browning here displays a certain anxiety about being able to reveal Truth through his poetry rather than just hint at it. "Master Hugues" is a good example of a poem that gives its truth "broken into prismatic hues" and "Abt Vogler" of one that better succeeds in conveying "the pure white light". Browning thought "Abt Vogler" the better poem, or at least a better representative of his poetry; but, in my opinion, "Master Hugues" is more effective because of its ability to say much more than it literally says. "Master Hugues" is a satisfying poem because it is constructed about a flickering candle that partially illumines and partially obscures, rather than a blinding white light that exposes all. We pay tribute to Browning because he is able, in his poetry, to blot out the sun and to carry the moon in his pocket, thereby casting all in shadow. The presence of the shadows and prismatic hues is one of the main defining features of the best of Browning's poetry.

Afterword

The preceding two chapters have attempted to characterize the musicality of Browning's poetry. Poems have been shown to be at times directly imitative of a specific musical form, and at other times to be suggestive of a musical aesthetic. The manner in which these poems achieve a musical quality may be simplistic or very sophisticated. In some poems, such as "Master Hugues", the musicality is directly linked with the poem's theme and a discussion of the musicality provides a way to better interpret the poem. In other poems, such as "Andrea", a musicality is present and contributes to the poem's overall effect, yet may be safely ignored in a discussion of other aspects of the poem. In still other poems, the musicality may be minimal and without any significant contribution to the poem's effect. For the above reasons, it is dangerous to generalize about the musicality of Browning's poems; but one is perhaps safe in saying that, when he chooses to be, Browning is a very musical poet.

In light of the present study, it might be interesting to compare more directly the musicality of Browning's poetry with Tennyson's. One would not wish to be too quick to label Tennyson unmusical, one would wish instead to characterize in degree and kind the musical nature of his poetry. It would also be interesting to trace the influence of Browning's musicality in the poets that succeeded him. It is my opinion that the musicality of Browning's poetry most distinguishes it from the poetry that preceded his. One may thus observe the influence Browning had on other poets by examining their use of music. Prime candidates for study are Swinburne, Hopkins, Eliot, and Stevens. It is also my

opinion that one of the distinguishing characteristics of early twentieth-century poetry is its further development of key concepts introduced by the musicality of Browning's poetry.

This study of the musicality of Browning's poetry is far from being complete. Rather than attempt to give an exhaustive account of music in Browning, I have attempted to provide a more general overview, and have concentrated on the illustration of a few major points. I have fully ignored Browning's early, late, and long poetry in favour of the short poetry of his middle period; because it is easier to discuss the minute and overall musical effects of a short poem, and because it is Browning's middle period when he seems to be most interested in the musical aspect of poetry. One of the poems of his last book, Asolando: Fancies and Facts (1889), is often discussed alongside his earlier music poems—"Toccata", "Master Hugues", and "Abt Vogler". But like the last of these, "Flute-Music, with an Accompaniment" is not as concerned with musical effects as it is with a discussion of music. "Flute-Music" can, however, be read as a discussion of the musicality of poetry, Browning's poetry in particular. Before examining the poem, I want to look at an earlier poem (from Men and Women) that also reflects Browning's concerns about his poetry and its music.

Most of "A Serenade at the Villa" is set on an oppressively hot night when the natural world is silent: "Life was dead and so was light." The only sound to break the silence is the music of the serenade. Neither the serenader nor the object of the serenade is described or placed within its setting. It is but vaguely hinted that the serenader with his lute is just outside the villa, and the woman of his devotion is somewhere behind the obdurate windows. It is also

hinted that the woman's sleep is disturbed and that she may be seriously ill. The serenader has come to offer his music as a means of easing the sleep of the woman, to bring her solace and comfort.

The serenade consists of three things: "Words and song and lute." Stanza iv of the poem may be read as a description of Browning's poetry similar to that found in "What a pretty tale":

What they could my words expressed,
 O my love, my all, my one!
 Singing helped the verses best,
 And when singing's best was done,
 To my lute I left the rest.

Words are the most direct form of the serenade, but the words are potentially limited and therefore singing helps to bring forth their full meaning. This is analogous to the poetization of words: when words are expressed through a poetic utterance, they can potentially convey a greater sense of their meaning. And when singing has achieved all that it can, the lute accompaniment will take the music to its greatest height: the musicality of the poetry complements the poetic utterance and allows the full effect to be conveyed. This stanza seems the best explanation Browning made concerning the function of music in poetry; but caution must be taken before accepting this as definitive, for in the same volume of poetry is "Master Hugues" which warns of blindly trying to find the meaning behind the music.

Just as Browning is both present and absent in his poems, so in "A Serenade", the serenader is both present and absent from the scene. The music is delivered in the darkest hours of the night, but the serenader only identifies his presence on the following day: "That was I, you

heard last night." His reason for returning is to receive an assessment of the effect of his music: he is anxious to know if he has brought relief from the sultry night. The woman's response is not recorded in the poem but the response the serenader desires and the one he fears are. He hopes that his music was received as a token of servitude and as well-intended help. He fears that his music did not help his lover's plight but instead increased it, that his music was heard as dissonant rather than harmonious. When all sounds have stopped and all light is gone, how should one dare to sound forth music? In the painful stillness of the oppressive air, any sound must be unwelcome, even the most benevolent music.

These opposed receptions of the serenader's music can be understood as the desired and feared reception of Browning's poetry. Browning was often anxious about his poetry's critical reception, and his anxieties sometimes found their way into his poems. When the imagined voice representing the foreboding reception says: "Shall another voice avail, / That shape be where these are not?" and "Is that face the last one sees?" the reference to the sound of the voice and the sight of the face of the serenader can be understood as a reference to the music and painting that Browning said would more fully invest the poems of Men and Women. Shall an increased use of music in poetry be able to convey what the poetry of others cannot? Shall the image portrayed by an increased use of painting in poetry be able to affect the reader in any significant way? This imagined voice can be understood to reflect that Browning is afraid the presence of the music and poetry will be unwelcome, and rather than bring a felicitous easing of the mind for his readers will instead further complicate their lives and add toil upon

toil. Browning had been told that his poetry is too complicated: he fears that a heightened use of music and painting will make his poetry insufferable.

While the plight of the woman is not fully characterized, it is suggested, especially in the lines: "Earth turned in her sleep with pain, / Sultrily suspiired for proof." This natural image is suggestive of the image of the woman tossing about in her bed, restless due to the heat of the night and the unrelieved passion of her heart. That which potentially brings relief to the closeness of the night is the lightning and the accompanying storm. In the first two stanzas is a careful description of the absence of sound and light; contrasted with this description is the reference to the music of the serenade. In being the only sight and sound to disturb the night, the lightning and the implied thunder are the image of the serenader and the music of the serenade. The heat of the night will be potentially relieved by the coming storm, the restless sleep of the woman will be potentially relieved by the serenader's music, and the passion of her earthy desires will be potentially relieved by the power of the celestial lightning. In this sense, it is the thunder and lightning of the sky that attempt to induce a more peaceful sleep in the Earth and the woman. And just as a summer storm may at times bring relief from the heat and humidity and at other times serves to increase them, so too the music of the serenade may ease the mind of its listener or compound its unrest. The drops of rain that fall as a result of the lightning are like the beads of perspiration that result from the serenader's efforts and the tears that fall as a result of his compassionate love. And as the lightning begins to pass away, the serenader finds the villa's windows are shut fast against the

storm and the iron gate reluctantly sways in the wind. The whole villa seems to be fully braced against the intruding serenade.

In "A Serenade", Browning likens his poetry both to a lover's midnight serenade and to lightning and thunder on a hot summer's night. In the phrase "That was I" is heard both the caressing tones of the lute strings and the emphatic insistence of the thunderclap. Browning is characterizing his poetry as both harmonious and dissonant, pleasing to the eye and frightful to behold.

The dialogue poem "Flute-Music, with an Accompaniment", from Browning's last volume of poetry, can be read as a more mature view of the musicality of Browning's poetry. While "A Serenade" is charged with the passions of young love, "Flute-Music" is touched with a more mature and experienced view of love. A couple chance to hear the flute-music of a concealed and distant player, and the music affects each differently. He hears the "passionate imploring" of Romeo for Juliet and decides that the music is a new variation of the age-old theme of Love. Naming his opinion his fancy, She offers the fact behind the music: the flautist is a clerk who, during a break from his daily toil, practices his playing. The music is not that of a young lover's serenade, she says, but is a study from "*Youth's Complete Instructor / How to play the Flute*", a study which the clerk poorly plays. She hears the harsh dissonance of an ineptly played pendantic piece; he hears the pleasant harmony of a young lover's serenade.

It is not without value to think of the flute-music as representative of Browning's poetry, especially the poetry of Men and Women. Any poem may be represented by the music, such as "A Serenade" or a poem with a more refined musicality such as "Youth and Art". The

factual and fanciful views of the music may be taken to represent two different critical appreciations of the earlier poetry, or two different views of the value of Browning's earlier poetry, especially its innovative musicality. The one view sees the musical poetry as a naïve experiment and wasted effort. Where the musicality attempted to make the poetry warm and flowing, it produced poetry that is cold and interrupted. It was merely the lack of experience and the youthful aspirations that allowed the poet to believe that his verses were worthy of praise; the more experienced and more exacting critic is able to point-up the imperfections:

Songs, Spring thought perfection,
 Summer criticizes:
 What in May escaped detection,
 August, past surprises,
 Notes, and names each blunder. (121-25)

The other perspective sees the poetry as a product of the passion of youth, and is ready to forgive any faults by ascribing them to zealous enthusiasm. That one is removed from the poetry and that one loves the poetry allow one to view it more fondly, just as slyness in a person is seen as coyness by one who loves the person and is separated from him or her: "Distance--ash-tops aiding, / Reconciled scraps else contrarious, / Brightened stuff fast fading" (170-72).

He accuses his companion of being eager to admire the new, contemporary poetry without being willing to regard the older poetry. He admits that the freshly opened rose bud is beautiful to behold, but the dusty, dark berry that replaces the blossom is also beautiful: it just wants a little cleaning and polishing. This same concern is

expressed in the parleying "With Charles Avison": although Wagner's music is fresh and exciting, Avison's Grand March is also interesting and beautiful, perhaps more so because viewed from the distance of time. Even though an art-work may fade in comparison to a newer work, a little time and love will restore much of its original lustre. In looking back on the musicality of his earlier poetry, one notices all the imperfections and over-enthusiastic zeal, but his love for the poems remains strong and the poems' infelicities are easily ignored or glossed over.

In "Flute-Music", Browning effectively silences the feared reception of the serenade at the villa. It is not important that the early poems were not well received. It is not important that they did not accomplish artistically everything they were meant to accomplish. It is only important that time and love have made them good poems, in the eyes of at least one person. Even if the person who likes the poems is not being fully honest with himself about their merit, it does not matter; there is as much beauty in something as it appears to be as there is in what it actually is:

What if all's appearance?
Is not outside seeming
Real as substance inside?
Both are facts, so leave me dreaming:

.

Let who lied be left lie! (184-87, 192)

There is the implication here that the speaker of these lines did not find the flute-music as affecting as he said he did. In this light, the poem can be taken to suggest Browning's anxiety that his poems only seem

to be musical, and that he merely tricks his reader into thinking they are truly musical:

So the secret of the player
 Was--he could surprise one
 Well-nigh into trusting
 Here was a musician
 Skilled consummately, yet lusting
 Through no vile ambition
 After making capture
 All the world ... (87-94)

But as "Flute-Music" concludes, whether the poems are truly musical or only seemingly musical is not important. What is important is that one loves them.

In "A Serenade at the Villa", the serenader's song is accompanied by his lute music and the thunder. In "What a pretty tale you told me", the lyre accompanies the contestant's song. In "Flute-Music, with an Accompaniment", the clerk's music is accompanied by the dialogue of the couple. The last poem characterizes an accompaniment as "assistance / Such as music rightly / Needs and claims" (97-99). In "Serenade", the assistance rises from a young and passionate love. In "Flute-Music", the assistance rises from a mature love, a love that can overlook the blunders of spring and the coyness of a friend. And in Browning's poetry, the assistance rises from a use of musicality.

Appendix A

As I ride, as I ride, With a full heart for my guide, So its
 tide rocks my side, As I ride, as I ride, That, as I
 were double-eyed, He, in whom our Tribes confide, Is des-
 cended, ways un- tried As I ride, as I ride.

Appendix B

Hamelin famous river
 Washes its pleasanter
 when be- five hundred
 see the vermin,
 Rats!
 fought the bit the
 ate the licked the
 open the nests in-
 even drowning their
 fifty

Town's in Hanover
 Weser,
 wall on the spot you
 gins my years a-
 townsfolk
 * was a
 dogs and babies
 cheeses soup from the
 kegs of side men's
 spoiled the speaking With
 different

Brunswick,
 city;
 deep and southern
 never ditty,
 go, suffer
 pity.
 killed the in the
 out of the cooks' own
 salted Sunday
 women's shrieking and
 sharps and

* By
 * The
 wide,
 side; A
 spied; But,
 * Almost
 * To
 so From
 * They
 cats, And
 cradles, And
 vats, And
 ladles, Split
 sprats, Made
 hats, And
 chats By
 squeaking in
 flats.

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