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Study of diction and imagery in the poetry of Robert Browning

Grace Ryon
The University of Montana

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A STUDY

of

DICTION AND IMAGERY

in the

POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING

by

Grace Ryon

B.A., Carleton College, 1919

Presented in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Montana State University

1940

Approved:

[Signatures]

Chairman of Board of Examiners

Chairman of Committee on Graduate Study
To

Dennis Murphy

and to all others who have directed and encouraged me in the writing of these pages I express sincere thanks and appreciation.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

For more than one hundred years Robert Browning has been claiming the attention of readers of poetry. Probably no poet of the mid-years of the nineteenth century is still read with so much interest as is Robert Browning. This is not because he is like the writers of twentieth century modern poetry, but because in his own right he is a poet and individual who is not quickly dismissed. It is to be surmised that this honor has corresponding influence upon English and American literature of today. Yet it is not this encouragement to freedom of expression in other writers that we want to discuss. The works of Robert Browning themselves contain a fund of material. Discussion of content and attempts at interpretation of that material are frequent; but no study of the technical side of the poetry has, to my knowledge, been made except one in prosody. This paper is an attempt to find and group some of the facts in this lesser worked field. In it I purpose to give results of examining the writings to show Browning's technique as revealed in diction and in imagery. In carrying forth this project, I have made use of works upon the study of poetry and of words; also, of helpful books upon Robert Browning. Therefore, though the paper is the product of my own research, it is dependent upon these helps. I have tried to assemble enough material to show Browning's tendencies in the field of technique. The
work as a whole takes on the character of a survey illustrated by examples found in abundance or gleaned with difficulty. For this study the Cambridge Edition of Browning's complete works has furnished the text.
CHAPTER II

DICTION

In an investigation of Browning's diction the question is not of whether the poet used the right word, but of what word he has used. If poetry succeeds in being clear and pleasing --enough so, at least, to live and be revived from time to time--the diction must be fairly right. The poetry of Browning has lived through such a history. The study, then, becomes one of the individual poet's diction--not diction in general, nor diction compared or contrasted with that of some other poet. Subconscious contact with general usage is always felt; it is probably that which makes a reader sense an individual style or an unusual example. The aim here is to direct the interest into Browning's diction; and where it seems surprising, beautiful, or involved, to observe it and to realize that just such characteristics make it a study of Browning instead of someone else.

Whether in the form of dramatic monologue, lyric, or drama proper, Browning is speaking through the character who tells the story, gives his views, or finds the hope. It is not necessary to separate the speeches of Gerard or Mertoun; nor does Porphyria's lover differ from these two; nor does Browning himself speak otherwise in "Christmas Eve." All are Browning; the Browning diction is their proper speech.

This does not mean that there is no variety. The thousands of lines and the many mouthpieces show how numerous the ways are of expressing the one man--Robert Browning.
Such a study of diction divides reasonably into the following parts: words, word combinations, clauses, and such additional considerations as spelling and punctuation.

A.

Browning's vocabulary is that in general use in the educated English home of the nineteenth century. Its balance of words of English and Latin origin is that of natural, thoughtful conversation and explanation. Lines like the following show how unaffected such usage is:

For I am vocal through the universe,
I' the workshop, manufactory, exchange
And market-place, seaport and custom-house
0' the frontier: listen if the echoes die--
"Unfettered commerce! Power to speak and hear
And print and read! The universal vote!" ¹

Here the proportion of English derivation to Latin is about 25:17.

If that seems a preponderance of Latin, try a nature scene--

Pacing on lighsome fetlock past the pines
Tress-topped,—²

---

¹ The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning (Student's Cambridge Edition; New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1895), citing "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society," p. 689, ll. 37-42 b. (Throughout this study the Cambridge Edition of Browning has been used. I have used a for first column, and b for second, following the page numbers.)

² Balaustion's Adventure, p. 614, ll. 27-28 b.
in which the less technical words balance about seven to four. Put into ordinary prose, this proportion becomes five to three: *Facing on light feet past the curled pines.* Note how these proportions resemble.

"What was a speck expands into a star,"\(^3\) one of Browning's most beautiful lines, shows a proportion of six to one for the Anglo-Saxon. This need not be disturbing when a poet can express so well without borrowing. Authorities tell us, however, that no computation answers the question of "What is the whole English vocabulary?"\(^4\)

B.

We turn now to words themselves. Words that had become archaic in Browning's time are not frequently found. The noun *buss* is found once; *quean*, *once*; *gently*, and *the nonce* appear several times. The adjectives *agog* and *fast* (closed) I find twice each. The verbs *blab* and *pray* are given the meaning once good, and appear many times. *Wot ye seems fitting in Saul.* Adverbs in the old-fashioned comparative degree occur often:

*All my days, I'll go softlier, sadlier.*\(^5\)

---

\(^3\) Paracelsus, p. 17, l. 54 a.


\(^5\) The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Works of Robert Browning, *Fears and Scruples*, p. 811, l. 9 b.
Correlative conjunctions are always the old or, or or nor, nor; never the either, or, neither, nor of today. The old a-holding and a-doing participle appears, usually for rhythm's sake. For the same reason the old prefixes e, en, and em sometimes begin the verb:

1. And still fear lest the terrible glory evanish like sleep.6

2. As early Art embrowns the gold.7

Often formal second person lends a dignity that is appropriate to the thought:

1. Said Blaise, the listening monk, "Well done; I doubt not thou art heard, my son:8

2. A voice said, So wouldst thou strive, not rest?"9

Variations from definition generally accepted for a word are surprisingly few. Most persistent in its proper connotation is the verb fix, to fasten or to hold.

1. How shall I fix you, fire you, freeze you,10

2. Fixed me a breathing-while or two.11

6. Saul, p. 182, 1. 18 b.


8. The Boy and The Angel, p. 254, 11. 5-6 a.

9. Rephan, p. 1005, 1. 6 a.

10. Women and Roses, p. 193, 1. 34 a.

11. The Last Ride Together, p. 267, 1. 23 b.
3. **fix my face, and fearless**
   **lift the latch.**

4. I could fix her face with a guard between,
   And find her soul as when friends confer,
   Friends--lovers that might have been.  

5. Doubt you if, in such a moment,
   As she fixed me, she felt clearly
   Ages past the soul existed.

Correct, also, is the early connotation of the following participle:

Vulgarized Horace, for the use of schools,

And the verb in the next, although a little odd:

Wilde, here's a line

(Don't lean on me: I'll English it for you)

Amusing connotations appear sometimes:

1. There she stands,
   Clara de Millefleurs, all deodorized,
   Twenty years' stain wiped off her innocence.

2. procrastinate the truth
   Until the wife, who had made proof and found
   The husband wanting, might essay once more,
   Hear, see, and feel him renovated now--
   Able to do, now, all herself had done,
   Risen to height of her.

---

12 Ned Bratta, p. 689, l. 24 b.
13 Any Wife to Any Husband, p. 137, ll. 18-20 a.
14 Cristina, p. 170, ll. 5-7 a.
15 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 2 b.
16 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 223, ll. 34-35 b.
17 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 767, ll. 9-11 b.
18 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 624, ll. 33-38 b.
A fondness for certain words becomes noticeable as one reads through a chronological arrangement of Browning's poems. Some words persist; others appear and are seen for a period of years. Because many of these words occur in other parts of this discussion, the following lists are short.

1. Persisting throughout the book:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fix</th>
<th>Flake</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bray</td>
<td>Stripe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blab</td>
<td>April</td>
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<td>The letter f</td>
<td>Spider</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Snake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tooth</td>
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</table>

2. Appearing for a time: (These are in time order.)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Oppugn</th>
<th>Mushroom</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Progress</td>
<td>Pink</td>
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<tr>
<td>Red, blue</td>
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<td>Oh</td>
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<td>Hebrew words</td>
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More words, closely allied to imagery, will help make the pictures in Chapter III.

Expressions and figurative phrases—some almost colloquial—find their way into the diction of Browning. While they show no originality, he gets out of them all the vigor suggested by "plague take,"[19] "blurt out,"[20] "wear and tear;"[21]

---

19 Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, p. 167, l. 1 a.
20 Herakles, p. 661, l. 21 a.
21 Sordello, p. 91, l. 17 a.
the off-hand manner suggested by "dirt and all"²² "go to the
dogs"²³ and "a hot time:"²⁴ the casualness of "to boot,"²⁵
"one of these days,"²⁶ "to all intents,"²⁷ "why swell the
list;"²⁸ and the silliness of "my dear."³⁰ Several of these
phrases we find more than once. Browning can also put a slight
change into an old expression, so that we read with heightened
alarm "stark staring lunacy"³¹ or "from crest to crupper."³²
Notice also the lively combination of two old phrases in one
line:

You get the pick of the news, and it costs you never a
pin.³³

That there should be such freshness about old things is the
wonder here.

Triteness of expression seems to me to be almost missing

---

²² Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 763, l. 12 b.
²³ Old Pictures in Florence, p. 171, l. 44 a.
²⁴ The Flight of the Duchess, p. 273, l. 6 b.
²⁵ By the Fireside, p. 187, l. 15 b.
²⁶ The Flower's Name, p. 166, l. 26 b.
²⁷ Sordello, p. 126, l. 40 a.
²⁸ Paracelsus, p. 31, l. 3 a.
²⁹ Before, p. 193, l. 29 b.
³⁰ Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 749, l. 47 b.
³¹ Cenciaja, p. 823, l. 34 a.
³² Sordello, p. 107, l. 13 a.
³³ Up at a Villa—Down in the City, p. 174, l. 15 b.
in both diction and imagery of Browning. "Dew-pearled," descriptive of the hillside, is used for a serenity; while diamond, which most authors tritely select for dew, would produce the wrong effect. When he says that the leaf-buds are "woolly," the advance of spring needs no further explanation. When Paracelsus speaks of the "murky souls" of adversaries, the adjective has done all needed. A strange, but pertinent choice is what we find in Browning. Notice plastic in this couplet:

He fixed me in the dance
Of plastic circumstance.

Twice invents is used of something God has made; in each case it is more convincing than creates would have been:

1. If you get simple beauty and naught else,
   You get about the best thing God invents.

2. So soon made happy? Hadst thou learned
   What God accounteth happiness,
   Thou wouldst not find it hard to guess
   What hell may be his punishment
   For those who doubt if God invent
   Better than they.

34 Pippa Passes, p. 133, l. 31 a.
35 The Lost Mistress, p. 170, l. 41 a.
36 Paracelsus, p. 37, l. 27 b.
37 Rabbi Ben Egra, p. 385, ll. 41-24 a.
38 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 344, ll. 37-38 a.
39 EasterQDay, p. 332, ll. 38-42 b.
Quaint verbs occur in these phrasings:

1. This likes me more, and that affects me less.  
2. What benefits mankind must glad me too.  
3. Not even Paris, ransacked, could supply That gem: he had to forage in New York.

A lovely choice of expression appears in

You have opened a new world to me,  
Will never take the faded language up  
Of what I leave?

Fearless is the concept of "foamy patriotism;" a forthright way to speak is of "the less pre-eminent angel;" while odd qualities combine in "hyaena groan-like laughter!" New expressions for old hopes come out in

1. I would adventure nobly for their sakes.  
2. My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

New diction for old ideas also does a neatly turned thought:

---

40 Pictor Ignotus, p. 342, ll. 18 a.  
41 Paracelsus, p. 34, l. 14 a.  
42 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 741, ll. 40-41 a.  
43 Colombes's Birthday, p. 242, ll. 53-54 a.  
44 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society, p. 694, l. 8 b.  
45 The Ring and the Book, p. 562, l. 34 b.  
46 The Return of the Druses, p. 208, l. 8 b.  
47 Paracelsus, p. 24, l. 50 a.  
48 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 643, l. 31 b.
1.

And a pin might be heard drop half a mile hence--

2.

a kindly bullet through your skull

Oaths are not usual in Browning's poetry, but when they do appear

they are different:

1.

I swear by the Holy House, my hand will I never wash

Till I filch his Pearl away--

2.

Zooks, what's to blame? you think you see a monk?

Young people today who use such slang as "mum's the word,"
"what a laugh!" or "can see your drift" do not know that they
quote Browning and that those expressions were hardly slang
as he used them. However, with Browning they were used for
fun, just as he might say

Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript

or

"'Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's noddy;"

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One of the most original bits of diction I can find lies in the word perplexed as used here:

concede there mocks
Each lover of free motion and much space
A perplexed length of apse and aisle, and nave,—56

Gloomed is the single magic word in

if there have not gloomed
Some blot i' the 'scutcheon.97

Knowing when to stop listing these examples of appropriate diction is difficult, but perhaps two illustrations of oxymoron will suffice to close the paragraph. Clive is "fearfully courageous."58 Old Taurello is "restlessly at rest."59 Oxymoron, however, is not often found.

Let us now turn to find some vocabulary of a rank not to be expected in poetry. Browning enjoys this, as almost any page will disclose. A few examples will serve. Go-cart60 makes a strange synecdoche for infancy. Ulcers of the stomach61 is not a pretty expression to find in a poem. Very humble, too, is

56 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society, p. 688, ll. 24-26 a.
57 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 223, ll. 7-8 b.
58 Clive, p. 897, l. 18 a.
59 Sordello, p. 83, l. 12 b.
60 Paracelsus, p. 26, l. 23 b.
61 Mibrab Shah, p. 936, l. 37 a.
So long as each toe spares its neighbor's kibe—

--Chirrups the contumacious grasshopper

is not exactly expected in poetry. Perhaps in this last, however, length of word produces the unpoetic effect. Another example will show the fun Browning has in a parade of long words:

One is incisive corrosive;
Two retorts, nettled, curt, crepitant;
Three makes rejoinder, expansive, explosive;
Four overbears them all, strident and strepitant:
Five . . . O Danæides, O Sieve!

For satire homely words are an integral part of Browning's diction. "Mixing mud with fantasy" is neither melodious nor comforting; nor is "bubble burst in suds."

Short u has no euphony. Church customs receive much of this satire. Referring to hogs is a favorite method. Brother Lawrence is "you swine;" the priest officiating on Holy-Cross Day is "an acorned hog." People in church sit "hip to haunch," and Brother Lippo mingled with people
outside the church "hip to haunch."70 Corks "religiously
popped"71 when the Image re-entered, and Ecelin "slunk"72
into being a monk. Though pointed, his satire has no beauty.
Here is another realistic suggestion:

how shall I describe
What grubs or nips or rubs or rips—your louse
For love, your flea for hate magnanimous73

and another written years later:

Once more has pashed competitors to dust74
Surely a "pickthank"75 is an unpleasant person, and the
"gormandizer-spenderthrift-dramatist"76 a subject for scorn.
Alliteration, so much a part of Browning's diction helps in
homely satire. "Boyhood's bugbear"77 and "a gilt-ginger-
bread big baby-house"78 may as well serve as a long line of
illustrations here. Their rough sound is also onomatopoetic.
Truly, most of Browning's onomatopoeia is of this unpleasant
sort:

70 Holy Cross Day, p. 282, l. 5 a.
71 The Englishman in Italy, p. 262, l. 28 a.
72 Sordello, p. 97, l. 47 a.
73 Ibid., p. 91, ll. 13-15 a.
74 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 636, l. 32 a.
75 King Victor and King Charles, p. 146, l. 26 a.
76 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 637, l. 19 a.
77 Sordello, p. 97, l. 47 a.
78 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 755, l. 38 b.
Thus wrangled, brangled, jangled they a month—

Actively satirical are such sounds as "gr-r-r," "he-he," "zooks," "whee-hee-nee," and "fee-faw-fum." Yet, we claim that Browning's diction is right!

The use of ungrammatical words is very rare, even when characters speak. Browning's own good construction predominates. Perhaps this is because characters who are inferior are usually spoken about. Mr. Sludge does say "he don't," and one or two other miserable people do. The Duchess in "Colombe's Birthday" remarks "'Twas me." "Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme?" the crowds ask. Once Browning uses "swang," but more in coined humor than otherwise. Several times for the sake of rime some license

---

79 The Ring and the Book, p. 416, l. 53 b.
80 Herakles, p. 669, l. 18 a.
81 Soliloquy in a Spanish Cloister, p. 167, l. 19 b.
83 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 342, l. 32 b.
84 Holy-Cross Day, p. 282, l. 29 a.
85 Ibid., p. 281, 3 b.
86 Colombe's Birthday, p. 235, l. 32 a.
87 Sordello, p. 105, l. 3 a.
88 Shop, p. 810, l. 12.
occurs, as in

The chord's might half discovered, what should 
One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck. 89

The word that must be pronounced in shortened form hardly ever
occurs to interrupt Browning's rhythm. Invincible in the fol­
lowing would probably be read in its full length:

Of that invincible faith, but only one!90

Probably Browning derived some of his keenest enter­
tainment from the coining of words, not as a neologlist, but
for his own use. Names for characters and nicknames occur
in a charmingly off-hand manner:

1. The Reverend Don So-and-so.91

2. A's book shall prop you up, B's shall cover you,
   Here's C to be grave with or D to be gay,
   And with E on each side, and F right over you,
   Dry-rot at ease till the Judgement-day!92

3. Go get you manned by Manning and new-manned
   By Newman and, mayhap, wise-manned to boot
   By Wiseman, and we'll see or else we won't!93

That much punning is very unusual in Browning, and, since he
does not like puns, adds to the satire he intended. The
satire in "Popularity" is charming when all these names
"put blue into their line:"

89 Sordello, p. 124, l. 34 b.
90 Paracelsus, p. 22, l. 7 a.
91 Up at a Villa--Down in a City, p. 174, l. 22 b.
92 Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, p. 167, l. 15-18 b.
93 The Ring and the Book, p. 418, l. 21-25 b.
Hobbs hints blue,—straight he turtle eats;  
Nobbs prints blue,—claret crowns his cup;  
Nokes outdoes Stokes in azure feats,—  
Both gorge. Who fished the murex up?  
What porridge had John Keats?  

Nokes also appears again in the story of "Ned Bratts." A line upon a nickname follows here:  
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"  
In "Sordello" we read of forms of government as:  
Down sank the People's Then; up-rose their Now  
The "High and Right," the "Low and Wrong," and the "Little and Bad" are faced by Euripides.  

Somewhat closely related to giving new names to old ideas is Browning's habit of substituting a definition for a word. Such kenning causes a thoughtful and often pleasurable response from the reader. Pollen is "golden soil" in  
Shock off, as might a lily its golden soil.  

Happiness he sums up in  
We have not sighed deep, laughed free  
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy.  

Beat is represented in

---

94 Popularity, p. 195, ll. 36-40 b.  
95 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 633, l. 37 b.  
96 Sordello, p. 121, l. 1 b.  
97 Herakles, p. 675, ll. 26-39 b.  
98 Sordello, p. 98, l. 58 b.  
99 Youth and Art, p. 396, ll. 11-12 b.
To that pulse's magnificent come-and-go. 100

Or wave in

'Neath the mute hand's to-and-fro. 101

Definition of documents comes in this:

--That is, o' the pen which stimulated tongue
On paper and saved all except the sound
Which never was. Law's speech beside law's thought? 102

In a longer passage he explains--almost as a definition--of
what life in a monastery consists:

Well, sir, I found in time, you may be sure,
'Twas not for nothing--the good bellyful,
The warm serge and the rope that goes all round,
And day-long blessed idleness beside. 103

Such coining and defining seem natural and pleasurable, re­
quiring only thoughtful interpretation.

There is, however, another side of Browning's diction
which sends one immediately to the dictionary. Most of the
unfamiliar words occur only once, or at least seldom.
"Sordello" and the "Balaustion" poems furnish most of these.
By search one can find some others, but, generally speaking,
Browning's vocabulary is not a parade of difficult words.
From some two dozen such words in "Sordello" one might list
blinkard, cobswain, sardius, thyrsus. "Balaustion" furnishes

100 The Laboratory, p. 168, l. 26 b.
101 A Lovers' Quarrel, p. 172, l. 49 a.
102 The Ring and the Book, p. 424, ll. 42-44 b.
103 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 343, ll. 37-40 a.
choinix, dikast, kottabos, and tettix among others from the Greek.

Turning from such erudite language to the English monosyllable is not meant to be an antithesis of idea. The monosyllabic lines, like the foreign words, are not frequent; but when they do occur, are always arresting.

1. Are heroes men? No more and scarce as much.  

2. That night the Duke said, "Dear or cheap  
   As the cost of this cup of bliss may prove  
   To body or soul, I will drain it deep."  

Directness is accomplished. When as in "Saul" the lines are of fourteen syllables and we find sixty consecutive single-syllable words (with two exceptions), the diction seems almost a phenomenon. There is no apparent effort to accomplish this, and the thought is not warped:

"O Saul, it shall be  
A face like my face that receives thee; a Man like to me,  
Thou shalt love and be loved by, forever; a Hand like this hand  
Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!"  
I know not too well how I found my way home that night.

Last in discussion of the single word or expression in Browning's technique is the hyphenated word. This occurs in so great abundance that a few examples will represent the

104 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 647, l. 24 b.  
105 The Statue and the Bust, p. 284, ll. 28-30 b.  
106 Saul, p. 184, ll. 21-31 a.
hundreds to be found. Among the nouns "standers-by" and "joy-hunger" are typical. Adjectives are "nine-hundred-years-old," "crop-headed," "cinder-black;" adverbs, "red-fig-wise" and "sausage-wise." None of these examples are alliterative, but there are many such words, as "fire-flash" in the favorite, and these found in lines to illustrate:

1. Directing or land-labor or sea-search
2. For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face
3. Cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds

In word combinations the trend toward alliteration leads. Browning's alliteration is usually of two words only, but often these are so arranged that two pairs occur

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107 Colombe's Birthday, p. 240, 1. 2 a.
108 Cleon, p. 361, 1. 33 a.
109 My Last Duchess, p. 252, 1. 33 a.
110 Marching Along, p. 163, 1. 2 a.
111 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 737, 1. 22 a.
112 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 634, 1. 39 a.
113 Ibid., p. 637, 1. 23 b.
114 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 607, 1. 15 a.
115 Ibid., p. 607, 1. 8 b.
116 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 641, 1. 24 b.
117 Ibid., p. 656, 1. 38 b.
in one line. Because the alliterative words are sometimes separated by words, there is a tendency to think of their giving consonance rather than alliteration; but a close examination will show that consonance is often present in addition to alliteration, not in place of it. The "Balaustion" poems are loaded with alliteration. From the first fifteen pages I have taken examples representative of these three poems, and, in fact, of all Browning's alliteration. Of two-word alliteration are the following:

1. Wretched Wrangle\(^{118}\)
2. "Ever is my wont to bear the bow."\(^{119}\)
3. To touch my lyre, to lift my soul in song\(^{120}\)
4. Friendly Crete looming large there\(^{121}\)
5. Harbor of many strangers, free to friend\(^{122}\)

Of three-word combinations:

1. Planates and pale populace of Heaven\(^{123}\)
2. Despite the gobbling and the silence soon\(^{124}\)

\(^{118}\) Balaustion's Adventure, p. 617, l. 10 b.
\(^{119}\) Ibid., p. 606, l. 49 a.
\(^{120}\) Ibid., p. 610, l. 45 a.
\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 603, l. 15 a.
\(^{122}\) Ibid., p. 614, l. 15 b.
\(^{123}\) Ibid., p. 604, l. 48 a.
\(^{124}\) Ibid., p. 610, l. 33 b.
3. Was truth fast terrifying tears away

Here is a startling longer illustration:

As who must grope until he gain the ground
0' the dungeon doomed to be his dwelling now
Already high o'er head was piled the dusk
When something pushed to stay its downward step,
Pluck back despair just reaching its repose.

Isn't that close-knit poetic planning! Such alliteration
runs the risk of becoming tiresome, and does before one
finishes the eighty pages of "Balaustion." Usually, how­
ever, alliteration adds interest and pleasure. Some examples
chosen from other poems where they furnish variety, not
satiety, may prove this. The first two make for force of
impression:

1. 'Neath our feet broke the brittle bright stubble like
   chaff.127
2. Fierce the black water frothed o'er the blind rock.128

The following two in m give time to think:

1. Mazed, motionless, and moonstruck—I'm the man!129
2. Multiform, manifold, and menacing130

125 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 613, l. 31 a.
126 Ibid., p. 615, 11. 3-7 a.
127 How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,
p. 163, l. 28 a.
128 The Englishman in Italy, p. 260, l. 59 a.
129 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 345, l. 24 b.
130 An Epistle, p. 340, l. 38 b.
Here is wasted motion:

You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished. 131

The last is an example of skill in collecting varied ideas into similar form:

Saint, Savage, Sage. 132

Consonance is not so frequent nor so apparent as alliteration, yet there are many lines in which it is the secret of the veiled charm. The first three of the following examples are from the first twenty-five pages of "Balaustion;" the second two are found near each other in "The Ring and the Book;"

1. I must inter a certain corpse today 133
2. Only half selfish now, since sensitive 134
3. Ere let the reptile raise his crest again 135
4. Buzzing and blaze, noon-tide and market-time 136
5. That was a firebrand at each fox's tail
   Unleashed in cornfield: soon spread flare enough,
   As hurtled thither and there heaped themselves
   From earth's four corners, all authority

131 Youth and Art, p. 396, l. 6 a.
132 Christmas Eve, p. 325, l. 15 b.
133 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 613, l. 41 a.
134 Ibid., p. 617, l. 31 b.
135 Ibid., p. 624, l. 23 a.
136 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 19 a.
And precedent for putting wives to death. 137

Assonance occurs often. It has relation to internal rime. Here are a number of single-line examples for the sake of the vowels themselves:

1. Ere let the reptile raise his crest again 138
2. Pun-pelleted from Pnx 139
3. He knew his man, his match, his master 140
4. Shall loose her doom on me 141
5. Hushing its hundreds at once 142
6. Unhook wings, unhood brows! Dost harken 143
7. Stopped by a conch a-top from fluttering forth 144

Dissonance, the pleasing variation, is also in Browning's poetry, but these lines found with more searching:

1. When--like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth 145
2. Such a web, simple and subtle 146

137 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 19 a.
138 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 624, l. 23 a.
139 Ibid., p. 632, l. 27 b.
140 Ibid., p. 635, l. 23 a.
141 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 648, l. 57 b.
142 Master Huges of Saxe-Gotha, p. 196, l. 7 a.
143 Apollo and the Fates, p. 950, l. 17 a.
144 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 42 a.
145 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 630, l. 60 a.
146 Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, p. 196, l. 45 b.
3. Fit to the finite his \textit{infinity}.\footnote{147} 

The following examples show a combination of these devices for sound as Browning is able to use them:

1. \textit{What was a speck expands into a star.}\footnote{148} 
   
   \begin{itemize}
   \item \textit{e}, \text{a}--for assonance
   \item \textit{a}--for dissonance
   \item \textit{s}, \text{sp}, \text{s}, \text{t}--for consonance
   \end{itemize}

2. \textit{None of self-laudation, vulgar brag. Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!}\footnote{149} 
   
   \begin{itemize}
   \item \textit{v}--for alliteration
   \item \textit{n}, \text{l}, \text{v}--for consonance
   \item \text{a}--for assonance
   \item \text{a}--for dissonance
   \end{itemize}

Quite as influential as these repetitions of sounds within a line can be the effect produced by ryming words. Browning's rime in general has not great variety, yet he does some things with it that produce sound patterns like no other poet's of his day.

Most striking of the diction of rime is what is known as mono-rime. The words, however, are not forced; their use is sensible; and the result is perfect unity. Except for the chorus, "Boot and Saddle" has no repetition of words to give the \textit{ay} sound in its other twelve lines. More striking, but also containing some refrain repetition, are the forty lines of "Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr," which contain

\begin{thebibliography}{99}

\footnote{147} Sordello, p. 124, l. 1 b.
\footnote{148} Paracelsus, p. 17, l. 54 a.
\footnote{149} The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 638, ll. 1-2 b.
\end{thebibliography}
five striking internal rime-words per stanza, increasing forty ide end-sounds to sixty such rimes before the poem is complete. Stanza four will illustrate the plan, except that the seventh line, which is the climax of the poem, outdoes all the rest.

As I ride, as I ride,
Ne'er has spur my swift horse plied.
Yet his hide, streaked and pied,
As I ride, as I ride,
Shows where sweat has sprung and dried,
--Zebra-footed, ostrich-thighed--
How has vied, stride with stride
As I ride, as I ride:

Rime entirely within the line, blending with assonance, comes in

Life too and wife too, would his friends but help!

Internal rime is not one of Browning's more usual types. One can hunt out lines, but examples like the next two show that they do not satisfy when found:

1. Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us.
2. Shrugged his hump-shoulder, to tell the beholder

Better employment is to seek end-rimes that show technique worth praising. Of the countless kinds, here are three samples:

150 Through the Metidja to Abd-el-Kadr, p. 165, ll. 35-42 b
151 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 615, l. 32 a.
152 The Lost Leader, p. 164, l. 13 a.
153 Nationality in Drinks, p. 166, l. 25 a.
This page contains a discussion of poetic rime and examples of imperfect rime used by Robert Browning. The text discusses how Browning occasionally uses imperfect rime, especially when necessary to emphasize thought, and how he may even give up the rime in some cases. The examples are taken from Browning's works, including "On the Cliff." The text also notes that refrains are less common in Browning's poems.

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154 The Englishman in Italy, p. 260, ll. 9-9-20 a.
155 Cristina, p. 170, ll. 29-36 a.
156 Another Way to Love, p. 190, ll. 12-22 b.
157 On the Cliff, p. 274, ll. 16-21 b., stanza 3.
own setting:

1. Crumbling your hounds their messes.
2. Fitting your hawks their jesses!^{158}

The economy of words in those indirect objects makes superb summarizing. Less pleasing, but of a certain amount of force, is a line of refrain completing each long stanza of "Women and Roses." It rhymes with nothing, which is excellent after eight lines of rime couplets:

They circle their rose on my rose tree.^{159}

The "Cavalier Tunes" have good refrains for song.

In "Why I Am A Liberal" a most daring piece of imperfect rime occurs on the word liberty. This appropriateness of diction is almost too much!

But little do or can the beat of us:
That little is achieved through liberty. c
Who, then, dares hold—emancipate thus— c
His fellow shall continue bound? Nor I, d
Who live, love, labor freely, nor discuss c
A brother's right to freedom. That is "Why."^{160} d

Browning is at his best I believe when his rime is a combination of the rime couplet and alternate rime arranged for his own designed effect. "Home Thoughts from Abroad" in its

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158 Pippa Passes, p. 137, ll. 24-33 b.
159 Women and Roses, p. 193, l. 7 b.
160 Why I Am A Liberal, p. 948, ll. 9-14 b.
twenty lines is an interesting study of rime diction. The equal proportion of heavy and light stresses in no set pattern and the almost equal number of end-stop and run-on lines contribute to the subtle plan. All of this is only a quarter of the poem’s beauty, for besides there are metre, imagery, and emotional intensity. The same plan of freedom in blending occurs with excellent effect in the narrative poems, "Hervé Riel" and "Clive," in Part III of "James Lee's Wife," and in "Christmas-Eve."

Alternate rime in "A Grammarian's Funeral," worked out in long and short lines and well-planned stresses, produces a powerful effect:

Let us begin and carry up this corpse, a (mas.)
Singing together b (fem.)
Leave we the common crofts, the vulgar thorps a (mas.)
Each in its tether b (fem.)

In "Waring" the feminine rime is tortured thus:

loved him
lost him
moved him
accost him

"Prospice" in masculine rime and a different rhythmic scheme has less melody than some poems in its collection:

When the snows begin and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place.

161 A Grammarian's Funeral, p. 279, ll. 30-33 a.
162 Waring, p. 264, ll. 42-45 b.
163 Prospice, p. 395, ll. 3-4 b.
Poems like "Old Pictures in Florence," which show evidence of effort to draw proper names into the rime, make one marvel at the technique:

1. Thyself shalt afford the example, Giotto! Thy one work, not to decrease, or diminish. Done at a stroke, was just (was it not?) "Oh!" Thy great Campanile is still to finish. 164

2. Margheritone of Arezzo With the grave-clothes garb and swaddling barret, (Why purse up mouth and beak in a pet so, You bold old saturnine poll-clawed parrot?) 165

"Pacchiarotto" in couplets does this decidedly:

I leave ye to fancy our Sienna's Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas-- 166

In his work upon the versification of Browning, Harlan Hatcher calls this type of rime a surprise saved for a moment of indulgence, and adds: "In its own way, 'Pachiarotto' is as perfect as 'Love Among the Ruins.'" 167

The riming complet is used by Browning for serious material and for lighter poems. Couplets complete the fourteen-syllable lines of "Saul" and "Abt Vogler," the tetrameter of "Easter-Day," "The Confessional," and "The Italian in England," and the pentameter of "My Last Duchess."

No jingling sound accompanies:

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164 Old Pictures in Florence, p. 177, ll. 25-28 a.
165 Ibid., p. 178, ll. 9-12 a.
166 Pacchiarotto, p. 804, ll. 53-54 b.
I said
"Fra Pandolf' by design, for never read
Strangers like you that pictured countenance.
The depth and passion of its earnest glance.168

Even the whimsical "Adam, Lilith, and Eve" with its couplets of mixed rhythm forestalls any jingle. Unlovely long wording and variations produce satire:

stupendous
defend us
horrend-ous
seraphic
graphic169

Blank verse, because of its lack of rime, will not be discussed here; but in passing it might be mentioned that the dignity of its diction is in keeping with its verse-form and its thought.

To introduce beauty of diction in rime the well-known eight lines from "Pippa Passes" cannot be excelled. The rime is not a factor of its loveliness that is usually realized, but I believe that analysis shows that it is the foundation. Here we have not one a, b, c, d and another e, f, g, h; but the second four lines are an exact echo of the first four, which sustains the impression and gives perfect unity.

The year's at the spring a
The day's at the morn; b
Morning's at seven c
The hill-side's dew pearled; d


169 Waring, p. 265, ll. 1-5 a.
Another secret of the beauty is the masculine rime varied by a small proportion of feminine rime. The first make it convincing; the second mellow it. And while the poem is before us, it is well to note the repetition of the contractions which are so appropriate in their presentation of the unassuming little working-girl's thought.

It is in "The Pied Piper" with its fitting diction that the complete joy of variation in numbers of rimed lines is found. The groupings may be from two to six continuous rimed lines. Spontaneity carries forward long syllables, short syllables, dignified words, simple words, alternate rime, couplet rime, and mono-rime quite as the piper drew after him

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats. 171

The three-line stanza brings out a diction that compels attention. A tercet form like the following is good because of its masculine stresses:

And straightway in his palace hall, where commonly is set Some coat-of-arms, some portraiture ancestral, lo, we met His mean estate's reminder in his fisher father's net. 172

The octameter of the "Toccato" is managed the same way and

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170 Pippa Passes, p. 133, ll. 29-36 a.
171 The Pied Piper of Hamelin, p. 268, l. 8 b.
has a poised effect. Browning makes a considerable use of terza rima, which produces a sustained effect:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I.</th>
<th>II.</th>
<th>III.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>well</td>
<td>there</td>
<td>ceased</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square</td>
<td>East</td>
<td>hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tell</td>
<td>air</td>
<td>increased</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These several uses of rime show that Browning experimented interestingly and selected well for his purposes. Stanza form, however, is not primarily diction; hence, we leave the subject of rime.

D.

Another distinctive quality in Browning's writing is the sudden introduction of an extra thought. These asides or inserts abound in Browning's style. The parenthetical is always a surprise, as in the following:

1. Called Nature's Alps, and the world's despair For peerless painting? (See Vasari.)

2. Nay, I shall have it yet! Detur amanti! My Koh-i-noor--or (if that's a platitude) Jewel of Gramsched, the Persian Sofi's eye;

3. Yourself were visible As you stood victor, then; whom now (your pardon!) I am forced narrowly to search and see.

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174 Old Pictures in Florence, p. 176, ll. 15-16 b.
175 Ibid., p. 173, ll. 36-38 a.
176 Colombe's Birthday, p. 239, ll. 50-52 a.
4. The lady girds the sword upon the Youth
   [He's always very young]—the trumpets sound,
   Cups pledge him, and, why, the King blesses him—177

   The use of appositives is an exact method also for the
   introduction of the parenthetical idea. Appositives may be
   single, as these following:

   1. The devil, that old stager, at his trick178
   2. I—patriot, loving peace and hating war;--179
   3. To spend one's April here, the blossom-month180
   4. Language, the makeshift, grew
       Into a bravest of expedients too;181

   They may be double, as in these:

   1. It kills her, and this prevents my seeing it close:
       The delicate droplet, my whole fortune's feel182
   2. And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
       Whereon he tried those le-e-e-es-es
       And ké-e-e-es-es and turns and trills,
       Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight183

   This introductory remark is a favorite with Browning:

   In short, he learned first, practiced afterwards.184

177 Strafford, p. 59, l. 21-23 a.
178 Red Cotton Night-Gap Country, p. 747, l. 49 b.
179 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 643, l. 39 b.
180 Strafford, p. 67, l. 39 a.
181 Sordello, p. 89, ll. 42-43 b.
182 The Laboratory, p. 168, ll. 36-37 b.
183 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 642, ll. 14-17 b.
184 Ibid., p. 636, l. 50 b.
More often the aside is added:

1. And now one after one seeks its lodging, as star
   follows star
   Into eve and the blue far above me,—so blue and
   so far! 185

2. The man sprang to his feet,
   Stood erect, caught at God's skirts, and prayed!
   --So, I was afraid! 186

3. Who saith—but why all this about what he saith? 187

   Word grouping in series is a favorite device with Browning. And perhaps in no other division of Browning's technique are there more varied effects. Similar items will illustrate first:

1. Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt, and blind! 188

2. So your fugue broadens and thickens,
   Greatens, and deepens, and lengthens, 189

3. So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown! 190

   Items denoting time often appear, but never more pleasingly than in

   And morning, evening, noon, and night,
   Praised God in place of Theocrite. 191

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185 Saul, p. 180, ll. 15-16 a.
186 Instans Tyrannus, p. 255, ll. 50-52 a.
187 An Epistle, p. 340, l. 31 b.
188 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 647, ll. 25 b.
189 Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, p. 196, ll. 34-35 b.
190 The Last Adventures of Balaustion, p. 636, l. 41 b.
191 The Boy and the Angel, p. 254, ll. 23-24 a.
Short clauses in series are effective in Mildred's speech:

I was so young, I loved him so, I had
No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.192

Instead of being equal, items sometimes rise to a climax:

1. Of subjects dreamed and dared and done before--193
2. Would I shrink to learn my lifetime's limit—days,
   weeks, months, or years?194

Or they may sink in anticlimax:

He Spartanizes, argues, fasts, and frowns,195

Antitheses even occur in series:

How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free!196

Browning occasionally makes a series of three items by the
addition of an idea to two customarily paired words. The
effect is decidedly unique:

1. Time, tide, and the train won't wait:197
2. he lords, ladies, and louts eyed198
3. Such men, such women, and such gods their guard:199

192 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 222, ll. 6-7 a.
193 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 677, l. 18 b.
194 La Saisiaz, p. 851, l. 21 b.
195 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 647, l. 52 a.
196 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 218, ll. 7-8 b.
197 The Inn Album, p. 786, l. 33 a.
198 Pacchiarotto, p. 804, l. 12 a.
199 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 646, l. 13 b.
The last illustration shows repetition in series in the word such. Likewise it represents Browning's fondness for groupings of three. Following are more examples of this series plan:

1. A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed.
2. Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
   Punish mob-favorites;
3. They thwarted me throughout, here, and here here.

As several of the above examples show, the series is one of Browning's methods for writing satire. The following two examples must have been intended for that, especially the second with its unevenness:

1. The daughter of the Burgraves, Landgraves, Markgraves,
   Remains their daughter. I shall scarce gainsay.
2. Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,
   Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout
   O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
   Alter-scrap-snatcher, pimp, and parasite—

Parallel structure is apparent in much of Browning's writing. We find it in both parallel ideas and opposite ideas. A pleasing vigor pervades the following parallels:

200 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 646, l. 43 b.
201 Ibid., p. 655, ll. 4-5 b.
202 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society, p. 694, l. 22 a.
203 Colombe's Birthday, p. 244, ll. 54 a--1 b.
204 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 629, ll. 39-42 a.
1. would you sail?  
He has drained the Tiber for you: would you walk?  
He straightened out the long Flaminian Way. 205

2. Names in the newspaper--great This, great That  
Gladstone, Carlyle, the Laureate--much I care! 206

3. A year ago had seen her and been seen,  
Loved and been loved. 207

4. The thing I pity most  
In man is--action prompted by surprise  
Of anger: Men? nay, bulls--whole onset lies  
At instance of the firework and the goad! 208

5. So I said "To do little is bad, to do nothing is worse"--  
and made verse. 209

An interesting parallel form not illustrated above appears in  
chiasmus, as follows:

1. 0 Lord, how long? How long, 0 Lord? 210
2. She toe-tips and **staccato,**--**legato,** shakes his poll  
3. The petty done, the undone vast, 212

Opposites in idea are quite as interesting. Isn't this nice  
balance in the description of a mushroom?

206 The Inn Album, p. 206, ll. 15-16 a.  
207 Colombe's Birthday, p. 243, ll. 10-11 a.  
208 A Forgiveness, p. 819, ll. 38-41 b.  
209 (An interlude for) Ferishtah's Fancies, p. 939,  
ll. 4-5 b.  
210 Bilippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial,  
p. 827, l. 28 b.  
211 Fifine at the Fair, p. 726, l. 2 a.  
212 The Last Ride Together, p. 268, l. 4 a.
Since, outside white as milk, and inside black as ink.  

Again comes the idea to the painter:

To something heaven-tinged, not hell-hued.

Other contrasts appear in such expressions as:

1. Looking so old—Euripides seems young.
2. Boiling and freezing, like love and hate.
3. "He doted, or he dozed!"
4. And if what seemed her "No" may not have meant her "Yes!"

Turning to the technique of longer constructions—clauses as we may call them—we find several outstanding characteristics. Abruptness is one of these, but it does not always lead to brevity. Instead it may accompany involved syntax, omission of full statements, and various devices for suggesting ideas. These constructions are not, however, so baffling as they have often been reputed. They settle into grooves, rather repetitious than wide-reaching and give one practice in their interpretation.

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213 Fifine at the Fair, p. 732, l. 16 a.
214 Pacchiarotto, p. 732, l. 16 a.
215 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 639, l. 51 b.
216 Ibid., p. 681, l. 29 a.
217 Fifine at the Fair, p. 715, l. 8 a.
218 Ibid., p. 709, l. 4 b.
Perhaps first we ought to see some of the abrupt statements themselves. They are of three kinds: sudden turns of thought, additions, and odd endings.

The sudden turns of thought come out nicely in the last stanza of "Count Gismond," which shows four definite abrupt changes as the countess conceals her thankful, happy boasting. The last two lines, however, are most unexpected:

Our older boy has got the clear
Great brow: the when his brother's black
Full eye shows scorn, it . . . Gismond here?
And have you brought my tercel back?
I just was telling Adela
How many birds it struck since May. 219

Having finished a discourse on God's plan, Prince Hohenstielschwangau proceeds:

Well then, this settled,—take your tea, I beg,
And meditate the fact, 'twixt sip and sip—
This settled—why I please myself—

Although Browning seldom addresses the reader, his attention is requested here:

Tower and tower,—our image bear in mind! 221

Here less abruptly the same admonition is given:

Now as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)
So, in this book lay absolutely truth,

219 Count Gismond, p. 253, ll. 29-34 b.

220 Prince Hohenstielschwangau, Savior of Society, p. 684, ll. 52-54 a.

221 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 749, l. 35 a.
Fanciful fact, the documents indeed. A question may make abrupt intrusion:

She had
A heart—how shall I say?—too soon made glad.

Additions to the thought may be sudden turns; they are handled aptly by Browning, often with surprising punctuation. Following are examples of various additions:

1. I was bid
Watch Gismond for my part: I did.

2. So, Willy, let's me and you be wipers
Of scores out with all men—especially pipers!

3. And all at once the climbing landed him
—Where, is my story.

Do you advise a climber? Have respect
To the poor head, with more or less brains
To spill, should breakage follow your advice.

4. you crept
Close by the side to dodge
Eyes in the house, two eyes except:
They styled their house "The Lodge."

The third, or abrupt ending, is the acme of this style of construction. The temptation here is to overload the list of examples because there is such variety. After

223 My Last Duchess, p. 252, l. 22 a.
224 Count Gismond, p. 253, l. 50 a.
225 The Pied Piper of Hamelin, p. 271, ll. 16-17 a.
226 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 726, ll. 55-56 a.
227 Confessions, p. 394, ll. 47-50 b.
speaking of his last duchess and the requisites of the next, the duke says suddenly to the envoy whom we have not heard:

Nay, we'll go
Together down, sir. Notice Neptune though,
Taming a sea-horse—thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innabrack cast in bronze for me!228

The Italian in England musing over his dreamed-of visit concludes:

So much for idle wishing—how
It steals the time! To business now."229

After fifty-three stanzas this is an unexpected ending:

And the whole is well worth thinking o'er
When autumn comes: which I mean to do.
One day, as I said before.230

A last stanza consisting of one line is a strange balance for a poem of 267 lines:

Again the Cousin's whistle! Go my Love.231

Browning ends the prologue to "Ferishtah's Fancies"

Who laughest "Take what is, trust what may be!"
That's life's true lesson,--eh?232

"Imperante Augusto Natus Est" represents a man with his quest outside the public baths. He thinks he has waited long enough:

228 My Last Duchess, p. 252, ll. 15-18 b.
229 The Italian in England, p. 260, ll. 7-8 b.
230 By the Fireside, p. 187, ll. 28-30 b.
231 Andrea Del Sarto, p. 348, l. 37 a.
232 Ferishtah's Fancies, p. 929, ll. 9-10 b.
Was it for nothing the gray Sibyl wrote
"Caesar Augustus regnant, shall be born
In blind Judea"--one to master him,
Him and the universe? An old-wife's tale?
Both-drudge! Here, slave! No cheating!
Our turn next.
No loitering or sure you taste the lash!
Two strigils, two oil-dippers, each a sponge! 233

Perhaps this last is too commonplace for poetry, but there are few writers who could have gotten such material into poetry. It is a grand blend of surprises in that most conventional English iambic pentameter.

Free from abruptness is a direct, dignified brevity, very beautiful, but much harder to find for illustrations. Balaustion tells of the queen's death in such a line:

And in a breath she passed away. 234

This is a poignant observation upon life:

Till lo, the little touch, and youth was gone! 235

The couplet so often repeated from "Rabbi Ben Ezra" no doubt gains its reputation from this style of expression as much as from the content:

What I aspired to be,
And was not, comforts me: 236

The dignity of that poem lends itself to such unadorned statements as these:

233 "Imperante Augusto Natus Est--" p. 100 11. 23-31 b.
234 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 611, l. 27 a.
235 A Grammarians Funeral, p. 279, l. 13 b.
So, take and use thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!  

Brief remarks in the hortatory manner are hardly to be found. In "Strafford" Rudyard cries out

Would I were sure we knew ourselves!  

Five hundred pages later a guest to a king exclaims

"Alas, Admetos--would we found thee gay,
Not grieving!"  

The pun is a form of brevity that Browning almost ignores. From his wish for

No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux

one must believe that he dislikes puns. Hence, is this one?

Let who lied by left lie!

Flowery high-flown elegance of language seems absent from Browning's style. The very fact that he is honest, direct, vigorous, and abrupt leaves no room for euphuisms.

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237 Rabbi Ben Ezra, p. 385, ll. 18-23 b.
238 Strafford, p. 56, l. 10 b.
239 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 612, ll. 2-21 b.
240 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 632, l. 27 b.
There is, nevertheless, a wealth of what at first glance seems to be involved syntax and obscure statement. Some of the examples already given suggest this. Others are typical. Of these the verb-subject-object order appears often in Browning's syntax:

1. Thus held he me there with his great eye that scrutinized mine—
2. See you not something besides masonry?
3. Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?

A pleasing word order appears in the last line of this representative stanza:

No mastery of mine o'er these!
Terror with beauty, like the Bush
Burning but unconsumed. Bend knees,
Drop eyes to earthward! Language? Tush!
Silence 'tis awe decrees.

Less smooth are these next wandering-prepositions, yet their force in such positions is probably the result of planning on the author's part.

1. 'Eat flesh? Rye-grass content thee rather with, Whereof accept a bundle!'
2. bade folk "Drape the nude And stop the scandal!" quoth the record prim

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242 Saul, p. 183, l. 15 a.
243 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 605, l. 15 b.
244 Rabbi Ben Ezra, p. 384, l. 3 a.
245 Prologue to Asolando, p. 987, ll. 26-30 a.
246 The Two Camels, p. 937, ll. 12-13 a.
I borrow this of: hang his book and him. 247

The adverb here is a surprise:

"I saw through the joke!" the man replied
They seated themselves beside. 248

The cognate accusative occurs sometimes. The examples suggest that Browning doesn't use them seriously:

1. Out-Homering Homer

2. I have seen my see. 250

The general plan of this last example makes a nice problem of analysis, with its position of appositive, "the first":

Here you behold the King of Comedy—
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors' filth. 251

Next will come a few examples of what might be called obscure. Probably they are no more convincingly so than some of the foregoing quotations.

1. I parleyed with my pass-book,—rubbed my pair
At the big balance in my banker's hands,—
Folded a check cigar-case-shape,—just wanting
Filling and signing,—and took the train, 252

2. Friendless—again I tell thee is ill-luck. 253

247 Beatrice Signorini, p. 996, ll. 19-21 b.
248 Adam, Lilith, and Eve, p. 916, ll. 53-54 a.
249 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society, p. 700, l. 29 a.
250 The Ring and the Book, p. 428, l. 8 b.
251 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 658, ll. 55-57 a.
252 The Inn Album, p. 775, ll. 9-12 b.
253 Herakles, p. 666, l. 9 a.
3. Thy child as surely grasps
   An orange as he fails to grasp the sun
   Assumed his capture. 254

4. Does she look, pity, wonder
   At one who mimics flight,
   Swims—heaven above, sea under,
   Yet always earth in sight? 255

5. Thus moaned
   Man till Prometheus helped him,—as we learn,—
   Offered an artifice whereby he drew
   Sun's rays into a focus,—plain and true,
   The very Sun in little: made fire burn
   And henceforth do Man service—glass-conglobed
   Though to a pin-point circle—all the same
   Comprising the Sun's self, but Sun disrobed
   Of that else-unconceived essential flame
   Borne by no naked sight. 256

Another point pertinent to this discussion is the omission
of words or whole expressions. A reader of Browning must
do a great deal of supplying. Here he may supply a third
verb, although the sense of the diction is better without it:

   Clapped my hands, laughed and sang, any noise, bad
   or good. 257

Supply subject and predicate in Guendolin's answer. But
you spoil it, both for rhythm and for drama:

   Mil. I say there is a cloud . . .
   Guen. No cloud to me!

   Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same! 258

254 A Pillar at Sebzevar, p. 940, ll. 44-46 b.

255 Prologue to Fifine at the Fair, p. 702, ll. 37-40 a.

256 Parleyings with Certain People—with Bernard de
   Mandeville, p. 955, ll. 23-32 a.

257 How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix,
   p. 165, l. 3 b.

258 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, p. 226, ll. 37-38 a.
What one should fill in here only Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau would know:

The free church comes to visit the free Church:
Receive her! or...or...never mind what else!259

This next one, spoken to the three Fates, is not hard.
Supply the gestures as well as the words:

Lift the chalice to the lip!
Good: thou next—and thou!260

Questions help one to interpret:

1. For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all these
   --A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate--first, second, third?261

2. Why, with beauty, needs there money be,
   Love with liking?
   Crush the fly-king
   In his gauze, because no honey-bee?262

An omission offering no difficulty, but giving vigorous variety, is that of the article before nouns:

1. Duchesses descend at door
   From carriage-step to stranger prostrate stretched
   And bid him take heart and deliver mind.263

2. Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.264

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259 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, p. 695, ll. 49-50 b.
260 Apollo and the Fates, p. 950, ll. 34-35 a.
263 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 749, ll. 55-57 b.
264 Filippo Baldinucci on the Privilege of Burial, p. 824, l. 32 a.
The twenty-four lines introducing "La Saisaiz" have no articles in them.

One more bit of technique demonstrating Browning's economy of words is in the introductory clauses for quotations and conversation. "Quoth this" and "quoth that" appear many times. Nice variety appears in such diction as the following examples show:

1. "To heaven with me!" was in the good man's mouth, 265

2. A voice said, "So wouldn't thou strive, not rest?" 266

3. He ended with a flourish. I replied: "Fancy myself your Aristonumos?" 267

4. A whisper from the west
Shoots—"Add this to the rest,
Take it and try its worth: there dies another day." 268

5. "—Yes, I'm Malcrais, and somebody beside,
You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
Our hero, safe at home— 269

6. A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!
Can it be my heart attains at last
Its longing? that you stand the very same
As in my visions? ...Ha! Hey, how?" aghast
Stops short the rapture. 270

Dialogue often has no introducing material, but its arrange—

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265 Jochanan Hakkodosh, p. 921, l. 16 a.
266 Rephan, p. 1005, l. 6 a.
267 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 653, ll. 29-30 a.
268 Rabbi Ben Ezra, p. 384, ll. 24-26 b.
269 Two Poets of Croisic, p. 871, ll. 21-23 b.
270 Ibid., p. 870, ll. 41-44 a.
ment on the page shows the new speaker.

1. "Thumps her athwart the muzzle; why?"
   "How else
   Instruct the creature—mouths should munch, not bite?"
   "True; he is a man, knows but man's trick to teach.
   Suppose some plain word, told her first of all,
   Had hindered any biting?"
   "Find him such,
   And fit the beast with understanding first!" 271
   He sings.
   She speaks.
   He sings. 272

2. Aforesaid. "Tell it, learnedest of friends!"

3. A certain morn broke beautiful and blue
   O'er Schiphaz city. 273

Thoughts of a character sometimes are printed in italics,
while his spoken ideas are put down in regular quotation form.
A quotation within a quotation may be so arranged. See
"The Inn Album."

The quotations within quotations in the "Balaustion"
adventures lead to great complication and even confusion,
but their punctuation is not at fault.

F.

Punctuation is usually much like ours today. "Caliban
upon Seteboa" defies usual punctuation and capitalization.
It even has a grammar of its own. A few illustrations from

271 A Camel-Driver, p. 936, ll. 28-37 b.
272 In a Gondola, pp. 262-264
273 Jochanan Hakkodosh, p. 918, ll. 26-29 a.
the poem will have to serve as a representation of the whole, and also serve to show Browning in his most daring technique:

1. "Will sprawl, now that the heat of day is best,
   (They is never found.)" 274

2. "Thinketh, He dwelleth i' the cold o' the moon." 275

3. Hating and loving warmth alike: so He. 276

4. Meanwhile, the best way to escape His ire
   Is, not to seem too happy. 'Sees, himself,
   Yonder two flies, with purple films and pink,
   Bask on the pompion-ball above: kills both. 277

Along with the other liberties taken in this poem, one looks for some in spelling. None are to be found. Browning does only two strange things in spelling. One is to write proper names differently from the accepted form, but this is so common to many writers that it can be accepted as demonstrating no individuality. To substitute u for y in Greek names is a different matter. Browning does this almost constantly. It is a little disconcerting to read about "Olumpus," the "Hudra," "Mukenaian," "Dionusios," and "Numpholeptos" and to come upon a "stulus" as an instrument for writing.

274 Caliban upon Setebos, p. 392, l. 1 a.

275 _Loc. cit._, l. 24 a.

276 _Loc. cit._, p. 1. 43 a.

277 _Ibid._, p. 394, ll. 44-47 a.
We have observed through various illustrations the outstanding tendencies of Browning's technique in diction. Our conclusion is that his methods run in certain grooves, but within these reveal impressive variety. His language is vigorous, the words and manner of expression fitted to his realistic tendencies of thought.
CHAPTER III

IMAGERY

We turn now from the study of diction to that of imagery. In one of his later writings Browning speaks of a poet as one who has

'Twixt thing and word, lit language straight
from soul.--1

Where better than in his imagery is a poet so revealed? Through the single word or short phrase, through figures of speech, and by long descriptive pictures and explanations Browning's imagery shows him a poet able to

Real vision to right language.2

In his earliest poem, "Pauline," he has prepared the reader to expect

--a principle of restlessness
Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel all--3

With such an introduction he prepares the reader to watch for much that is pleasurable.

A.

Since the author has mentioned "see" early in his list of aims, we shall use it first in the discussion.

1. Parleyings with Certain People--With Christopher Smart, p. 960, ll. 1-2 b.
2. Loc. cit., ll. 13-14
3. Pauline, p. 5, ll. 8-9 a.
Long lists of visual images show that Browning was eye-minded. Color and form make a ratio of about seventy to thirty, while these combined one hundred sight images are matched with only twenty sound images, four images of smell, four of touch, and two of taste. These numbers are the result of natural reading, not of minute search; therefore, they represent a listing of what seem the best passages. They do, however, show pretty well the use Browning makes of the five senses. No accurate count would be possible because Browning elaborates many of the pictures until several combinations, particularly of sight and sound, overlap and defy separate counting.

Use of primary colors impresses one from Browning's earliest pages on. In "Pauline," found only eight lines apart, are

Blue sunny air, where a great cloud floats—\(^4\)

and

See where the solid azure waters lie\(^5\)

These give a sample of Browning's technique in the showing of a pleasant scene. In his early idealistic poems blue eyes also give pleasure:

1. No foreigners, that I can recollect
   Come, as she says, a month since to inspect

\(^4\) *Pauline*, p. 9, l. 51 a.

\(^5\) *Loc. cit.*, l. 1 b.
Our silk-mills--none with blue eyes and thick rings of raw-silk-colored hair.

2. King-cousin takes a fancy to blue eyes.

Gem-like blue is beautiful in

Our sapphirine spirit of a twilight star.

With red, too, he does some excellent things. Notice how it is twice suggested here, and also how much more the image gives than just red flower:

The wild tulip, at end of its tube, blows out its great red bell
Like a thin clear bubble of blood, for children to pick and sell.

A combination of red and blue was often found in Browning's imagery when he was young. In "Jochanan Hakkadosh," written in 1833, he reflects upon that preference:

While Youth bent gazing at its red and blue
And we find the youthful Sordello, 1840, saying:

Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post
For gondolas.

Another Italian setting:

Not a pillar nor post but is dizened
With red and blue papers.

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6 Fippa Passes, p. 144, ll. 49-51 a.
7 Colombe's Birthday, p. 247, l. 37 a.
8 Paracelsus, p. 23, l. 57 a.
9 Up at a Villa-Down in the City, p. 174, ll. 31-32 a.
10 Jochanan Hakkadosh, p. 921, l. 41 b.
11 Sordello, p. 98, ll. 50-51 b.
12 The Englishman in Italy, p. 262, ll. 9-10 a.
Later in "The Ring and the Book" come these estimates:

1. --now such reds and blues
   As only heaven could fitly interfuse.--13

2. A wreck of tapestry, proudly-purposed web
   When reds and blues were indeed red and blue,14

A number of times books, one of the favorite images, are represented in color. This one fits in right here:

With all the binding a blister,
   And great blue spots where the ink has run
   And reddish streaks that wink and glitter
   Over the page so beautifully yellow:15

Browning's most important book is "the square old yellow Book."16

Yellow is used most for hair color, as in his early years he much preferred that color. Such words as "gold,"17 "amber,"18 and "colored like honey"19 describe the heads.

Some use is made of secondary colors, but not so much alone as in combination. Alone green appears in "green-flesh melons"20 and "green-glazed minaret."21 but

13 Epilogue to Dramatis Personae, p. 414, ll. 5-6 a.
14 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, ll. 36-37 a.
16 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 8 a.
17 A Toccata at Galuppi's, p. 175, l. 25 b.
18 Evelyn Hope, p. 171, l. 31 b.
19 Sordello, p. 85, l. 36 a.
20 De Gustibus, p. 178, l. 58 b.
21 Sordello, p. 92, l. 42 a.
usually green is suggested by metals, "greenish tonguelet licked from brass;" or by some gem-like brilliance, as in "emerald shafts," "emerald luzern;" or in changing green, as "that eye a kindling chrysopras." Combined color is beautiful in

A lens to drape
In ruby, emerald, chrysopras.

Purple we find in a gem also:

And this leaps ruby, this lurks amethyst.

It appears interestingly in more every-day pictures:

1. And gourds fried in great purple slices,
   That color of popes,

2. From stalwart strider by wagon-side,
   Brightening the acre with his purple blouse

Most poetic is this purple in "the halo irised."

Returning to gems we find topaz suggesting a whole portrait. (The wonder of Browning's portraits is fresh
through all his pages.) Brown and shades of brown occur:

Priscilla left me for a Brabant lord
Whose cheek was like the topaz on his thumb. 31

Other browns are used in great variety, and are one of the
single colors the poet uses best. They are realistic and
beautiful at once in images of soil, which occur often:

1. Where the quick sandpipers flit
   In and out the marl and grit
   That seems to breed them, brown as they, 32

2. the mounds
   Of red earth from whose sides strange trees grow out 33

3. You've the brown ploughed land before, where
   oxen steam and wheeze 34

4. Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth
   This autumn morning 35

Autumn browns in Italy "had networked with brown" 36
each white grape, showed "some burnt sprig," 37 and "twisted
dead vine-twigs." 38 A more unusual place for brown comes in

Ah, do you mark the brown o' the clouds, made
bright with fire

31 Colombe's Birthday, p. 247, ll. 50-51 b.
32 Paracelsus, p. 44, ll. 31-33 b.
33 Ibid., p. 24, ll. 58-59 a.
34 Up at a Villa--Down in the City, p. 174, l. 26 a.
35 Among the Rocks, p. 375, ll. 9-10 b.
36 The Englishman in Italy, p. 260, l. 22 a.
37 Loc. cit., l. 37 a.
38 Loc. cit., l. 47 a.
Through and through? as, old wilga succeeding
to desire.\textsuperscript{39}

Browning's observations of \textit{gray} are more original
than most peoples'. Here is another book:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Or, my scrofulous French novel}
On gray paper with blunt type.\textsuperscript{40}
\end{quote}

\textit{Gray grapes} aren't our usual image—"gray as an unripe
grape."\textsuperscript{41} Nor do we see \textit{gray moons}:

\textit{The moon breaks through, a gray mean scale against
the vault.}\textsuperscript{42}

Definition for the adjective as well as keen observation make
this picture and this old belief strangely pleasing:

\begin{quote}
To a milk river that makes oxen white
Miraculously, un-mouse-colors skin,
Or so the Roman country people dream.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

The \textit{gray} of stones, hair, eyes, and weather is more usual
and is found in abundance. A picture like the following,
although often used by poets, is always lovely:

\begin{quote}
And the hills over-smoked behind by the faint gray
olive trees.\textsuperscript{44}
\end{quote}

Notice how over-smoked doubles the \textit{gray} and makes this tree

\textsuperscript{39} Fifine at the Fair, p. 706, ll. 1-2 b.
\textsuperscript{40} Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, p. 168, ll. 27-28 a.
\textsuperscript{41} Sordello, p. 123, l. 28 a.
\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 119, ll. 53-54 b.
\textsuperscript{43} Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society,
p. 699, ll. 49-51 a.
\textsuperscript{44} Up at a Villa—Down in the City, pl74, l. 27 a.
imagery Browning's own. The diction of this next stanza does something for trees that I think places Browning high above most word-painters of trees and plants:

And the leaf-buds on the vines are woolly,
I noticed that today:
One day more bursts them open fully
---You know the red turns gray. 45

Pink is a most unpoetic sound, but Browning uses the idea so well that we see the trees and forget the sound:

1. at last
   Pink leaflets budded on the beach 46

2. Should yearn for this first larch-bloom
crisp and pink 47

There is definite beauty in "this pink perfection of the cyclamen." 48 When the idea is expressed in rose we have what poets nearly all, from Homer on, have made us accustomed to. But is "the rosy-fingered dawn" better than this?

And see a rose-light dyes
The endmost snow: 'tis dawn, 'tis day, 'tis safe at home! 49

Black and white appear so often in descriptions of faces and as foils for each other and for other colors that a short list of those will suffice. Again, nature suggests

45 The Lost Mistress, p. 170, ll. 5-8 a.
46 Sordello, p. 83, l. 47 b.
47 Ibid., p. 93, l. 19 a.
48 La Saisaiz, p. 849, l. 13 b.
49 Ivan Ivanovitch, p. 883, ll. 21-22 b.
concrete pictures:

1. A bruised black-blooded mulberry; 50
2. Their sooty ranks, caw and confabulate-- 51

This next black is surprising:

The king hailed his keeper, an Arab,
As glossy and black as a scarab; 52

Of course there are countless references to black hair and
eyes because so many of Browning's people have them.

Because Browning is so energetic and sees so completely,
much of his imagery will be a combination of colors. Here are
a few of the most pleasing and most striking:

1. --gather fruits of one great gaze
   At the moon: look you! The same orange haze,--
   The same blue stripe round that--and, in the
   midst a spectral whiteness; 53

2. Fancy the Pampas' sheen!
   Miles and miles of gold and green
   Where the sunflowers blow
   In a solid glow
   And--to break now and then the screen--
   Black neck and eyeballs keep
   Up a wild horse leaps between. 54

3. Shall we sail round and round them, close over
   The rocks, though unseen,
   That ruffle the gray glassy water
   To glorious green? 55

50 The Flight of the Duchess, p. 274, l. 29 b.
51 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 768, l. 56 b.
52 The Glove, p. 256, ll. 51-52 b.
53 Sordello, p. 80, ll. 15-18 a.
54 A Lovers' Quarrel, p. 173, ll. 8-14 a.
55 The Englishman in Italy, p. 261, ll. 31-34 a.
4. While another picks
   And puts away even pebbles, when a child,
   Because of bluish spots and pinky veins—
   "Give him forthwith a paint-box!"

5. Where one small orange cup amassed
   Five beetles,—blind and green they grope
   Among the honey-meal:

The rainbow is spoken of many times, sometimes as a symbol
of hope and most times as an image of color. The prettiest
reference is perhaps

   Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.

But the rainbow is never broken up into separate colors
as is this blaze:

   Things furnish you rose-flame,
   Which burn up red, green, blue, nay, yellow more than
   needs.

   Effects of light and shade seem to me more vividly
presented by Browning than by any other writer I have
noticed. Where else is such co-operation on the reader's
part called forth as in:

1. a brown pair
   Of hawks from the wood float with wide wings
   Strained to a bell; 'gainst noon-day glare
   You count the streaks and rings.

---

57 Two in the Campagna, p. 189, ll. 22-24 a.
58 Sordello, p. 80, 1. 47 b.
59 Fifine at the Fair, p. 715, ll. 14-16 a.
60 By the Fireside, p. 186, ll. 28-31 b.
2. I lay and looked at the sun,
    The noon-sun looked at me:
    Between us two, no one
    Live creature, that I could see.

    Yes! There came floating by
    Me, who lay floating too,
    Such a strange butterfly!
    Creature as dear as new:

    Because the membraned wings
    So wonderful, so wide,
    So sun-suffused, were things
    Like soul and naught beside.61

3. The herded pines commune and have deep thoughts,
    A secret they assemble to discuss
    When the sun drops behind their trunks which glare
    Like gates of hell:62

4. On the arch where olives overhead
    Print the blue sky with twig and leaf.63

This final example is a nice little epigram:

Measure your mind's height by the shade it casts.

The above examples have several times illustrated
just as vividly images of form as images of color. The
 technique here, however, follows certain trends which the
 following examples attempt to show:

The silhouette from "How They Brought the Good News
from Ghent to Aix" is well-known:

61 Prologue to Fifine at the Fair, p. 701, ll. 5-16 a.
62 Paracelsus, p. 47, ll. 18-21 a.
63 Old Pictures in Florence, p. 176, ll. 25-26 a.
64 Paracelsus, p. 32, l. 19 b.
At Aershot, up leaped of a sudden the sun, 65
And against him the cattle stood black every one, 66
Also his horse's ear, "just one sharp ear bent back," and another horse's ear, "the thin stiff ear like an abbey spire!" are clear images of shape.

Browning's love of three makes frequent pleasing little suggestions of flowers and plants:

1. Daisied turf gives room to
   Trefoil, plucked once in her presence—68

2. let our laurels lie!
   Braided moonfern now with mystic trifoly 69

3. A slight flower growing alone, and offering
   Its frail cup of three leaves to the cold sun, 70

Just as pleasingly he draws a leaf of five parts:

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltiness, has furled
   Her five fingers,
   Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the world 71

A needle-shaped tree against the sky is a favorite pattern:

1. by thorn-rows
   Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire

---

65 How They Brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix, p. 165, ll. 7-8 a.
66 Loc. cit., l. 13 a.
68 Flute-Music with an Accompaniment, p. 1000, ll. 2-3 a.
69 Sordello, p. 92, ll. 33-34 b.
70 Pauline, p. 8, ll. 37-38 b.
71 In the Doorway, p. 373, ll. 21-23 b.
And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire\(^{72}\)

2. And one sharp tree--'tis a cypress--stands\(^{73}\)

Notice in the first example how much more there is of imagery besides the shape of the tree. The same is true of these mountains. Mountains are not often found in Browning's imagery, but here are two too vivid to miss:

1. See, in the evening-glow,
   How sharp the silver spear-heads charge
   When Alp meets heaven in snow!\(^{74}\)

2. Strange groups
   Of young volcanos come up, cyclope-like,
   Staring together with eyes of flame--\(^{75}\)

More usual are hills and piles of stones, but they are seldom comfortable hills. Notice the harsh strong outlines:

1. I crossed a ridge of short sharp broken hills
   Like an old lion's cheek teeth.\(^{76}\)

2. How does it strike you, the construction
   Gaunt and gray--
   Sole object, those piled stones, that gleam
   Unground away
   By twilight's hungry jaw, which champs fine
   All beside
   I' the solitary waste we grope through?\(^{77}\)

3. 'Mid rock chasms and piles of loose stones
   Like the loose broken teeth

---

\(^{72}\) Sordello, p. 93, ll. 23-25 b.

\(^{73}\) De Gustibus, p. 178, l. 47 b.

\(^{74}\) By the Fireside, p. 185, ll. 33-35 a.

\(^{75}\) Paracelsus, p. 46, ll. 16-18 b.

\(^{76}\) An Epistle, p. 340, ll. 43-44 b.

\(^{77}\) Fifine at the Fair, p. 731, ll. 6-9 b.
Of some monster which climbed there to die
From the ocean beneath—78

The constant reiteration of teeth in these configurations
is a striking example of a Browning trend in imagery. Observe
how much these homes on hills resemble in technique, if not
in satisfaction to the occupant:

1. Well now, look at our villa! stuck like the
   horn of a bull
   Just on a mountain edge, as bare as the
   creature's skull,79

2. What I love best in all the world
   Is a castle, precipice-encurled
   In a gash in the wind-grieved Apennine.80

Architecture, of course, suggests a wealth of forms,
usually in fairly complex statement, but in clear suggestions
of imagery:

1. Over the waters of the vaporous West
   The sun goes down in a sphere of gold
   Behind the arm of the city, which between,
   With all that length of domes and minarets,
   Athwart the splendor, black and crooked runs
   Like a Turk verse along a scimitar.
   There lie, sullen memorial, and no more
   Possess my aching sight?81

2. By the portal—enter, and, concede there mocks
   Each lover of free motion and much space
   A perplexed length of apse and aisle and nave,—

78 The Englishman in Italy, p. 261, ll. 36-39 a.
80 De Gustibus, p. 178, ll. 38-40 a.
81 Paracelsus, p. 19, ll. 35-42 b.
Pillared roof and carved screen, and what care I?—

3. Ah, the slim castle! dwindled of late years,
   But more mysterious; gone to ruin--trails
   Of vine through every loop-hole. Naught avails
   The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
   The maple chamber: did I say its floor
   Was made of intersecting cedar beams?
   Worm now with gaps so large, there blew cold streams
   Of air quite from the dungeon; lay your ear
   Close and 'tis like, one after one, you hear
   In the blind darkness water drop.83

How much imagery besides that of form there is to find in
such description! The touch of cold air and the sound of
dropping water are just as vivid in this last combination as
are the sight images it is used to illustrate.

For sound imagery in Browning's poems there is variety,
but there are not great numbers of images:

   The wind slips whispering from bough to bough84
   is pleasing. So are bird sounds:

1. Spin, pray, then sing like linnets o'er the flax.85

2. We shall have the word
   In a minor third,
   There is none but the cuckoo knows.86

3. That's a wise thrush; he sings each song twice over
   Lest you should think he never could recapture

---

82 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society,
p. 688, ll. 23-26 a.

83 Sordello, p. 92, ll. 50-56 a. and ll. 1-3-b.

84 Paracelsus, p. 34, l. 29 a.

85 The Ring and the Book, p. 438, l. 19 a.

86 A Lovers' Quarrel, p. 173, ll. 34-36 b.
The first fine careless rapture! 87

Favorite insect sounds are those of the cicala who "dared carouse" 88 or "the very cicala laughs," 89 and "the implacable cicala's cry." 90 Sometimes there is not personification like this, but people themselves make the sounds:

1. Pursuing his discourse: a grand unchecked
   Monotony made out of his quick talk
   And the recurring noises of his walk; 91

2. Then heaves abroad his cares in one good sigh, 92

3. Ovidian quip or Ciceronian crank,
   A-bubble in the larynx while he laughs,
   As he had fritters deep down frying there. 93

Frying can be used horridly, as in these lines from a torture scene:

Hell—are they sprinkling fire too? The blood fries
   And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear 94

A creaking hinge is a real relief after that, even if the author does mind

the gruff

Hinge's invariable scold

---

87 Home Thoughts from Abroad, p. 179, ll. 14-16 a.
88 Pippa Passes, p. 130, l. 51 b.
89 Ibid., p. 139, l. 17 b.
90 The Ring and the Book, p. 443, l. 51 b.
91 Sordello, p. 119, ll. 34-36 a.
92 The Ring and the Book, p. 426, l. 6 a.
93 Ibid., p. 425, ll. 15-17 a.
Making my very blood run cold.\textsuperscript{95}

Or even this:

I sit of evenings—silence, save for biscuit crunch.\textsuperscript{96}

As might be expected, a musician would include many references to musical sounds. These are suggested by "the lyre alone sufficed,"\textsuperscript{97} by "bells now mute can jingle,"\textsuperscript{98} by a flautist's "tootlings hoarse and husky,"\textsuperscript{99} or by "the seven-stringed tortoise-shell."\textsuperscript{100} Because often "Robert Browning at the organ chased a fugue"\textsuperscript{101} we hear a toccata with its sudden stops:

1. 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!"\textsuperscript{102}

2. Hugues! I advise \textit{mea poena}
   (Counterpoint glares like a Gorgon)
   Bid One, Two, Three, Four, Five, clear the arena!
   Say the word, straight I unstop the full organ,
   Blare out the \textit{mode Palestrina}.\textsuperscript{103}

\textsuperscript{95} Christmas-Eve, p. 316, ll. 23-25 b.
\textsuperscript{96} Clive, p. 893, l. 10 b.
\textsuperscript{97} Sordello, p. 89, l. 46 b.
\textsuperscript{98} Fifine at the Fair, p. 708, l. 37 a.
\textsuperscript{99} Flute-Music, with an Accompaniment, p. 1000, l. 25 a.
\textsuperscript{100} Herakles, p. 667, l. 41 a.
\textsuperscript{101} The Toccata of Gallupi's, p. 175, ll. 15-16 a.
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Loc. cit.}, ll. 3-5 b.
\textsuperscript{103} Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, p. 197, ll. 6-10 b.
3. I feel for the common chord again,  
Sliding by semitones till I sink to the  
minor,—yes,  
And I blunt it into a ninth, and I stand on  
alien ground,  
Surveying awhile the heights I rolled from  
into the deep;  
Which, hark, I have dared and done, for my  
resting-place is found,  
The C Major of this life: so, now I will  
try to sleep.104

The anacoluthon of those three scattered examples is so  
similar that it represents a trend in technique, but not in  
variety. A more varied example will be good for a con­  
clusion to this part of the discussion: The sound imagery  
and emotional intensity of "Meeting at Night" are accom­  
plished by short, quiet words, onomatopoetic often:
   A tap at the pane, the quick sharp scratch  
And blue spurt of a lighted match,  
And a voice less loud, through its joys and fears,  
Than two hearts beating each to each;105

Consonance, assonance, and dissonance are probably the  
secret of the perfection here.

The relatively small numbers of images of taste  
and smell will be shown by fewer examples. There are ideas  
that having burst like a bubble "found soapsuds bitter to  
the tongue;"106 There are words that "bite like salt."107

104 Abt Vogler, p. 383, ll. 13-18 b.
105 Meeting at Night, pl70, ll. 9-12 b.
106 The Ring and the Book, p. 431, l. 49 a.
107 Fifine at the Fair, p. 735, l. 22 a.
Old perfumes help represent the treasures in "Paracelsus:"

1. And strew faint sweetness from some old
   Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
   Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
   Or shredded perfume like a cloud
   From closet long to quiet vowed,
   With mothed and dropping arras hung,
   Mouldering her lute and books among,
   As when a queen, long dead, was young. 108

In the next example smell is so combined with touch that
there is no separating them:

   In came the country sounds and sights and
   smells— that fine
   Sharp needle in the nose from our
   fermenting wine! 109

   Somewhat the same sensation of touch comes a few
   lines later in the same poem:

   To give me once again the electric snap and
   spark
   Which prove, when finger finds out finger
   in the dark 110

Touch associated with motion in the search for something
is made realistic by Browning. Again it is through a kind
of portrait painting:

   1. Themistokles—
      Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
      Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?— he
      Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
      Who touched Zeus, link by link, the
      un-ruptured chain! 111

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108 Paracelsus, p. 36, ll. 4-11 b.
109 Fifine at the Fair, p. 724, ll. 32-33 a.
110 Ibid., p. 725, ll. 17-18 a.
111 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 646, ll. 51-55 a.
2. Feelingly he extends a foot
   Which tastes the way ere it touches
   Earth's solid and just escapes man's soft,
   Nor hold of the same unclutches
   Till its fellow foot, light as a feather which,
   Lands itself no less finely:
   So a mother removes a fly from the face
   Of her babe asleep supinely.112

Browning really does more with a sense of motion
than he can with mere touch. The foregoing examples prove
that. Motion is nicely suggested in these three examples
found somewhat at random:

1. Tiring three boys at the bellows?113
2. The twenty-two-years-old frank footstep114
3. A man of ready smile and facile tear,115

Attempted or partly accomplished motion in faces is abundant.
The brevity of diction in producing a whole picture is one
of Browning's supreme skills:

1. Finally the last sleep finds the eye
   So tired it cannot even shut itself.116
2. Starts somewhat, solemnizes straight his smile,117
3. And for all the crone's submissive attitude,
   I could see round her mouth the loose plaits
tightening.

112 Donald, p. 92, ll. 49-52 b., and p. 913, ll. 1-4 a.
113 Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha, p. 196, l. 43 b.
114 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 746, l. 55 a.
115 The Ring and the Book, p. 425, l. 35 a.
116 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 738, ll. 45-46 b.
117 The Ring and the Book, p. 425, l. 53 b.
And her brow with assenting intelligence
brightening. 118

4. Like a smile striving with a wrinkled face 119

5. His hollow cheek
Looked all night long as though a creeping
laugh
At his own state were just about to break
From the dying man 120

Vigorous action is so much the rule with Browning that we
can pass that by and give an example or two of exaggeration,
which is not extreme, to which he usually goes. He is too
intelligent for much like these:

1. Spin him around and send him flying
Off to hell 121

2. Had stunk the patient dead ere he could groan.
I cursed the doctor, upset the brother,
Brushed past the conjurer. 122

A most unaccountable action is manifest in the abuse of the
"old yellow Book:"

--I toss
I' the air, and catch again, and twirl about
By the crumpled vellum covers. 123

Much more pleasing is this persiflage:

119 Paracelsus, p. 46, l. 25 b.
120 Ibid., p. 41, ll. 7-10 a.
121 Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, p. 168,
ll. 25-26 a.
122 Paracelsus, p. 29, ll. 60-62 a.
123 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, l. 8-10 a.
Outstripping my ten small steps with one stride? 124

The realistic is most nearly accurate:

1. These cappings quick, these crook-and-cringings low. 125

2. Quietly through the town they rode jog-jog. 126

Interesting motions in nature make a vivid blend here:

Naught disturbs the quiet way,
Save a lazy stork that springs,
Trailing it with legs and wings,
Whom the sly fox from the hill
Rouses, creep he ne'er so still. 127

One of Brownings most fascinating images of motion
is that of rising smoke or the suggestion of smoke:

1. From the volcano's vapor-flag winds hoist
Black o'er the spread of sea,--128

2. Now that I, tying thy glass mask tightly,
May gaze through those faint smokes
curling whitely,
As thou pliest thy trade in this devil's-smithy--129

3. Larches scattered through the pine-tree solitudes
Brightened, "as in the slumberous heart of the woods
Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
To placid incantations, and that stain
About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
With those black pines"--so Eglamour gave vent
To a chance fancy. 130

124 Any Wife to Any Husband, p. 188, l. 45 b.
125 Colombe's Birthday, p. 233, l. 17 a.
126 Sordello, p. 76, l. 24 b.
127 Paracelsus, p. 44, l. 33-37 b.
128 Sordello, p. 124, l. 25-26 b.
129 The Laboratory, p. 168, l. 1-3 a.
130 Sordello, p. 83, l. 49-55 b.
A realization of weight is another kind of imagery occasionally present. We read in strange diction about a familiar idea—the sermon of "pig-of-lead-like pressure." More than mere weight is suggested in these other examples which are more extended:

1. The shrubs bestir and rouse themselves as if some snake, that weighed them down all night, let go His hold. 

2. When heaven's pillars seemed o'erbowed with heat, its black-blue canopy suffered descend Close on us both, to weigh down each to each, And another up all life except our life.

One more type of image, and we must turn to some other phase of Browning's style. This type isn't frequent, but is impressive wherever found. Support of things either by self or by something else is hard to manage effectively. Browning's clearness of idea and fitting words produce these pictures. "Incident of the French Camp" has an example of each of these images: Napoleon supports himself—

With neck out-thrust, you fancy how, Legs wide, arms locked behind, As if to balance the prone brow Oppressive with its mind.

131 Christmas-Eve, p. 317, l. 17 b.
132 Paracelsus, p. 34, ll. 5-7 b.
133 Pippa Passes, p. 132, ll. 42-45 b.
134 Incident of the French Camp, p. 251, ll. 5-8 a.
The wounded boy

held himself erect
By just his horse's mane.\textsuperscript{135}

In more detail, but with effect similar to this last stands Saul:

He stood erect as that tent-\prop, both arms stretched and wide
On the great cross-\support in the centre, that goes to each side;
He relaxed not a muscle, but hung there as, caught in his pangs
And waiting his change, the king-\serpent all heavily hangs.\textsuperscript{136}

Hills help in this vivid simile:

The hills, like giants at hunting, lay,
Chin upon hand, to see the game at bay,—\textsuperscript{137}

Sinister, too, and lonely is this impression:

When all at once, large-\looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.\textsuperscript{138}

The picture of head supported by a hand is far more beautiful when a portrait:

Musing by the fire-light, that great brow,
And the spirit-small hand propping it.\textsuperscript{139}

We have now seen many examples of Browning's out-

\textsuperscript{135} Incident of the French Camp, p. 251, ll. 18-19 a.
\textsuperscript{136} Saul, p. 180, ll. 3-6 a.
\textsuperscript{137} Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Comes, p. 289, ll. 4-5 a.
\textsuperscript{138} The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 635, ll. 55-58 b.
\textsuperscript{139} By the Fireside, p. 187, ll. 23-24 b.
standing trends in imagery—love for gem colors, appreciation of trees, pleasure in songs of birds and noise of insects—to name a few favorites. There are still some others which he repeats too often to be omitted.

Stones, ores, and metals are found as often in color imagery as are gems. "Blank alabaster, black obsidian" is a most striking combination. Granite and sandstone seem more real because ordinary. The pavement of the Kremlin is of "serpentine and syenite." Greatest of all as a study of stones is "The Bishop Orders His Tomb in Saint Praxed's Church," which teaches something about each of nearly a dozen kinds of stone. Metals serve to give less information and greater color. Gold and silver, so common in all vocabularies, are handled with originality in

The gold-rough pointel, silver blazing disk
O' the lily! A statue of "bloodless, hard, cold bronze" seems to represent all the qualities of that metal. A livelier bronze is suggested by

See how that beetle burnishes in the path! A

140 Sordello, p. 111, l. 38 a.
141 Waring, p. 265, l. 61 a.
142 Sordello, p. 112, l. 11 a.
143 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 615, l. 21 b.
144 Pippa Passes, p. 141, l. 37 b.
Pleasingly honest is the description of the Bard's breast

Shows what brass we took for gold: 145

Here are eyes of wolves:

They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye --
green-glowing brass: 146

Let us conclude color imagery with a figurative explanation:

Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with light metal, to show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though ablaze
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of posturer, not combatant: 147

In plant life Browning's favorite images are moss,
ferns, lichens, worts, muchrooms, and weeds. Vines occur
as often as trees. There is something very charming about
these modest little plants:

1. Round us the wild creatures, overhead the trees,
   Underfoot the moss-tracks,--life and love of these. 148

2. A stone floor one may writhe on like a worm:
   No mossy pillow blue with violets 149

3. How the minute gray lichens, plate o'er plate
   Have softened down the crisp-cut name and date: 150

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145 At the "Mermaid", p. 808, l. 16 a.
146 Ivan Ivanovich, p. 882, l. 22 b.
147 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 650, ll. 38-44 a.
148 Ferishtah's Fancies, p. 930, ll. 21-22 a.
149 Paracelsus, p. 39, ll. 52-53 a.
150 Fame, p. 170, ll. 7-8 b.
4. By boulder-stones where lichens mock
   The marks on a moth, and small ferns fit
   Their teeth to the polished block.151

5. O' the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe:152

6. Springs up a fungus brood sickly and pale,
   Chill mushrooms colored like a corpse's cheek.153

7. But cockle, spurge, according to their law
   Might propagate their kind, with none to awe,
   You'd think: a burr had been a treasure trove.154

8. Plantain and quitch, the rocks' shade keep alive:155

Vines in Italy make a picture like this:

   --you stripped and whitened mulberry trees,
   Bound each to each by lazy ropes of vine!156

Ruins may be cowered thus:

   By the caper overrooted, by the gourd
   Overscored,
   While the patching houseleek's head of blossom winks
   Through the chinks.157

Among the plants, nut-bearing trees are mentioned:

   1. Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped
      Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped.158

It is the acorn's cap that pleases Browning:

151 By the Fireside, p. 185, ll. 42-44 b.
152 Sordello, p. 99, l. 54 b.
153 Paracelsus, p. 30, ll. 35-36 a.
154 Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, p. 287, ll. 13-15 b.
155 A Death in the Desert, p. 386, l. 11 a.
156 King Victor and King Charles, p. 152, ll. 13-14 b.
157 Love Among the Ruins, p. 172, ll. 35-38 a.
158 Sordello, p. 82, ll. 24-25 b.
2. Nor its fine thimble fits the acorn-top
Keeps woolly ward above the oval brown,
Its placid feature!59

Small animals please Browning—"the snail with his gay
shell of dew,"160 the "bat which cowers throughout noontide,"161 "a toad in a christening font,"162 "a wee white
mouse,"163 and of course all the rats of Hamelin-town.
For both color and sound this is a favorite line—

A black lynx snarled and pricked a tufted ear;164
Reptiles figure realistically---efts, lizards, and numerous
snakes. But Browning's predilection is for the insects.
Without collecting them all, I have thirteen spiders, eight
various flies, four bees, five wasps, three ants, a gnat,
a tick, a specimen of aphis, a butterfly, four moths, occa-
sional caterpillars, three crickets, six cicalas (as he calls
them), a grass-hopper or two, four beetles, two special
scarabs, three earwigs, eleven scorpions, fourteen various
worms, a slug, and a leech. Several of these appear together
in the book by Sibandus Schafnaburgensis, dropped into a
hollow tree:

159 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 738, ll. 25-27 a.
160 Paracelsus, p. 13, ll. 19 a.
161 Sordello, p. 85, l. 53 b.
162 Gold Hair, p. 378, l. 3 a.
163 Fra Lippo Lippi, p. 342, l. 44 a.
164 An Epistle, p. 338, l. 20 b.
How did he like it when the live creatures
Tickled and toused and broused him all over,
And worm, slug, eft, with serious features,
Came in, each one, for his right of trover?
--When the water-beetle with great blind deaf face
Made of her eggs a stately deposit.
And the newt borrowed just so much of the preface
As tiled in the top of his black wife's closet?165

Above this scene
A spider had spun his web across,
And sat in the midst with arms akimbo: 166

In contrast with this moist scene, we'll look at some baking ones. From the top of a wall out comes
A scorpion with wide angry nippers:167
Another scorpion "sprawls"168
Where the baked cicala dies of drouth.169

With charming delicacy Browning makes a few fairy pictures. Another poet might try to but never say so well as Browning does this about a yellow leaf fallen on some moss:

---a shield else gold from rim to boss,
And lay it for show on the fairy-cupped
Elf-needled mat of moss,170

165 Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, p. 167, ll. 49-54 a.
166 Loc. cit., ll. 35-36 a.
167 The Englishman in Italy, p. 262, 1. 37 a.
168 De Gustibus, p. 178, 1. 56 b.
169 Loc. cit., 1. 45 b.
170 By the Fireside, p. 185, ll. 48-50 b.
This simile shows Browning's deftness:

I turned to him, scarce consciously, as turns
A water-snake when fairies cross his sleep.171

Even in this piece of realism the idea of fairies occurs:

Ay, he strewed
A fairy dust upon the multitude,
Although he feigned to take them by themselves,
His giants dignified those puny elves.172

B.

From this somewhat spontaneous imagery we turn now to pictures no less excellent, but more frankly attempted—figures of speech.

Most poets use the simile most. This Browning does, but he finds less need of it as his writings progress. These first are among his early similes, some delightfully conceived and trustingly said:

he bade me grow
Guiltless, forever, like a tree
That buds and blooms, nor seeks to know
The law by which it prospers so:173

Or scientifically—

And green and blue his sharp eyes twinkled
Like candle-flame where salt is sprinkled;174

Or historically—

171 Paracelsus, p. 16, l. 63 a. and l. 1 b.
172 Sordello, p. 89, ll. 6-9 b.
173 Johannes Agricola in Meditation, p. 341, ll. 22-25 a.
174 The Pied Piper of Hamelin, p. 269, ll. 1-2 b.
--Save one who, stout as Julius Caesar,
Swam across and lived to carry
(As he, the manuscript he cherished)
To Rat-land home his commentary:175

In "Paracelsus" we find the beautiful but the more usual:
The sun goes down like a sphere of gold. 176

An interesting later simile reads:

Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones,
head-piece footpiece when they lean,
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er
a coffined Past between.177

Of the extended simile, a score of examples can be found. This one shows the style, in which a long explanation leads to the comparison:

Now, my friend, if you had so little religion
As to catch a hawk, some falcon lanner,
And thrust her broad wings like a banner
Into a coop for vulgar pigeon;
And if day by day and week by week
You cut her claws, and sealed her eyes,
And clipped her wings, and tied her beak,
Would it cause you any surprise
If, when you decided to give her an airing,
You found she needed a little preparing?
--I say, should you be such a curmudgeon,
If she clung to the perch; as to take it in dudgeon?
Yet when the Duke to his lady signified
Just a day before, as he judged most dignified,
In what a pleasure she was to participate,--
And, instead of leaping wide in flashes,
Her eyes just lifted their long lashes,
As if pressed by fatigue even he could not dissipate,
And duly acknowledged the Duke's forethought,
But spoke of her health, if her health were worth aught,

175 The Pied Piper of Hamelin, p. 269, ll. 1-2 b.
176 Paracelsus, p. 19, l. 36 b.
177 Clive, p. 894, ll. 28-29 a.
Of the weight by day and the watch by night,
And much wrong now that used to be right,
So, thanking him, declined the hunting,—
Was conduct ever more affronting? 178

In "Bishop Blougram's Apology" the author suddenly says

A simile! 179

and then follows this line from time to time through five
pages. In "Half Rome" a simile is going on and on when
Browning suddenly says aside

(Where was I with that angler-simile?) 180

Browning's metaphors are more numerous and probably
better in some ways than his similes. They appear to be
of four kinds—suggested, obvious or direct, mixed, and
long.

Some suggested comparisons like the following are
interestingly ready for interpretation:

1. King Charles!
   Pause here upon this strip of time
   Allotted you out of eternity! 181

2. A thousand poets pried at life,
   And only one amid the strife
   Rose to a Shakespeare! 182

3. I had felt
   Ice in me melt, grow steam, drive to effect

179 Bishop Blougram's Apology, p. 350, l. 41 a.
180 The Ring and the Book, p. 430, l. 30 a.
181 King Victor and King Charles, p. 161, ll. 36-38 b.
182 Christmas-Eve, p. 324, ll. 36-38 a.
Any or all the fancies sluggish here\footnote{The Inn Album, p. 781, ll. 24-26 a.}

4. My life found its May grow October\footnote{Pacchiarotto, p. 805, l. 30 b.}

5. He danced the jig that needs no floor.--\footnote{Ned Bratts, p. 889, l. 12 a.}

Obvious and direct are these next metaphors. In 1841 Browning could say

\begin{quote}
--God's puppets, best and worst,
\end{quote}

The metaphor, however, is good technique at any time:

1. The buttercups, the little children's dower\footnote{Pippa Passes, p. 130, ll. 32-33 b.}

2. My soul
   Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll,\footnote{Home-Thoughts, from Abroad, p. 179, l. 19 a.}

3. And I am a weak-eyed bat no sun should tempt.\footnote{The Last Ride Together, p. 267, ll. 34-35 b.}

4. Beauty's the prize-flower which dispenses eye
   From peering into what has nourished root--\footnote{Andrea del Sarto, p. 347, l. 55 a.}

Browning mixes metaphors, and owns the charge in

See, we have traversed with hop, step, and jump,
From heel to head, the main-street in a trice,
Measured the garment (help my metaphor!)
Not merely criticised the cap, forsooth:}

\footnote{The Inn Album, p. 785, ll. 36-37 b.}

\footnote{Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 739, ll. 49-52 a.}
Others are:

1. There stands he,
   While the same grim black-panelled chamber blinks
   As though rubbed shiny with the sins of Rome
   Told the same oak for ages—wave-washed wall
   Against which sets a sea of wickedness. 192

2. Knitting an iron nerve—193

3. And easily ravel out a clue to all. 194

Two longer metaphors will serve to illustrate the beauty that can be worked into a longer comparison. From "Pippa Passes:"

Day!
Faster and more fast,
O'er night's brim, day boils at last:
Boils pure gold, o'er the cloud-cup's brim
Where spurting and suppressed it lay,
For not a froth-flake touched the rim
Of yonder gap in the solid gray
Of the eastern cloud, an hour away;
But forth one wavelet, then another, curled,
Till the whole sunrise, not to be suppressed,
Rose, reddened, and its seething breast
Flickered in bounds, grew gold, then
overflowed the world. 195

More than forty years later Browning writes the little lyric "Wanting Is—What?", also an introduction in metaphorical style, this time in very different metrics. Line six is one of the best, although the whole thing is praiseworthy. It seems more studied in its form than

193 Mesmerism, p. 255, l. 47 b.
194 Paracelsus, p. 32, l. 4 b.
earlier example:

Wanting is--what?
Summer redundant
Blueness abundant,
--Where is the blot?
Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
--Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Roses embowering with naught they embower?
Come then, complete incompleteness, O comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
   Breathe but one breath
   Rose-beauty above,
   And all that was death
   Grows life, grows love,
   Grows love! 196

Browning seems never to parade his personification.

Such examples as the following show how spontaneous and apt
such figures are:

1. --the woods wondered, and left us 197
2. --the very river put
   Its arm around me and conducted me 198
3. And all the world's coarse thumb
   And finger failed to plumb 199
4. Horror coquetting with voluptuousness 200
5. A lie that walks and eats and drinks! 201

197 The Englishman in Italy, p. 261, l. 32 a.
198 The Blot on the *Scutcheon, p. 226, ll. 21-22 b.
199 Rabbi Ben Ezra, p. 385, ll. 19-20 a.
200 A Forgiveness, p. 819, l. 44 a.
201 Pippa Passes, p. 133, l. 14 b.
6. While calm sits Caution, rapt with heavenward eye,\textsuperscript{202} These figures are almost bold in idea. The conventional \textbf{Beauty} and \textbf{Duty} are not the figures Browning calls upon for his personification.

One more of the usual figures of speech is met occasionally, the apostrophe. It is effective, although perhaps not so individual as some of three already mentioned. Examples are:

1. \textit{Dear and great angel, wouldst thou only leave That child, when thou hast done with him, for me?}\textsuperscript{203}
2. \textit{May I print, Shelley, how it came to pass}\textsuperscript{204}
3. \textit{Hervé Riel, accept my verse!}\textsuperscript{205}
4. \textit{Autobiography, adieu!}\textsuperscript{206}

For metonomy and synecdoche examples are not numerous. There is, however, a richness of imagery in these that follow.

\textbf{Metonomy:}

1. \textit{Listening the while, where on a heap of stones The white breast of the sea-lark twitters sweet.}\textsuperscript{207}
2. \textit{The block pursues me.}\textsuperscript{208}

\textsuperscript{202} The Ring and the Book, p. 425, l. 45 a.
\textsuperscript{203} The Guardian-Angel, p. 194, 11. 39-40 a.
\textsuperscript{204} Cenciaja, p. 821, l. 1 a.
\textsuperscript{205} Hervé Riel, p. 817, l. 1 a.
\textsuperscript{206} Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society, p. 692, l. 33 b.
\textsuperscript{207} Among the Rocks, p. 375, l. 13-14 b.
\textsuperscript{208} Strafford, p. 70, l. 23 a.
3. As if you had carried sour John Knox
To a play-house at Paris.

Synecoche:

1. --how
Behaved our spokesman with the forehead?

2. The ear of Charon marks their period
Waits to end all.

3. A blackness sits on either side at watch.

4. You'd come upon his scrutinizing hat.

Contrast of terms, discussed in the chapter on diction, often goes on to produce imagery. Browning has a zest for antithesis; his quick mind calls up the proper response to an opposite idea. Figurative language is a natural result:

1. I used to take him for a brown cold piece
Of the wall's self, as out of it he rose
To let me pass--at first, I say, I used:
Now, so has that dumb figure fastened on me,
I rather should account the plastered wall,
A piece of him, so chilly does it strike.

2. be yours to prove
That gold and dross may meet and never mix,
Purity plunge in pitch yet soil not plume.

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209 Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis, p. 167, ll. 7-8 b.
210 Colombe's Birthday, p. 274, ll. 25-26 a.
211 Herakles, p. 664, ll. 20-21 b.
212 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, p. 757, l. 24 a.
213 How It Strikes a Contemporary, p. 336, l. 46 a.
214 Pippa Passes, p. 131, ll. 17-22 b.
3. Pouring heaven into the shut house of life.  

4. I must suspect,  
   My scholar had been left to cool his heels  
   Uncarpeted, or warm them—likelier still—  
   With bastinado for intrusion.  

5. Churned the black water white,  

Litotes is closely related to antithesis in  
But though I cannot soar, I do not crawl.  

In "not unbecoming hair" the vigor of true litotes is felt. Pure litotes is not frequent.  

So much that is vigorous is found in Browning's style that one might expect him to deal constantly in hyperbole. This does not prove to be so, and is perhaps the reason for his vigor. Too great overstatement results from lack of thought. Certainly Browning cannot be accused of failing to think about what he puts into a poem. Even the humorous poems, which do give away to hyperbole, are the result of most lively thought. "In fifty different sharps and flats" is good where it is found in the realm of

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217 A Bean-Stripe: Also Apple-Eating, p. 943, ll. 31-34 b.  
218 Balaustion's Adventure, p. 603, l. 36 a.  
219 Paracelsus, p. 32, l. 35 a.  
220 Colombe's Birthday, p. 235, l. 23 a.  
221 The Pied Piper of Hamelin, p. 268, l. 20 b.
humor. A lawyer who "shed tears in a flood" is an exaggeration, but one may look long to find many examples of pure hyperbole like that. The heightened style of diction does not need the extra gusto. "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" illustrates this. The whole idea is delightfully extreme, but there are not hyperboles in it—unless the whole poem is a hyperbole.

A passage combining several figures is more typical of Browning's technique than these last separate figures which have been searched out with a fair amount of difficulty. This bit of drama in which the three Fates and Apollo speak illustrates how packed and highly figurative the material can be:

Clotho. I spin thee a thread. Live, Admetus! Produce him!
Lachesis. Go,—brave, wise, good, happy! Now chequer the thread:
He is slaved for, yet loved by a god. I unloose him
A godless-sent plague. He was conquered, is wed,
Men crown him, he stands at the height,—
Atropos. He is...
Apollo. (Entering: Light.) "Dead?"
Nay, swart spinsters! So I surprise you
Making and marring the fortunes of Man?
Huddling—no marvel, your enemy eyes you—
Head by head bat-like, blots under the ban
Of daylight earth's blessings since time began!
The Fates. Back to thy blest earth, prying Apollo!
Shaft after shaft transpierce with they beams
Earth to the center,—spare but this hollow

222 Fonte Dell' Angelo, Venice, p. 996, l. 4 a.
Hewn out of Night's heart, where our mystery seems
Mewed from day's malice: wake earth from her dreams.223

Some entire poems are figures of speech. "The Ring
and the Book" is even so. After the long, picturesque
explanation of making a ring, the author says

What of it? 'Tis a figure, a symbol, say;
A thing's sign; now for the thing signified.224

Following this is described the thing, the book. He has
"mastered the contents" and then says to the reader

Now, as the ingot, ere the ring was forged,
Lay gold, (beseech you, hold that figure fast!)225

C.

There are left many descriptions of various lengths
and purposes that are just as rich in imagery as any of the
passages in the foregoing pages. They consist often of a
little narrative for the purpose of explanation, beautifully
illustrated, and executed in most satisfying diction. A
list of twenty such I have cut to three:

1. Just the judgment passed
Upon a statue, luckless like myself,
I saw in Rome once! 'Twas some artist's whim
To cover all the accessories close
I' the group, and leave you only Laocoön
With neither sons nor serpents to denote
The purpose of his gesture. Then a crowd
Was called to try the question, criticize
Wherefore such energy of legs and arms,

---

223 Apollo and the Fates, p. 948, ll. 8-25 b.
224 The Ring and the Book, p. 415, ll. 6-7 a.
225 Ibid., p. 416, ll. 13-14 a.
Nay, eyeballs, starting from the socket. One—
I give him leave to write my history—
Only one said, "I think the gesture strives
Against some obstacle we cannot see."
All the rest made their minds up. "'Tis a yawn
Of sheer fatigue subsiding to repose:
The statue's 'Somnolency' clear enough!"226

2. There's a tale extant, in a book I knewed
Long years ago, which treats of things beyond
The common, antique times and countries queer
And customs strange to match. "'Tis said last year,"
(Recounts my author) "that the King had mind
To view his kingdom—guessed from behind
A palace-window hitherto. Announced
No sooner was such purpose than 'twas pounced
Upon by all the ladies of the land—
Loyal but light of life: they formed a band
Of loveliest ones but lithest also, since
Proudly they all combined to bear their prince.
Backs joined to breasts,--arms, legs,--nay ankles, wrists,
Hands, feet, I know not by what turns and twists,
So interwoven lay that you believed
'Twas one sole beast of burden which received
The monarch on his back, of breadth not scant,
Since fifty girls made one white elephant."
So with fifty flowers which shapes and hues
Blent, as I tell, and made one fast yet loose
Mixture of beauties, composite, distinct
No less in each combining flower that linked
With flower to form a fit environment
For,—whom might be the painter's heart's intent
Thus, in the midst enhaled to enshrine?

"This glory-guarded middle space--is mine?
For me to fill?"227

3. — or— example better yet,—
A carpet-web I saw once leave the loom
And lie at gorgeous length in Ispahan:
The weaver plied his work with lengths of silk
Dyed each to match some jewel as it might,
And wove them, this by that. 'How comes it, friend,'—
(Quoth I)—'that while, apart, this fiery hue,

226 Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, Savior of Society,
227 Beatrice Signorini, p. 998, ll. 16-42 a.
That watery dimness, either shocks the eye,  
So blinding bright, or else offends again 
By dullness,—yet the two, set each by each, 
Somehow produce a color born of both, 
A medium profitable to the sight? 
'Such medium is the end whereat I aim,'—
Answered my craftsman: 'there's no single tint 
Would satisfy the eye's desire to taste 
The secret of the diamond: join extremes 
Results a serviceable medium-ghost, 
The diamond's simulation. Even so 
I needs must blend the quality of man 
With quality of God, and so assist 
Mere human sight to understand my Life, 
What is, what should be,—228

To leave the subject of imagery without separate attention to Browning's portraits would be to give an incomplete impression of his ability in word-painting. Likewise, emphasis upon man, Browning's chief interest, would hardly be paid due account. The poems are a veritable portrait gallery. From the thousand pages I have with no effort and with great delight collected sixty. Many more are there. To classify and present all these is not necessary here. Some of them given chronologically will serve to show Browning, the painter, from 1840 to 1890.

The youthful Sordello first:

His face
--Look, now he turns away! Yourselves shall trace 
(The delicate nostril swerving wide and find, 
A sharp restless lip, so well combine 
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive 
Delight at every sense;229

228 A Bean-Stripe: Also Apple-Eating, p. 945, ll. 19-40 a
229 Sordello, p. 79, ll. 13-18 a.
Youth again is pictured here:

--'Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
Colored like honey oozed from topmost rocks
gun-bleached the livelong summer'—230

Notice how diction produces this portrait:

How...say, she told me, gathering up her face,
All left of it, into an arch-grimace
To die with...231

How much is suggested here by the adjectives of this metaphor
in portrait language:

His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth:232

The next three offer variety:

1. See him stand
   Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
   Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
   As in a forge; it buries either eye
   White and extinct, that stupid brow;
   teeth clenched,
   The neck tight-corded, too, the chin
   deep-trenched—233

2. If this my daughter's forehead? Yes:
   I've made it fitter now to be a queen's
   Than formerly: I've ploughed the deep lines there
   Which keep too well a crown from slipping off.234

3. You, with a brow ruled like a score,
   Yes, and eyes buried in pits on each cheek,

230 Sordello, p. 85, ll. 35-38 a.
231 Ibid., p. 96, ll. 36-38 a.
232 Ibid., p. 101, l. 48 b.
233 Ibid., p. 112, ll. 43-48 a.
234 King Victor and King Charles, p. 162, ll. 40-43 b.
Like two great breves, as they wrote them of yore. 
Each side that bar, your straight beak! 235

Pompilia should be in this gallery—

"A lovelier face is not in Rome," cried he,
"Shaped like a peacock's egg, the pure as pearl."

More activity comes in these next:

1. Stay start of quick mustache, arrest the angry rise of eyebrow. 237

2. Blood burnt the cheekbone, each black eye flashed fierce. 238

On one page contrasts appear:

1. Humanity's mishap: the wrinkled brow, bald pate, 
   And rheumy eyes of age, peak'd chin and 
   parchment chap 239

2. --the next revolting you was Youth, 
   Start ignorance and crude conceit, half smirk, 
   half stare, 
   On that frank fool-face, gay beneath its head of hair 
   Which covers nothing. 240

This last portrait is the equal of any:

Those sparkling eyes beneath their eyebrows!
(Each meets each, and the hawk-nose rises between) 
ridge 241

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236 The Ring and the Book, p. 441, 20-21 b.
237 Fifine at the Fair, p. 704, ll. 3-4 a.
238 The Last Adventure of Balaustion, p. 844, l. 44 a.
239 Fifine at the Fair, p. 726, ll. 6-7 b.
240 Loc. cit., ll. 14-17 b.
241 "Imperante Augusto Natus Est --", p. 1002, ll. 34-36 a.
For a discussion of Browning's imagery there is no long conclusion to be drawn. The illustrations speak for him, and, to my mind, declare him superior in imagery that is both beautiful and vigorous.

Enough of the dream! You see how poetry turns to prose. Announcing wonder-work, I dwindle at the close Down to mere commonplace old facts which everybody knows.
CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The foregoing chapters upon diction and imagery in the poetry of Robert Browning have attempted to show the rich and varied material which he fits into certain definite trends in the manner of technique. We have observed that Browning's choice of words is careful, vivid, and realistic; we have become aware that he has certain habits of syntax, but that within these limits the variety of diction and construction is great. His is the language of the alert man who speaks fearlessly, but in good taste, who by his trustworthy diction attains a freedom of style that makes his poetry live. If he repeats, the repetition is comfortable; if he adds to the variety, the addition is exhilarating. As this is said of Browning's diction, likewise may it be said of his imagery. Some of the images grow to be old friends, but always with noticeable personality changes. When the new images appear, they increase the kaleidoscopic color, add a detail to a scene, or enlarge the gallery of portraits. While content of the writings has not been the field of this work, in many instances words and images must have suggested its breadth. There is a wholesome freedom about what Browning does in any direction. That his methods may at times seem repetitious is not a criticism against them, but rather a verification of his discrimination in
technique. He omits, perhaps, as wisely as he chooses. Then, having chosen, he practices the habits which make him individual. I am willing to conclude that Robert Browning is a thoughtful, zestful poet who uses wide variety of diction and imagery within deliberately planned narrower limits of technique.
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