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The technique of character, setting, and point of view in Browning's longer poems

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis
THE TECHNIQUE OF CHARACTER, SETTING,
AND POINT OF VIEW
IN BROWNING'S LONGER POEMS

by
Mary Elizabeth Colley
(A.B., Wheaton College, 1924)

submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

1936
Longer Narratives of Browning

Covered in This Thesis

Pauline

Sordello

Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country

The Inn Album

The Two Poets of Croisic

Christmas Eve and Easter Day

The Flight of the Duchess

Balaustion's Adventure

Fifine at the Fair

The Ring and the Book
FOREWORD

Among the many books which I consulted in preparing this thesis, I am largely indebted to Clayton Hamilton's *A Manual of the Art of Fiction* for foundation material in technique used in forming the outline and basis for the technical discussion.

I also wish to express my appreciation to Professor Thomas R. Mather for his help regarding narrative technique and to Professor George M. Sneath for his inspiring interest in Browning.
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INTRODUCTION

There is delight in singing, tho' none hear
Beside the singer; and there is delight
In praising, tho' the praiser sit alone
And see the praised far off him, far above.
Shakespeare is not our poet, but the world's,
Therefore on him no speech! and brief for thee
Browning! Since Chaucer was alive and hale,
No man hath walked along our roads with step
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue so varied in discourse.

W. S. Landor

Thus Landor expresses a feeling which I, too, have for Browning.
I admire him, and believe that he has viewed life actively and inquiringly.
Moreover, I think that through his varied discourse he has kept to his
purpose — "to chronicle the stages of all life." Because he has done
this so skilfully, I often wonder how he has produced such effective
results. I wish to know his methods. How has he made his characters
live? How has he produced scenes which are as vivid as our memories of
places in which we have been? Why does he compel our attention and hold
our interest?

In trying to find answers for these questions, I am led to
analyze Browning's longer narrative poems. I aim to find out just what
principles of narrative technique he uses in presenting his characters
and his settings. I am eager to know what plans he follows regarding
point of view.

---

1 To Robert Browning — W. S. Landor.
2 Pauline — Robert Browning.
Such analysis, I believe, has not previously been attempted. However, it should be valuable. Discovering that authors make use of definite methods helps us to understand something of their ability to succeed in their work; it also helps us to be more effective in going about our smaller tasks of revelation. Moreover, for the student, the work in itself is worth while. It gives him an opportunity "to follow knowledge like a sinking star."

Although many other phases of narrative technique exist, in my analysis I am dealing with only three: characters, setting, and point of view.

Characters — or the people of the narration — may be the speakers or the objective creatures of the story. At any event, they are the persons in whose thoughts and actions we are interested. Sometimes groups of persons are impersonally presented to help give the atmosphere of the scene. In discussing characters, however, we are not concerned with such groups, but with the people who are the motivators, the thinkers, the actors of the narrative.

In dealing with the subject of characters, I shall aim to prove that Browning's characters are worth knowing, that they possess both typical and personal traits, that they are introduced in a variety of ways. I shall discuss these different methods of presentation, show how each one makes us acquainted with a character, and how a combination of these methods actually reveals individualities.

Setting is the background for the action of the story. Place (city,

---

3 Ulysses — Tennyson.
country, palace, cottage, field, forest), time (century, season, time of day), manners and customs, circumstances — all are included in setting. The importance of the setting lies in definite facts. Certain events can happen only under specific conditions; environment influences a person's character and personality; settings are sometimes the direct motivators of action.

I shall endeavour to show that Browning cares little for settings in themselves, but that he does employ the necessary technique to make his story advance and his characters unfold as actual persons.

The point of view — or the standpoint from which a narrative is presented — is very important to the unity and coherence of a story. The story may be told by one who was a participator in its events. Possibly it is related by several different persons who took part in the action. Such a story is given from the internal point of view. The external point of view is the method of story-telling in which the author, seeing events from an external point of view, directly narrates the story in his own person. Sometimes the narrator writes subjectively; on the other hand, he may present his story objectively. At any rate, the author wishes his story to be as true a representation of life as possible. Therefore, he chooses the point of view which will give most clearly and most truly the facts, themes, persons, and motives of his story.

I shall endeavour to show that Browning makes use of a knowledge of methods concerning point of view and that he chooses his viewpoint with discrimination.

In short, I am limiting my examination to Browning's longer narrative poems. I am analyzing these with reference to three phases:
characters, setting, and point of view, in order to find just what methods of narrative technique Browning employs. I am showing that in his choice of methods he is motivated by his desire to reveal human minds.

**Summary**

Arnold Bennett tells us that we should not seek into motives, but rather into actions, which are the result of the sum total of our life and our environment, but our writer, in his novel *The New Woman*, depicts each character as a product of his own environment.
CHAPTER I

Characters

Characters Worth Knowing

Arnold Bennett tells us that we should not spend time reading books which we do not "translate into life." Naturally, if we are going to make a book a part of our life, our understanding, and our action, we want one that is worthy of such treatment. If it is fiction, then, it must contain characters who will give us greater understanding. Browning’s characters do just that. They are worth knowing, worth spending time with, for they represent types of persons ever present in the world; they help us to better understand human kind, its passions and its emotions.

Unless we are willing to think, we need not bother to meet these people. They reveal their souls to us, their reasons for acting, their ambitions, and their ideals. But they are not simple people. Perhaps they are harder to comprehend than are those friends of whom we say, "I can't understand you."

Nevertheless, they are real — probably more representative of types of mankind than some of these very friends.

Because they are typical, they possess universal appeal. In telling us the story of The Two Ports of Croisic Browning says,

"Point me out the place
Wherever man has made himself
a home,
And there I find the story of our race
In little, just at Croisic as at Rome."
The characters in most of his other longer narrative poems are representative of their class, too. Sordello, for instance, with his visions of the deeds he would like to accomplish, with his imaginary world of idealized people, stands for the idealistic dreamer. Miranda may symbolize the doubter in any country and age. Familiar with the religious beliefs of his region from infancy, he wondered and questioned. Another type, the worldly deceiver, wishing wealth and willing to gain it through any trickery, is the Elder Man of The Inn Album.

In addition to their typical traits, these characters possess individual traits which make them distinct personalities. Sordello is not only an idealistic dreamer; he is also a poet. He not only dreams, but he puts his dreams into beautiful words which he sings to his own accompaniment. He is unique in possessing the ability to make people see his visions and love his music. Surpassing other contestants, he is chosen by Palma to be her minstrel. Miranda is not only a doubter, but also a lover. Having once seen Clara, he loves her throughout his life. He is unique in that having once been a fickle sort of person he remains true to Clara although unmarried and convinced that his love is in opposition to his religion. The Elder Man, in addition to being a worldly deceiver, is filled with such a strong hatred for the Woman in The Inn Album that he will not leave her in peace but tries to force her into a life of sin. His possessing this hatred to such a strong degree makes him a definite personality.

Such traits and characteristics make Browning's people more than
allegorical creatures. They are not simply abstractions, but real people who arouse our sympathy or our dislike. How can we fail, for Their Reality instance, to feel deep pity and admiration for the pure and lovely Pompilia, who is married to Count Guido by her foster parents and who, as a result, lives a life of torment, strive as she may to get relief? And who can help hating the cruel and vile Guido, who makes her feel that death would be a welcome relief?

Static and Kinetic Characters

Some of these real people presented to us possess the same characteristics throughout the poem in which they appear. Such characters are René Gentilhomme and Paul Desforges, in The Two Posts of Croisic, who are shown to us as they become renowned poets and as they are left to be forgotten. The Younger Man, good, but rather awkward, the Woman, high in her ideals, but betrayed, the worldly Elder Man in The Inn Album are all the same kinds of persons when we leave them as they are when we meet them.

In addition to such static characters, we also find kinetic characters; that is, characters who develop or deteriorate during the story. Such a character is the Speaker in Pauline. He confesses that throughout his life two desires have been struggling within him: his desire for beauty and his desire for knowledge. Now that he is about to die, he is enabled to see more clearly, to adjust these two desires, and to see the greater importance of love.

Sordello is at first absorbed by his boyish, imaginary world; then he grows interested in singing for people, and in filling his dream world
with idealized real persons; seeing the problems of the Mantuans, he becomes interested in really acting, that he may aid humanity; not being able to accomplish his visions completely, he does nothing.

Miranda, in *Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country*, surrounded by inculcators of beliefs as a boy, grows up to doubt, then feels sure he can live on a low level as long as he wishes before rising to a higher plane. Realizing that he is still living on the lower level and is continually struggling with his desire for the higher, he becomes insane.

The Speaker, in *Christmas Eve*, intolerant at first, becomes, after his visions, a more tolerant and loving Christian.

**Direct Delineation**

Whether static or kinetic, the characters are revealed to us in various ways. In fact, most of the individual characters are presented in several different ways in order that they may be comprehensively understood. In some instances Browning uses direct delineation, telling us himself certain facts in regard to the persons of the story. By means of exposition, when the character is not actually present, the author reveals an individual's personality. By telling us now and then of traits of character which we must know in order to understand incidents, the author makes a gradual portrayal. Sometimes Browning wishes us to study a character's mind — to learn directly why an individual acts as he does. Then our poet reveals gradually certain subjective traits, psychologically analyzing the situation. Thus Browning makes us feel that we know a character thoroughly, understanding, as we do, his mind. However, of
course, this analyzing sometimes makes us impatient because of the hindrance of the action. Of course, a character's own speech is an indirect method of revealing him; on the other hand, what another character says of him is one of the ways through which the author directly characterizes him.

Let us notice some instances in the longer narratives in which Browning directly delineates character. First of all, we shall consider some persons revealed by means of exposition; that is, by means of explanation by the author. In *Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country*, he tells us something of Miranda and Clara before he shows them to us. He informs us of Miranda's devotion to the church and of his generosity in giving presents for religious festivals. Miranda gave a wonderful crown containing a marvelous gem for one ceremony. We learn that he was benevolent, that he had humbled and denied himself by giving up his goldsmith business to relatives, that he had loved his wife devotedly, that she and he had enjoyed their beautiful, landscaped garden. His wife was suitable for him because of her religious generosity. Both had agreed that their home should be left to the church.

In *The Two Poets of Croisic*, Browning gives us information regarding these poets before he starts telling their stories. Rene Gentilhomme and Paul Desforges, we learn, possess universal qualities. They were heroes and poets and were temporarily famous.

Among characters gradually portrayed we find Taurello. By placing a word now here, now there, in the narrative, the author tells us that Taurello is good-humored, tactful, courteous, showy, and turbulent, subtle and brawling. When Taurello and Sordello are spoken of in contrast we learn that Taurello can decide on men's abilities
and aims through studying their hearts, whereas Sordello learns about man-
kind only as a way through which he may disclose himself. We are also
shown the difference between the lack of decision in Sordello and the
decisiveness of Taurello.

Through gradual description we learn of Miranda that he was divided
in mind between faith and doubt, that he was an obedient, home-loving son
when with his parents, that he was an industrious worker in business, but
that in other respects he led a gay but "prudent" life.

The Duke's mother in The Flight of the Duchess is gradually port-
rayed, too. We see early that she is very cold to the young bride of
her son. Later we learn that she has a sharp tongue with which she scolds
the duchess severely for not going on the hunt.

The minds of Browning's characters are revealed through his use of
psychological analysis. The Speaker in Pauline analyzes himself. He
mentions his intensity, his restlessness, his need for God, his faith in a
By Psychological Analysis guiding hand. He declares his inability to love
fully, speaks of his search for beauty. He tells of
his growth, of his shaping life to suit his wants. He
is tired; the struggle of life seems worthless. He feels the power
exerted by earlier days. He shows that he formerly turned his mind
against itself and thus developed cunning, envy, lying. He has cleansed
himself through living somewhat solitarily. Peace has returned to him;
he enjoys singing and is proud in that joy. He has been eager to find
how one might include every joy in his life. Having lost hope and faith
in mankind, in freedom and in virtue, he lost his own purpose in life. He
became vain, ironical, light-hearted, determined to use up every hour of life and then to die. He is selfish, restless, eager for knowledge. He hates his weakness, his changeable will, his selfishness. His imagination is still valuable to him. He yearns for God and believes in immortality. Recognizing the love of Christ, he loves Pauline and is willing to be guided by her. Then, believing he will see clearer and love better, he is happy and fearless.

Another self-centered character revealed through psychological analysis is Sordello. Sordello dreams of accomplishing great deeds some day. Having won the prize as singer, he realizes his skill and power in creating songs from fancies aroused by what he has seen, and determines to make more songs, expressing himself thus instead of in action. However, he is disappointed that people do not see what he means to have them see in his songs. Feeling frustrated, he is doubtful whether to continue with his singing or to go into action. The struggle in his mind is between Man and Poet. Seeing the troubles of the Mantuans, he at length thinks of men and their wants. He realizes that if he rules mankind he may incidentally bring some good to them. This kind of action will bring him happiness. After seeing Taurello, he realizes somewhat the difficulties of straightening out affairs and making people happier. He determines — after hearing the song about olden days in Rome — to build Rome up again. After his speech with Taurello, he is discouraged at finding himself without the power to act, without the power to move Taurello to action by his words, without earnestness. Broken in spirit, he realizes he has lost chances in the past while he has been using his energies in fancying. Continually
pondering on what he might do, what he has done, what he will do, he wonders what is the right course in the abstract for him. Finally, in his effort to overcome the great temptation of giving up what he has believed the right course for the opposing cause, combined with marriage to his beloved Palma, and a powerful position, he dies.

Another person made known to us by his thoughts is the Speaker in Christmas Eve. Watching the people in the chapel, he decides that they believe themselves to be chosen, superior people, and that they think they should restrict the admittance to their place of worship. A thinker, he ponders on the attitude of these people and on ideas presented by their minister. He decides that truth is always truth and that when it appears not to be so the fault lies in the prover. He then considers the attempts of various preachers throughout the world to make their congregations believe what they already believe anyway. Believing that God gave man qualities of power and love, he is confident that God — the source — possesses power and love greater than those qualities in man. Hearing the scholar — in the vision — decide that they ought at least to "rever" the myths and to be holy for their own sakes, he concludes even that decision to be of worth. At length, he sees the value of toleration toward different beliefs, and back in the chapel refers himself to God, knowing that God can understand both heart and brain.

The Speaker in Easter Day feels that the first difficulty in being a true Christian is the difficulty of belief. Another, he thinks, is the difficulty of renouncing the world. He wonders what the history of, and the faith in, Christianity has meant to him. In a vision, having been told that he is excluded from Heaven and is to go on apparently in the
same old way, because he decided in favor of the world, he mentions the enjoyment he can receive from nature and art. He learns, then, that he has accepted only parts—hints on earth—of what he might see in Heaven. He wishes, thereupon, to make the most of knowledge on earth, but finds that knowledge only a fable concerning the truth in Heaven. At last, he prays that he may have only the leave to love. Finding love to be the basis of God's whole plan, he pleads for hope that he may sometime reach Heaven. He finds himself on Earth, still possessing Hope.

The Speaker in Fifine at the Fair does not fool his wife with all his analyzing. She realizes that he is sensual and selfish. Pretending that an analytical interest is the reason for his regarding Fifine with favour, he reveals the desire for her in his own mind. He asks Elvire to analyze herself as he thinks Helen of Troy must have done. He explains that each person has his place in the world. Later, he declares that families would get along much better if women could understand analysis. He compares having Elvire for his wife to owning a beautiful painting. What he owns, he does not worry about. He thinks the appearance of a person helps one to decide whom he loves. He claims he likes to test out his soul by experience just as he tests out his bodily strength in swimming. He knows his soul has strength, just as he knows his body has strength among the waves. He is convinced that life is given us in order that we may prove we are true. Life with Elvire is too safe. He wants to test himself with Fifine. Very careless in regard to Elvire's feelings, he reveals his immense selfishness. He claims the purpose of life is to learn to hate the false and to love the true. After he has determined to live a "proper" life, he suddenly returns to interest in Fifine on
receiving a note from her.

Knowing a person's motives is always necessary for a complete understanding of his acts; learning about his reputation is interesting. From what Browning's characters in his longer narrative poems say regarding each other, we gain much. We learn that Sordello By Reports from other characters seems weak to Salinguerra Taurello, who thinks of him, "Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
A stammering, awkward man that scarce dared raise
His eye before the magisterial gaze."

On the other hand, Salinguerra is considered by Sordello to be a man of great force. Sordello opined, "But I front Taurello, one
Of happier fate, and all I should have done,
He does; the people's good being paramount
With him; their progress may account
For his abiding still."

Even from the words of one who hates her, we learn that the Woman in The Inn Album possesses excellent qualities. We hear that she is true, devoted, constant, fair, loving, possessed of a good mind, disdainful and contemptuous of him who deceived her.

From the words of the Pope we learn that Pompilia is a pure, beautiful character with little knowledge; she has been faithful and patient, obedient in so far as she has known how to be, law abiding, true to her ideals, dutiful to her foster parents, tolerant even to Guido, and brave in her efforts to save her child.

Guido, as the Pope declares, is guilty. Moreover, the Pope states
that he is strong in mind and body. We ascertain other facts from this speaker's words. Witty, wise, and courageous, the villainous Guido has powerful friends. He is hardened beyond listening to his conscience, poor, greedy, and irreligious. An evil trickster, he hopes for power and safety through the church. His instincts and aspirations are low, and he arranged his marriage because of his desire for gold. Bold, crafty, and aggressive, he had at first tormented his wife and finally murdered her.

Indirect Delineation

Turning from examples of direct delineation, let us consider indirect delineation. In this method of portrayal the character's qualities are presented indirectly through his own speech or through his actions, through the effect he produces on other characters or through an account of his environment or of his heredity.

In examining Browning's use of indirect delineation, let us first consider his revelation of characters by means of their speech. Through her words Clara, in Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country, shows herself to be clever and to possess insight. She tells the cousins that by speech she knew if she had been left her husband's wealth that she would have been an easy prey for rapaciousness. For this reason, she did not wish Miranda to leave anything to her. The church is sole administrator and inheritor. She tells of her and Miranda's having helped one another in their difficulties. Very keen, she shows that she knows why each cousin acted as he had.

In The Two Ports of Croisic, Paul Desforge's sister — through her words — shows that she is clever and resourceful. She sees that Paul
was too imperative.

"Now let me counsel! Lay this piece
on shelf
Masterpiece though it be! From out
your desk
Hand me some lighter sample,
verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no good
grotesque
Presiding o'er the navy! I myself
Hand write what's legible
yet picturesque;
I'll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts
La Roque!"

The Wife of the Speaker, who tells us about Paul, reveals to us, through her language, her tenderness and comradeship, her interest in music and poetry, and (when she applies the tale in her speech to her own helpfulness) her wit.

The Younger Man in The Inn Album shows admiration for the Elder Man in such lines as:

"Now, don't be angry with a friend whose
fault
Is that he thinks — upon my soul, I do,
Your head the best head going."

The Younger's appreciation is shown when he tells the Elder Man how much he thanks him for all he has done. Generosity and kindness are revealed when he says he wishes to cancel the Elder's debt to him. He shows proper interest for others when he says, in asking his debtor to forget the debt:

"I hate
Thinking you beg or borrow or reduce
To strychnine some poor devil of a lord."

Friendliness is shown in the Younger Man's saying that he will try to
arrange for his companion to come to his aunt's home. He declares that he considers himself foolish and meek to have left the Woman so soon. He thinks he might have won her had he been more persistent.

Balastion, in Balastion's Adventure, shows courage and loyalty in the words which she utters regarding Athens. She wishes the people to remain true to Athens, whereas they are determined to renounce their allegiance to Athens and to favour Sparta. Leading power is evinced in her words, which lead her relatives to prepare a ship for going to Athens with her. Her courage is shown when she tells the Syracusans that she will recite a drama for them if they will not force her and her friends to turn back to sea where the pirates are awaiting them. Her wonderful memory is revealed through her reciting Euripides' play Alkestis.

Pompilia's purity is shown as she tells of her attempts to get away from the evils of her husband's home, of going to the Archbishop, to the Governor, and to the priest for help and advice. She shows faith in God when she says that she knows Caponsacchi will come. She prays to God all day that He will send Caponsacchi to save her. At the end of her speech she composes herself, knowing that she will be in the presence of God. Her appreciation and true love are shown when she declares that she would have sprung to Caponsacchi's summons through any kind of difficulty. Her gentle, forgiving nature is revealed when she forgives even the cruel Guido, who tortured her and finally fatally wounded her.

According to the old saying, Actions speak louder than words. We have learned certain things from the words of the characters mentioned above. Now, let us see that we may become well acquainted with certain fictitious persons through means of their actions.
Palma's friendliness with Sordello is shown in her talking and laughing happily with him, in her aiding him and being aided by him. Her idealism is revealed through her having planned her life so that she would be worthy of such a lover as Sordello. Her ability to arrange is shown in her scheming for Sordello to carry on the Kaiser's cause. She is convincing as she persuades Sordello to consult Salinguerra regarding her plans. Her quiet confidence reveals itself as,

"'Twas Palma through the band
Conducted him in silence by her hand."

In The Two Poets of Croisic, Paul Desforges Maillard is interested in accomplishments of others. Having seen Rene's poems, he seeks for information about him and poems by him. His egotism and confidence are revealed in his writing a poem of praise to the Academy on their choosing his poem as the best before they have made their decision. Persistence appears as he endeavours to get his poem before the powerful in order that it may be praised. He is proud and gives slight credit to his sister for gaining admiration for his poems. He believes all the credit is due to the poems themselves, and he is their author. Confident, he goes to Paris, expecting to receive great acclaim. He prints the poems, signed with his own name, in spite of La Roque's telling him that he can not expect a second triumph. Thus he shows his stubbornness.

How vividly the Duke's actions in The Flight of the Duchess present the man to us! He welcomes his lady in a very grand, cold manner. His actions show that he always acts in accordance with the rules of the Middle Ages. His huntsmen are obliged to follow the precepts in the old books for actions and costumes. When his duchess
refuses to come to the hunt in order that she may wash her liege's hands and dry them on a towel at the disemboweling in accordance with ancient custom, the Duke becomes very angry. Selfish, he wants his wife to do always as he wishes. Hoping that she may be subdued, he sends the old gipsy to frighten her with strange tales.

From Caponsacchi's actions we ascertain that he is a man of strong character. Thoughtful and serious, he explains to Pompilia the danger of attempting to escape to Rome with him. He is not to be thwarted. When he has made up his mind to leave in the evening, he turns aside the hindrances to that plan which confront him during the day. A good planner, he goes over the route which he has told Pompilia to follow in reaching the Inn where she is to meet him, in order to be sure that she can be there. He also arranges for the Inn Keeper to have a good horse and a reliable man servant at hand. On the journey, he tells Pompilia interesting old stories to cheer her when she is despondent and afraid. Seeing a baby as they journey along, he brings it to her to hold that she may gain hope while looking at the infant and talking with its happy mother. Strong-willed, he imbues Pompilia with courage.

The personality of a character is made clear by the effect which he produces upon other persons. Pauline impresses the Speaker in the poem bearing her name as being very beautiful and as possessing a strong love for him. He feels protected from all evil fancies when he is with her, because of her strong, calm mind, and her skill in encouraging. He is inspired with faith and trust by her goodness and loyalty.
Miranda, in *Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country*, is so impressed by Clara that he falls in love with her at first sight and continues to love her throughout his life. After he has left Paris, he is happy in solitude, her company being so dear to him that he needs no other.

In *The Flight of the Duchess* the grand manner of the Duke and the haughty coldness of his mother cause the disappearance of his young bride's gaiety. Because of the Duke's allowing her to do nothing except to see and to be seen according to his wishes, because he treats her like a mechanical toy and laughs at her, she grows thin and quiet. However, the Gipsy influences her in quite another way. The Gipsy's enchanting power, her explanation of the greatness of love, her promise that the Duchess can obtain happiness with the gipsies if she will endure trial, — all these factors bring beauty and happiness to the Duchess's face and cause her to escape.

The characters in *The Inn Album* produce very definite effects on each other. The Elder Man has so won the admiration of the Younger Man that the latter is beginning to be somewhat of a trickster himself. Finally, the Elder Man's bullying of the Woman makes the Younger Man realize suddenly the kind of a cheating life which the Elder has led. The Younger now demands that the Elder pay the money due him at the proper time. The Woman's sincerity and genuine appearance make the Younger Man realize that the Elder has lied in claiming she came to get the Younger's love. Finally, the shock of the Elder's evil causes the Younger Man to kill him.

Pompilia's personality causes Caponsacchi to risk all for her safety. He beautifully expresses the first effect of seeing her.
"When I saw enter, stand, and seat herself
   A lady, young, tall, beautiful,
   strange and sad,
It was as when, in our cathedral once,
   As I got yawningly through matin-song,
   I saw facchini bear a burden up,
   Base it on the high-altar, break away
   A board or two, and leave the thing inside
   Lofty and lone: and lo, when next
   I looked,
There was the Rafael! I was still
   one stare, . . . .
   . . . . Then she turned,
Looked our way, smiled the beautiful sad strange smile."

Later he says:

"No, Sirs, I cannot have the lady dead!
   That erect form, flashing brow,
   fulgurant eye,
   That voice immortal (oh, that voice of hers!)
   That vision in the blood-red day-break — that
Leap to life of the pale electric sword
   Angels go armed with, — that was not the last O' the lady!"

Again:

"I might have sat beside her
   on the bench
   Where the children were: I wish
   the thing had been,
   Indeed: the event could not be worse, you know:
One more half-hour of her saved!
   She's dead now, Sirs!
While I was running on at such a rate,
   Friends should have plucked me by
   the sleeve: I went
Too much o' the trivial outside of her face
And the purity that shone there —
   plain to me,
Not to you, what more natural?
   Nor am I
Infatuated, — oh, I saw, be sure!"
Her brow had not the right line, 
leaned too much, 
Painters would say; they like the 
straight-up Greek: 
This seemed bent somewhat with 
an invisible crown 
Of martyr and saint, not such as 
art approves. 
And how the dark orbs dwelt 
deep underneath, 
Looked out of such a sad sweet 
heaven on me! 
The lips, compressed a little, came 
forward too, 
Careful for a whole world of sin and pain."

Caponsacchi speaks to the judges in words which show the influence of Pompilia:

"For Pompilia — be advised. 
Build churches, go pray! You will 
find me there, 
I know if you come — and you will 
come, I know. 
Why there's a Judge weeping! Did not 
say, 
You were good and true at bottom? You 
see the truth — 
I am glad I helped you: she helped 
me just so."

Having learned of personality through its effects we gain further information regarding it through an account of the character's social and natural environment. Sordello, because of the quiet, seclusion, and beauty of his early environment, lives among imagined By Environment characters. The lovely woods around the great castle in which he dwells, the fact that no active life exists within its walls, tend to make him dream. Looking at the figures of historical persons on the arras, he dreams of being likewise great. He believes that some day he will accomplish great feats for which at present no opportunity exists except in imagination. However, this environment and opportunity
for idealization lead him away from action to such an extent that he does not act when he can because he cannot perform the action as he wishes.

Miranda of Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country is likewise greatly influenced by environment.

"With faith it was friends
bulwarked him about
From infancy to boyhood."

The near-by church and the statue of the Virgin, the opinions of both preachers and philosophers, — all influence him.

The Duke of The Flight of the Duchess, having been brought up in France, where he has been told that there are only a few wild regions such as his home where the Heroic customs are maintained, feels pride and joy on his return to his dukedom in showing off old manners and customs.

An understanding of heredity likewise makes characters real to us. Concerning Miranda, we are informed that in him

\[
\text{Mixed the Castilian passionate}
\text{blind blood}
\text{With answerable gush, his mother's gift,}
\text{Of spirit, French and critical and cold.}
\]

Consequently, within his mind, will is dominant only part of the time. Struggle is the result.

In The Two Poets of Croisic we are told that Rene Gentilhomme is the son of a poet; that Paul Maillard, by heredity, possesses good qualities from both North and South.

The Duke (in The Flight of the Duchess) inherits his pride and his love for the hunt from his father, who enjoyed hunting and wished always to have his Huntsman, a man skilled in killing boars, at his side. Pride
in his castle and love for it are also characteristics inherited by the
Duke.

After we have met these various characters and have studied the
different ways in which Browning has revealed them to us, we feel that
we know them well and that the author has used every avail-
able means to present them faithfully. He has explained
their characteristics; he has described their traits; he
has analyzed their thoughts so carefully that he has revealed their very
souls. Through telling us what other characters have thought of them
he has acquainted us with their reputations. Through their words he has
given us ideas concerning their hopes, experiences, and fears; through their
actions he has more strongly revealed their true characters; through their
influence upon others, he has shown their importance in their niche of the
world. By telling us of their environment and heredity, he has given us
some reasons for their particular tendencies. We cannot help feeling
that these characters must continue to live and to have influence on
mankind — because they are so real — so long as our race endures.
CHAPTER II

Setting

Importance of Background

Setting is always important in making a story seem true and alive to us. Moreover, it often influences the characters or the action of the plot. Just as we want the setting on the stage for a dramatic performance, so we wish to have a background for our mind's eye in a story. Browning's places are presented clearly, as a rule, in his longer narrative poems. However, as in the following quotation from The Ring and the Book, he is usually more interested in the spirit, ideas, and manners of the persons forming the background of his story than in just pictures of scenes.

"From dawn till now that it is growing dusk,
A multitude has flocked and filled the church,
Coming and going, coming back again
Till to count crazed one. Rome was at the show.
People climbed up the columns, fought for spikes
O' the chapel rail to perch themselves upon,
Jumped over and so broke the wooden work
Painted like porphyrus to deceive the eye;
Serve the priests right! The organ loft
was crammed,
Women were fainting, no few fights ensued,
In short, it was a show repaid your pains."

Setting as an Aid to Action

The setting in Sordello, while aiding in creating verisimilitude, helps the action of the narrative. Thirteenth century Verona is a setting in which fighting and intrigue would naturally take place.

Sordello
The horrible effects of conflicts upon the people present a necessity for leaders who will strive to help humanity. The opposing Guelphs and Ghibellines create an atmosphere in which hatred between opposing leaders is probable and in which any type of real harmony between parties is difficult.

The prevailing influence of the church in Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country is necessary in order that Miranda may give presents to the Lady Ravissante. The tower on his estate is very necessary as a place from which he can leap at the end of the story.

The background of Judgment Day — Earth and Heaven seemingly ablaze — the celestial city — God in Judgment — all are necessary as a place in which the Speaker in Easter Day can be judged.

The Inn, in The Inn Album, situated in a peaceful country village, provides a place in which the characters can meet without being frequently interrupted as they probably would be in the city. Besides, the Album gives a place for the adding of the score and for the message of the Elder Man to the Woman.

In The Ring and the Book, the background of Italy in the seventeenth century furnishes an opportunity for such a trial as that of Guido. The manners and customs clearly presented to us show the relations of church and society at the time.

Presbyters, minor characters in the Roman Catholic Church were allowed to marry and were, also, permitted to appeal to the Pope. Such a position was held by Guido. His trial is presided over
by the Governor and the Criminal Judge of Rome. At this time, there was no judgment-bar before which accused and accuser stood. Their advocates wrote their opinions. After the court decision regarding Guido is made he can appeal to the Pope. Another custom of the period — that of having a prominent place for beheading and hanging — affords the opportunity for Guido to stand before the populace.

Setting as an Aid to Characterization

In addition to being so definite a help to action, setting aids also in characterizing. Browning uses it in this way by showing harmony or contrast between the mood of the scene and the mood of his characters.

Emotional harmony is present in Sordello. In one instance the beauties of spring are mentioned. In tune with them, Sordello dreams of Palma and through his minstrelsy is rewarded with her prize. Later, when autumn arrives, we read,

"One declining Autumn day —
Few birds about the heaven chill and gray,
No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods —
He sauntered home complacently, their moods
According, his and nature's."

At another time, the moon rises, shedding its light and influence over the sea. Sordello feels that he has been purposeless and that now he is influenced by Palma somewhat as the sea is affected by the moon.

The tree, in The Inn Album, is described in its beauty that its harmony with the character of the Woman may more fully reveal her.

She is appreciative of beauty, rich in character, but unsatisfied with
life; she looks heavenward. Of the tree, she says:

"O you exceeding beauty, bosomful
Of lights and shades, murmurs
and silences,
Sun warmth, dew coolness, squirrel,
bee and bird
High, higher, highest, till the blue
proclaims
'Leave earth; there's nothing
better till next step —
Heavenward!"

The medieval setting of The Flight of the Duchess is quite in harmony with the romantic escape of the lady.

In contrast to such pleasant agreement, we notice the great difference between setting and mood in Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country. The country, edged by blue sea, is beautifully calm and peaceful with its many grain fields and its white-steepled church. The women who live there are continually bobbing their white-capped heads over the lace they are making. On a bright, spring day, this calm setting is the scene of dire tragedy.

In The Inn Album we have another contrast. The room in which the scene occurs is a place of "vulgar, flat, smooth respectability." Historical pictures hang on its "sprig-pattern-papered wall." Looking out of the window, guests see the sun rise over a beautiful, country scene which artists paint, calling it the "Corot landscape." Within this room, before the day is over, murder has been committed.

In addition to being used artistically, settings may be employed philosophically; that is, they may be employed as motives toward action or as influences on character.
In Palmaustion's Adventure, the setting is really the cause of the action. Palmaustion's city of Rhodes is ready to break off allegiance to Athens. She, with followers who are true to Athens, is on Motive for a ship bound for that city when a storm drives them to un-Action friendly Syracuse. The Syracusans are about to send the ship back to see, where pirates await it. Because Palmaustion knows that the Syracusans greatly admire Euripides and give great rewards to those who can recite his works, she offers to recite Alkestis.

In The Flight of the Duchess the old castle and the surrounding wild country motivate the Duke in keeping up the old medieval habits. This setting, to a large extent, determines the course of the action. Because of the Duke’s interest in Heroic customs, he decides on the old fashioned hunt. Angered at his wife’s refusal to be present, he determines to see that she is subdued. When she flees, the surrounding country gives opportunity for her escape.

Besides being a reason for action, setting may exert an influence on character. The place in which Sordello lives as a youth is beautiful. An exquisitely constructed castle, containing many large and lovely rooms, is situated among mountains. Statuary, woods-lands, and vineyards surround the castle. Here Sordello receives inspiration and finds opportunity for dreaming.

"Doubt Rose tardily in one so fenced about From most that nurtures judgment, — care and pain."
Uses of Weather

Weather — as a phase of setting — is used interestingly in various poems. In The Two Poets of Croisic, a thunderstorm destroys a marble ducal crown on a pillar. It aids the action because this destruction causes Rene to write a poem which results in his being called prophet and "Royal Poet" by King Louis.

In Christmas Eve, rain is accountable for the Speaker's entering the chapel, where he finds himself again after his vision.

In The Flight of the Duchess, the bright autumn weather imbues the Duke with the desire to go hunting, the desire which leads finally to the Duchess's flight.

In The Ring and The Book we find weather in harmony with mood. On a bright sunny morning when the birds are singing and flying in the beautiful sky, Pompilia decides she must live — must go to Rome for the sake of her babe. In contrast to this scene, a cold, January evening when the ground is sparsely covered with snow and a few flakes are falling is pictured as the time when Guido, with hate in his heart, comes to kill Pompilia.

Romantic Settings

Romantic settings are not as frequently found in Browning as are the realistic backgrounds. However, of course, The Flight of the Duchess has a romantic background with its medieval castle, Heroic customs, and inspiring Gipsy. It carries us back to a time somewhat unknown and glamorous. Then, too, we may call the vision setting with its celestial city,
in Easter Day, romantic. Both of these scenes are artistically suitable for their narratives.

Realistic Settings

Usually, exact details, specific knowledge of historical periods, and skillful description make Browning's scenes very realistic. In Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country how detailed is his description of the place and of the customs! He not only describes the peaceful country side and its inhabitants but he mentions the carriages that have neither springs nor cushions, the clocks that run down and are not wound up, the notice pasted on the barn and left there indefinitely.

In Fifine at the Fair we are told that the prosaic scene of the night before has been changed into the gay scene of the Fair. What were mere, brown, rough boards are now bright pavillons for dancers and conjurers. The actors — their features, their muscles, and their costumes — are carefully pictured as a background for Fifine.

In The Ring and the Book the setting is very realistic. Seventeenth Century Italy is made a present day reality to us. We know exactly where Pietro and his wife are buried. Their graves are on the second step of the chancel, behind the altar rail. Pietro is at the right of the altar rail, and his wife is at the left.

Guido's prison is described precisely. The air within it is fetid and stuffy. There is a straw covering over the filthy floor. A stone bench is the only furniture within these four, dirty, stone walls.
Atmosphere or Local Color

Atmosphere is created readily by Browning because of his choosing items possessing the quality desired and leaving out any details which do not fit in with that mood. In Christmas Eve how clearly he distinguishes for us the different types of places which the Speaker visits! The feeling that they are chosen people and should restrict admittance to their chapel is evinced by the actions of the members of the chapel congregation. The fat, tired woman gives a snort at seeing the visitor; the thin, tattered, young woman seems to grudge him his standing room on the mat; almost every one looks at him with a questioning glance, as if wishing to ask how he has dared to come. In contrast to this atmosphere, Browning pictures the eager expectation and religious fervour of the crowds in the Basilica in Rome while they attend mass. He tells of the rapture and terror of the people while incense rises and the bell tinkles.

"Earth breaks up, time drops away;
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life."

Having noticed these effective settings, we should pause to state that in his early poem Pauline, Browning has no setting whatever. This fact reveals his lack of interest in what does not help to reveal the soul of a character.

Browning's settings, then (save in the last mentioned poem), in his longer narratives, are used always as an aid to action or as an aid

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to characterization, never as mere decoration. In using them as an aid to characterization he employs harmony or contrast between landscape and the characters' moods or actions. Philosophically, he employs setting as the initial reason for an action and as an influence on character. Weather, he treats in the same way as setting. A few of his scenes are romantic, but, as a rule, he makes use of realistic backgrounds. At creating atmosphere, he is very clever. Always, however, he is working with his one definite purpose in mind — that of revealing human minds. For that reason, his settings exist.
CHAPTER III

The Point of View

Explanation of the Term

Having considered Browning's longer narrative poems in regard to their characters and their settings, let us now consider them in regard to the point of view of their author. Technically, the point of view means the method of narration. The author may write from the internal or the external point of view. The internal point of view is the viewpoint from which an actor in an event sees it. As long as the story is told in the first person — as long as the author uses a character in the book to tell the story — the method of story-telling is internal; however, the results are different in accordance with the speaker's being the main actor in the story, a subsidiary actor, or simply one who from a long way off sees what is happening. The external point of view is the method of story-telling in which the author, seeing events from an external point of view, directly narrates the story in his own person.

Regardless of point of view, the story may be either subjective or objective. The author may always reveal himself and his thoughts and feelings regarding the happenings of the story, or he may write impersonally, never letting us think of him, always hiding himself. He may present his story
emotionally or intellectually. Likewise, the character speaking may be subjective or objective. These statements lead us to a consideration of the popular use of the expression point of view. Popularly, point of view means the attitude of the author who is writing.

The same event may be differently seen by different persons. Have you noticed how varied are the accounts which may be given of a football game? One person speaks subjectively; another, objectively. One person notices the color, life, movement, the music between halves. Another has observed every play carefully, and knows just why the winning team was successful. Some people see humour in almost any situation. G. K. Chesterton says that whether the situation in which one finds himself is an inconvenience or an adventure depends entirely upon one's point of view. A narrative may be presented, then, in accordance with the mood and mental attitude of the speaker. Are we listening to an elderly philosopher, to a contemplative artist, to a youthful enthusiast? Is the speaker telling us about himself or about someone whom he has observed? Are several speakers telling the story? Does the author talk in a personal or an impersonal way? Naturally, he is endeavouring to present a true picture of life. In order to do that, he has chosen the point of view which he considers best adapted to his story.

Browning's Attitude

In general, Browning shows a serious tone in his longer, narrative poems. His thoughtfulness and his interest in the human mind are evident in all these poems. In his early work, Pauline, he declares that his chief interest lies in studying the human soul.
**Sordello**, likewise, shows keen interest in analyzing the hero's mind. Christmas Eve and Easter Day reveal the deep thought of certain Christians. Fifine at the Fair is an analysis of the mind of a sensualist. Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country, The Inn Album, and The Ring and the Book reveal his interest in delving for the real causes behind dreadful tragedies. Although The Two Poets of Croisic is a bit lighter in tone, it also shows his desire to study the reaction of individual minds to definite situations. The romantic poem, The Flight of the Duchess, evinces thoughtfulness in its idea of the great importance of love. Belaustion's Adventure discloses a deep interest in Greek literature.

In *The Ring and the Book*, Browning shows his great desire to get at the truth of the matter. He states that the Book contains the truth of the story. However, he desires to find deeper truth than that. He wants to understand the personalities and motives behind the story. Therefore, he lets each character tell of the same event, revealing his own mind as he does so. In this way, Browning hopes we will get at the deep significance of the story and realize the truth of its message concerning "the great constraining relation between man and woman at once at its maximum and as the relation most worth while in life for either party."

**Browning's Use of the Internal Point of View**

In attempting to reveal truths, Browning, as a rule, uses the

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Point of View of the Leading Actor

internal point of view in his longer narratives. He likes to tell stories in the first person. The point of view of the leading actor is a good choice because it gives plausibility to action and reality to emotion; it gives a sense of verisimilitude to the story; it possesses concreteness and objectivity in picturing other characters; it gives centrality to the narrative.

How much more vivid is Christmas Eve, told in the first person, than it would be in the third! As the Speaker tells about his own experience of leaving the chapel, being in church at Rome, visiting a meeting of German scholars, all in one night, we feel the reasonableness of what would actually be impossible. However, he tells us of his personal thoughts and emotions concerning each incident. How can we but believe him? As he describes the appearance of the members of the congregation, and considers the arguments of their preacher, he makes them all appear in objective reality. His own personality — as he tells of his actions and thoughts on entering the chapel, seeing the vision, and finding himself again in this chapel — gives unity to the narrative.

Another narrative related by the leading actor is Pauline. We have already seen in the chapter on characters that the Speaker in this poem thoroughly analyzes himself, showing his faults, his weaknesses, and his final realization of the worth of genuine love.

In Balaustion’s Adventure, also, we hear from the leading actor. Her telling of their being driven by the storms and chased by the pirates, their worrying about entering an enemy’s harbour, her efforts to gain their
safety, her success and rewards, — all gain our interest and sympathetic attention as her personality pervades the poem and makes it real and centralized.

Instead of the hero’s telling a story, a subordinate actor may tell it. Such a character, although not likely to analyze himself, can give the characteristics of a hero directly. From the viewpoint of a friend, he has the opportunity to extol the hero’s virtues. The subsidiary character can relate the story objectively, vividly, emotionally, and realistically. Naturally, he may know details of the plot.

The Flight of the Duchess, told by the Duke’s huntsman, who aided the lady in her escape, is an interesting example of a story told by a subsidiary actor. The huntsman is able to characterize vividly the Duchess whom he so greatly admires, to tell of her appearing almost too small for all the joy with which her mind is filled, to speak of her being easy to please, and being thankful for small things such as his patting her horse. He speaks, also, of Max’s stating that she has a wide-awake interest in all that goes on around her and desires to know the names of all the birds she sees. He explains that she is joyfully energetic until quelled by the attitudes of the Duke and his mother. His telling us just where he is standing and how he happens to see the events brings them before our very eyes. He speaks of his being on the balcony just outside of the room in which the lady — attended by his sweetheart — and the Gipsy are talking. As he watches his lady being beautifully transformed by the Gipsy, he, too, is influenced by her bewitching power. Finally, he realizes that the Gipsy is helping the
lady, and that when his mistress drives away, she will find happiness with the gipsies.

When several different actors relate a narrative, each speaker giving the same story but from his own point of view, the method is called focus method. This device is particularly well adapted to showing the minds of different characters. For this reason, Browning is fond of it. Moreover, this method possesses impartiality, and thus lets the reader judge as to the real truth.

Browning employs this device in The Ring and the Book. Having himself stated the story briefly in Book I, he presents, then, the same story from the points of view of different participants in order to show clearly the minds of these individuals. In Book II, he gives the views of those who are against Pompilia; in Book III, he tells the thoughts of those who think she acted rightly; in Book IV, he presents a group that is somewhat "on the fence"; in Book V, he allows Guido to speak for himself; in Book VI, he permits Caponsacchi to tell his ideas in regard to the affair; in Book VII Pompilia, on her death-bed, speaks; in Book VIII, Count Guido's counsel defends him; in Book IX, the Public Prosecutor presents his speech; in Book X, the Pope gives his opinions in regard to the case; in Book XI, Guido again speaks. Each character speaks in his own person, revealing his thoughts, his motives, his actions.

Throughout a small part of The Inn Album, the same focus device is used. When — while they are going through the woods on the way to the Younger Man's Cousin's — the men tell of a past in which each was interested in a woman, each mentions the same woman without being sure of
that fact. When she appears later, she relates her story, too, making clear some points which were obscure before. Moreover, she carries her narrative on further, almost making The Inn Album for a time a story from what is technically called the series point of view. This is the only approach to a series point of view in that portion of Browning which I am treating.

The epistolary point of view, so favoured by some authors, is not really used by Browning in his longer narratives. The nearest approach to it is a quotation now and then from Miranda's letters, which show his interest in amours and his seeing to it that he does not pay for the same, later his feeling for Clara, and his accounts of her admirers.

External Point of View

Having examined stories told from the internal point of view, let us now study some stories presented by Browning from the external point of view, the point of view of a third person looking objectively at the scenes. This third person may assume an omniscient point of view. Then, he never has to give any reason for possessing intimate knowledge concerning the actors. This attitude also gives him the chance to analyze the minds of his characters on a large scale. Of course, there is the danger of abstractness in telling of objective events in a lengthy work.

The omniscient view point is employed in Sordello. This attitude gives the author the opportunity of knowing about the circumstances of Palma's confessing her love to Sordello. He knows of the struggle in
Sordello's mind as he gazes on the emperor's badge. He analyzes Sordello's mind from his childhood days until his death. However, his continual analysis does become abstract. We feel that the action is too much retarded. Shifts in point of view prevent the poem's being strictly omniscient in method (a point which we shall discuss more fully later) and present difficulty in keeping the thread of the story. We recall that Elizabeth Barret wrote to Browning of this poem:

"It wants drawing together and fortifying in the connections and associations . . . . which hang as loosely every here and there as those in a dream, and confound the reader who persists in thinking himself awake." 

Sometimes an author gives up completely the attitude of omniscience and assumes an air absolutely external and observant. Browning does so in The Inn Album. Observing from the outside, he presents the characters to us and lets them speak and act their parts. This poem is almost a drama. It becomes tense and exciting as it moves forward through the murder scene. We do not know the readers' thoughts, save when they express them through their conversation. Then, we do learn something of their thoughts and of their characters. The woman shows common sense and humour when, realizing that she cannot adequately judge a character in an hour or two, she says:

"I shall judge

I shall judge

While he carves chicken! Sends he leg
for wing?
That revelation into character
And conduct must suffice me."

---

2 The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barret - R. B. Browning.
Through the words of the Girl, we learn that the Woman keeps much to herself; she had not told the Girl of her affairs. The Woman's determination that justice shall be done is evinced in her act of writing in the Album, although she is dying — in order that the Younger Man may not be condemned. Thus Browning carries on the action throughout the poem, the last words of which are, "Let the curtain fall."

Mixed Point of View

The delightful way in which The Inn Album keeps to the rigidly restrictive view is in contrast to the shift in point of view which we noted in Sordello. Browning himself speaks in the introduction, making that part of the story a narrative from the internal point of view. As he speaks, he shows us his preference for the internal point of view.

In fact, he prefers the character to reveal himself.

"Never, I should warn you first,
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell
A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,
And leaving you to say the rest for him.
Since, though I might be proud to see
the dim
Abysmal past divide the hateful surge,
Letting of all men this one man emerge,
Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
I should delight in watching first to last
His progress as you watch it, not a whit
More in the secret than yourselves who sit
Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems
Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
Makers of quite new men, producing them,
Would best chalk broadly on each
vesture's hem
The wearer's quality or take their stand,
Motley on back and painting-pole in hand,
Beside him. So, for once I face ye, friends,
Summoned together from the world's four ends."
After a few more comments he is ready for the background of his story. Soon he causes a vision to appear, in which his characters are to act. In this vision, according to the information he gives, Verona is appearing. He reveals conditions there, gets entirely into the omniscient point of view of one completely outside. Now and then, he steps forth again, however, as a Spectator at the theatre might whisper a word to his companion in a quiet moment, or as he might chat between scenes. He begins one of his comments with:

"For he, for he
Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,
(If I should falter now) -- for he is thine!
Sordello, thy forerunner Florentine!"

In the introduction he speaks as if he were to play the actors as puppets before an audience. A bit later (within the story), he tells us to go into the castle. This slight change in point of view causes slight obscurity. Later, he again thinks of the audience as watching a play. He says:

"The curtain see
Dividing! She is there; and presently
He will be there."

Having told of Sordello's being at Eglamor's grave, the poet unnecessarily brings himself in when he writes:

"So much for Eglamor. My own month came;
'Twas a sunrise of blossoming and May,
Beneath a flowering thicket lay Sordello."

Here, the reader has to stop in the midst of his thoughts to recall that Browning was born in May. In another instance, having told the reader something of Sordello's thoughts, Browning suddenly inserts,

"You pother with your glossaries to get
A notion of the Troubadour's intent."
After a few more lines he switches back to the actions and comments of the crowd within the story; thus he keeps the thoughts of the audience jumping from one idea to another. From these facts we see that Browning's continual shifting of point of view accounts to a large extent for the obscurity of Sordello.

In Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country we find a story introduced in the first person. The author, writing as if he were living near Miranda's estate, speaks of having seen Clara. As he goes on with the narrative, he seems to shift the point of view to that of the third person and the limited point of view. His omniscience extends only over Miranda and Clara, and in their case only part of the time. Very vividly he relates their conversations and actions, as we have seen in the chapter on Characters. Other objective parts and facts of the narrative he presents as being either seen or heard in the neighborhood in which he lives or at the court hearing (which he apparently attended) concerning Miranda's estate. For instance, he states that the Mother's acquiescence to her son's relation with Clara was shown by a lawyer. Concerning the account of Miranda's having gone on his knees from Ravissante to Clairvaux he wrote,

"'Maliciously perverted incident!'
Snarled the retort, when this was told at Vire."

In one instance — even in giving Miranda's thoughts — he says that he is merely supposing. However, regarding Miranda's ideas at the last scene of his life, he says:

"He thought . . . .
(Suppose I should prefer 'He said'?
Along with every act — and speech is act —
There go, a multitude impalpable
To ordinary human faculty,
The thoughts which give the act significance."
Who is a poet needs must apprehend
Alike both speech and thoughts
which prompt to speak.
Part these, and thought withdraws
to poetry:
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)

He said, then, probably no word
at all,
But thought as follows — in a minute's
space —
One particle of ore beats out such leaf!"

Of the cousin's thoughts regarding Miranda's money after his mother's death, he writes, "I give it you as mere conjecture, mind." Speaking of Clara's thoughts after Miranda's death, he says, "She might soliloquize."

In The Two Poets of Croisic, the Speaker — the distant I — is talking with his wife beside the open fire-place. Of course, as he speaks in his own words, the story is given from the internal point of view. However, the two stories which he relates to his wife within their conversation are related from the omniscient point of view. He tells of the thoughts of the various actors in these stories. Voltaire, at the mirror, wonders what color to wear, wonders what has happened to his rouge and to his scents. Rene, trying to work out the rhyme for a love poem, sees lightning strike the marble ducal crown on a pedestal. Thinking about that destruction, he is enabled to write a poem which causes him to be called a prophet. Demoiselle Malcrais chooses one of her brother's poems which she thinks maliciously is probably the worst in his collection.

Although the Speaker briefly gives a thought of a character in these two poems now and then, the brevity of the poems and their action preclude any real analysis of the characters' minds.
Impersonal Tone

Having assumed these Internal and External attitudes in presenting his stories, an author may write impersonally or personally. If he writes impersonally, he gives no comments of his own regarding characters. Such a tone is used by Browning in The Inn Album. He lets the characters speak. Between times he simply explains their movements and their appearance. Of the Elder Man, he writes,

"The more refined man smiles a frown away."

Later on:

"They slacken pace; the young
stops abrupt,
Discards cigar, looks his friend
full in face."

Still later:

"The man who knelt starts up from kneeling,
stands
Moving no muscle, and confronts the stare."

Personal Tone

In contrast to this impersonal tone, we find the personal tone in several of the longer narrative poems. In Sordello, for instance, Browning uses many personal comments, suggests what readers are probably thinking, answers them, says,

And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

He introduces Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country in a friendly, talkative manner. He chats about the country, describing its appearance, argues as to whether it should be called White or Red Cotton Night-Cap Country.
Sometimes he asks questions of his listeners, such as,

"British maid
And British man, suppose we have it out
Here in the fields, decide the question so."

Sometimes he apparently repeats a question:

"Why not say swans are black and black
birds white,
Because such instances exist? you ask."

Sometimes he shows his excited interest in what is going on, as when he says:

"Not let me light till, lo, the Red is reached,
And yonder lies in luminosity."

Such lines as "No, sit and stay," and "Permit me a preliminary word," make us keep in mind that this story is being told personally. Moreover, he personally judges the actions of his characters. He tells us that Miranda was sane in his leap, that he believes anyone in such a condition as Miranda's should test his faith and have a definite decision. He claims Miranda is better off dead than he would be living in perpetual doubt.

Of Claire, he comments:

"Twenty years long, you may have loved
this man;
He must have loved you; that's a
pleasant life,
Whatever was your right to lead the same."

In The Two Poets of Croisic, Browning, also, speaks very informally. The transitory flames which the Speaker sees in the fire make him think of the passing renown of two poets, and he tells their stories. He sometimes repeats his wife's questions, and then replies:

"How fortune fares
With such a mediocrity, who cares?
Well, I care - intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt - ""

He talks to the people of his poem as if they were present,

"Step thou forth
Second consummate songster!"

Probably because of the shortness of the poems, he does not go into much detail concerning his opinion of the characters. His wife - when her turn comes - utters intimate phrases between the parts of her story.

Some of these remarks are:

"Pray, no petting!"
"Sir, I hope you understand."
"Therefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a --- poet? All I care for
Is --- to tell him that a girl's 'Love' comes aptly in when gruff Grows his singing."

Summary

Through a study of Browning's point of view, we have learned that he is generally serious. He aims definitely to present truths. He states such a purpose in The Ring and the Book. Through presenting Christmas Eve, Pauline, and Balaustion's Adventure in the first person - and that the leading actor - he writes vividly, plausibly, emotionally, concretely, and unified. He presents The Flight of the Duchess from the point of view of a subsidiary actor and is thus enabled to characterize and to picture the leading characters directly. By means of this point of view, he also creates the feeling of vividness and immediacy. Through using the focus point of view in The Ring and the Book, he is enabled to get at the truths behind the story, to bring to light the motives of the actors. Each character reveals his own thoughts, motives, and actions. Not really
making use of the epistolary method, he, nevertheless, portrays the
caracter of Miranda in Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country a bit more clearly
through quoting briefly from a few of his letters.

Employing a mixed point of view — speaking in the first person
and yet speaking with omniscience — he presents Sordello, Red-Cotton Night-
Cap Country, and The Two Poets of Croisic. In Sordello he makes use of the
opportunity which the omniscient view point gives him for depicting
characters by means of mental analysis. Unfortunately, he carries this
analysis to such an extreme and shifts his view point so frequently that
he makes the action obscure.

Employing a rigidly restrictive point of view in The Inn Album,
Browning limits himself to an observant external attitude. In this poem,
he writes in an impersonal tone, whereas in Sordello, Red-Cotton Night-Cap
Country, and The Two Poets of Croisic he shows personal interest in his
characters, comments upon them, and talks in a chatty manner to his reader.

All in all, we see that he uses the point of view best adapted to
his purpose — the revelation of the workings of individual minds. For
that purpose, he finds the internal point of view with the first person
speaking most satisfactory.
Conclusion

In analyzing Browning's longer narrative poems in order to discover the methods which he uses in making his characters alive, his backgrounds appropriate and vital, his points of view effective, I have come to very definite conclusions.

From studying his characterizations, I have decided that he has used every means to present his persons faithfully. He has explained their characteristics, described their appearance, analyzed their minds, recorded their acts. Through giving us the opinions of other characters concerning the main actors, he has revealed reputations. Through speeches of individuals, he has shown their emotions and their motives; through actions, he has shown forth their true characters. Telling us of their influence upon others, he has shown their importance in their world. By describing their environment and explaining their heredity, he has given us reasons for their peculiar tendencies. He has made his people so real that I believe they will live as long as fiction endures. These statements are the results of my analysis of the characters in Browning's longer narrative poems.

Through examining the settings in the same narratives, I have learned that they are interesting and effective. Browning is more interested in presenting social background than in painting mere scenes. Never using settings for merely decorative purposes, he employs them to aid action and to reveal character. In making use of background as a help to
characterization, he employs harmony or contrast between landscape and the moods or actions of the characters. Philosophically, he employs settings as the first reason for action and as an influence on character. He treats weather in the same way as setting.

A few of his scenes are romantic, but, usually, he employs realistic backgrounds. He is very clever in creating atmosphere. Although he presents backgrounds skilfully, he creates them only for the purpose of revealing minds.

Through carefully considering Browning's point of view, I have learned that he is usually seriously presenting truths in his longer narrative poems. Because he wishes to show forth the workings of individual minds, he prefers to have his characters speak for themselves. For this reason, he prefers to use the internal points of view with the leading actor speaking. Thus, he makes his stories real, probable, vital, concrete, and unified. In only one instance in the longer narrative poems does he approach the epistolary point of view. Sometimes he uses the focus point of view; that is, the method in which each character tells the same story, but in accordance with his own view point. By making use of this focus method, Browning is able to give impartial truth. In only one instance does he approach the series point of view. He also employs the method of having a subsidiary actor tell the story. Such an actor can readily praise the hero; he can, also, be familiar with the details of the plot.

Although he shows preference for the internal method of telling a story, this author makes use, also, of the external method in his longer narratives. He uses the omniscient view point (making too much use of the opportunity to analyze and so causing obscurity), the restricted
view point, and the rigidly restricted view point. Moreover, he sometimes combines the internal and external view points. The fact that The Inn Album is the only longer narrative poem to be presented from the rigidly restrictive point of view is an interesting discovery of our research.

In The Inn Album, Browning's attitude is absolutely impersonal. In the other poems under discussion, however, he uses the personal tone.

We see that Browning aims to reveal the truth in the minds of his characters and that he can best do this by allowing each character to speak for himself in his own person.

The poems which I have used for this analysis are: Pauline, Cordello, Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country, The Inn Album, The Two Ports of Croisic, Christmas Eve and Easter Day, The Flight of the Duchess, Balastion's Adventure, Fifine at the Fair, The Ring and the Book.
Digest

This paper covers the following phases of the technique of character, setting, and point of view in Browning's longer narrative poems. It discusses the worth of the characters; the fact that they possess both universal and typical traits and call forth sympathy or dislike from the reader. The characters in *The Two Poets of Croisic* and in *The Inn Album* are static, whereas Pompilia, Sordello, Miranda (in *The Red-Cotton Night-Cap Country*) and the Speaker in *Christmas Eve* are kinetic. The paper discusses Browning's use of both direct and indirect methods of portrayal. It shows that the direct methods of delineation used by him are exposition, gradual portrayal, psychological analysis, and reports from other characters. It discusses his indirect delineations by means of speech, action, effect on other characters, environment, and heredity. The importance of background and the various ways in which Browning uses it are discussed. Under this heading are studied setting as an aid to action and setting characterization. Romantic settings, realistic settings, and atmosphere are discussed. An explanation of both the technical and popular meanings of point of view follows. Browning's efforts to reveal truth and his use of internal point of view, external point of view, and a mixture of both in order to carry out his purpose of revealing human minds are studied. Browning's use of both impersonal and personal tones in telling his stories is the last subject presented. A summary of the proofs made through my examination of these matters concludes the paper.
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