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THE IDEA OF JOY:
ROBERT BROWNING AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRADITION

A Dissertation

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in

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by
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ABSTRACT

In his poetic exploration of the idea of Joy, Robert Browning makes an important contribution to the development of one of the most vital concepts in nineteenth-century English literature, a contribution which also elucidates the nature of his strategic place midway in the evolving Romantic tradition between Wordsworth and Yeats.

In the traditional Christian ethos, the concept of Joy was associated with supernatural virtue which man struggled to attain. With the disintegration of a viable Christian tradition, however, the idea of Joy came to be seen, partly through the impetus of the French Revolution, both as an egalitarian human right and as the unique possession of the poetic consciousness. Chapter I examines Browning's idea of Joy against the background of some of the most important touchstones of the concept from Schiller's "Ode to Joy" to W. B. Yeats's "tragic joy," with special emphasis given Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Arnold. Since The Prelude is the most important embodiment of the idea of Joy in nineteenth-century English literature, Chapter II is devoted to an exploration of the complex and manifold
implications which Wordsworth gives the concept of Joy. Wordsworth carefully identifies Joy as a power which partakes of "happiness" and "pleasure" but ultimately transcends both of these qualities and is associated with the essential dignity of human nature, with unity, with power and energy, and with the universality of the poetic imagination.

Browning's earliest attempts at the formulation of his idea of Joy are discussed in Chapter III from the standpoint of these aspects of the Wordsworthian concept of Joy. In Pauline, Paracelsus, and Sordello, Browning both extends and modifies the Romantic idea of Joy, while in Easter-Day and in "Saul," he incorporates the concept firmly within the framework of his religious faith, recalling the traditional relation of the idea of Joy to Christian virtue. Browning dramatizes his concept of man's capability for Joy in some of his finest poems, and twenty-two of the poems of Men and Women and Dramatis Personae are examined in Chapter IV as they demonstrate his developing poetic concern with the idea of Joy.

In Chapter V, the relationship between Joy, energy, and the grotesque which John Ruskin emphasizes in the chapter on "The Nature of Gothic" in The Stones of Venice is discussed as it is manifested in Book One of The Ring and the
Book. Ruskin, following Coleridge and Wordsworth, identifies the concept of Joy with purity, energy, and universality. Browning extends this identification further through the dramatization of these qualities in his characterization of Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope. In the final chapter, Browning's struggle to maintain his idea of Joy is seen in a few of the poems of the 1870's and 1880's, especially in "Nympholeptos," La Saisiaz, and several of the poems of Fenishtah's Fancies.

The idea of Joy is an attempt of the nineteenth-century literary consciousness to embody the most powerful experience discernible by the poetic vision and to draw upon the concept of Joy as a unifying cultural experience which could rejuvenate a society that was being rapidly transformed by technological progress. When it is identified and traced through some of his most important poems, Robert Browning's idea of Joy emerges as the most dynamic Victorian attempt to transmit and transmute the Romantic legacy of Joy-consciousness.
CHAPTER I

THE IDEA OF JOY:
ROBERT BROWNING AND THE TRADITION

The concept of Joy includes some of the most dynamic and crucial developments in nineteenth-century literature. Robert Browning's contribution to the idea of Joy is an important aspect of his poetry, important because it greatly enriches the poetic texture itself, but important also because it indicates one facet of Browning's strategic place in the Romantic tradition midway between Wordsworth and Yeats. Browning's modifications and extensions of the idea of Joy will be more relevant if they are considered against the background of a few of the important touchstones of the idea in the entire Romantic tradition.

For the idea of Joy is one of the complex literary motifs of the nineteenth century; it is a vital, protean concept which appears with varying subtlety and complexity in the chief Romantics and Victorians, and is modified and metamorphosed as it enters the twentieth century in the work of Hardy and Yeats. One thinks of Schiller's "Ode to Joy," most probably of its musical embodiment in Beethoven's
Ninth Symphony; of the claim that Wordsworth makes for the "never-failing principle of joy"; of the loss of Joy described by Coleridge in "Dejection"; of Keats's lament for the transitory visitations of "Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu"; of Browning's Cleon and his "joy hunger"; of Arnold's longing for "joy whose grounds are true"; of Meredith's exultation in "the joy of earth"; of Hardy's description of man's insatiable "appetite for joy" as the force which drives Tess D'Urberville in the climactic pages of that novel; or of W. B. Yeats's savage attempt to reconcile the paradox of "tragic joy." These examples suggest both the importance and the scope of nineteenth-century explorations of the idea of Joy, an idea treated briefly by Frank Kermode in Romantic Image, where Joy is termed a "crucial concept" for the understanding not only of earlier nineteenth-century literature, but also of Symbolism and the entire modern movement in poetry from Baudelaire to Yeats.

This brief catalogue also suggests that the importance given Joy in the imaginative thought of poets as diverse in their aesthetic aims as Wordsworth, Browning, and Yeats, makes it more than a convenient synonym for "happiness" or "pleasure," though Joy certainly includes these connotations. Thomas Hardy's description of Tess's
"appetite for joy" is quoted, although no source is indicated in the text of the novel, from Browning's poem, Paracelsus. Browning's phrase, as Hardy must have recognized, is a telling one: the metaphoric equivalence of "hunger" and "joy" suggests the transformation of Joy to the status of a basic human drive as powerful as man's biological drives and more important to his total being. Joy is one of the perennial needs of the human personality. It is a value defined, cherished, and sought after by the major Romantic poets. This initial chapter should both dispel the obvious but rather simplistic associations of the concept of Joy and establish evidence of the rich poetic and cultural ramifications of the Joy motif in a few of the chief figures of the nineteenth century.

In "The Everlasting Yea" of Sartor Resartus, Thomas Carlyle voices one of the central ideas of the Romantic movement: "Man's Unhappiness, as I construe, comes of his Greatness; it is because there is an Infinite in him, which with all his cunning he cannot quite bury under the Finite." Carlyle's prescription for this infinite unrest is, paradoxically, that man should simply accept infinitude as his necessary condition and stop his ceaseless search for the means of happiness, "Love not Pleasure; love God. This is the EVERLASTING YEA, wherein all contradiction is
solved; wherein whoso walks and works, it is well with him." But the idea of the infinite possibilities of human life which reached its apotheosis in the French Revolution could not be stilled even by the thundering rhetoric of Carlyle. The quest for Joy as the means of the highest form of happiness is a consistent theme of the first generation of Romantic poets and extends through the Victorians into modern literature.

However, from a historical perspective, Joy is a relatively new idea. In the traditional Christian ethos, perfect Joy was attained in an Eternity to come, and its most satisfactory counterpart attainable in this world was found in a life which conformed to the Will of God. Joy was considered to be a habit of the soul, a virtue won only after long struggle. A well-known example of this concept of Joy in literature is Chaucer's Squire. The keynote of Chaucer's description of the Squire is joyousness, because Joy is the virtue most highly prized in the young knight; it is a virtue which denotes purity and innocence of soul and has to be carefully nurtured. With the disintegration of a viable Christian tradition, however, Joy loses its association with supernatural virtue and eventually comes to be seen both as one of man's basic rights and as the peculiar possession of the imaginative
consciousness of the poet. When Carlyle admonishes man to forget happiness and pleasure, he is attempting to refute the contemporary assumption that they are the universal rights of all men by reminding man of his infinite spiritual nature, a nature which all the pleasures of the world cannot satisfy. Most nineteenth-century writers tacitly assume man's infinitude; but they also assume, as the narrator of Herman Melville's Pierre says, that Joy "is my right as man; deprived of joy, I feel that I should find cause for deadly feuds with things invisible."

The roots of the new importance accorded Joy can be found in the thought of the eighteenth century. The epistemology of John Locke helped to inaugurate what has been called a "crisis of consciousness" in English thought. If sensation is the basis of reality, value has no objective existence outside of the subjective experience of the individual. Ernest Lee Tuveson, in his study of the Lockean tradition, notes that Locke's epistemology created "the necessity of finding new channels for old and valued experience, and of reconstructing on new foundations the dignity of the soul."¹ Joy is such an old and valued human

experience, and it is made one of the chief foundations for man's dignity of soul. Professor Tuveson's discussion of Joseph Addison's essays on *The Pleasures of the Imagination* provides an insight into the idea of Joy in the nineteenth century.

Professor Tuveson explains that when Addison says that the first discovery of Beauty "strikes the mind with an inward joy," he is voicing a rather revolutionary idea:

Saint-Just, the utopian and apologist of the French Revolution, once remarked that "happiness is an idea new to Europe." As an ideal to be attained in this life, joy was a relatively new conception. The word "pleasure," used in the title of the series, is a touchstone. The tendency has formerly been to contrast the temporal "pleasure" with the true and eternal "joy"... In Addison's usage, "pleasure" has taken on a spiritual value and "joy" arises from a purely sensuous delight God Himself has prepared for us. Another idea has found aesthetic projection.2

A glance at the entry on Joy in the OED bears out Tuveson's claim that Joy is a relatively new concept and indicates its central place in the Romantic movement. One form of the word Joy, "joyance," was introduced into the language by Spenser, considered obsolete by Dr. Johnson, and appeared again about 1800 in the works of Coleridge and Southey, becoming a favorite word with writers of imaginative literature.3

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The rise of Evangelical Christianity with its emphasis on a joyously enthusiastic and emotional religious conversion, in addition to Locke's epistemology and Addison's aesthetic that Professor Tuveson cites, are all interrelated causes for the new emphasis on Joy. The concept of Joy receives even more important aesthetic and intellectual projection in the nineteenth century.

Schiller's "Ode to Joy" is the logical starting place for a discussion of the idea of Joy. His aesthetic ideal of Joy had an important, demonstrable influence upon Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Arnold, and his poem embodies many of the facets of the new idea of Joy. Schiller credits Joy with the instinct to brotherhood among men. In its Victorian translation, the An die Freude begins with an apostrophe to Joy as the "spark from the fire that gods have fed":

Strong custom rends us from each other--
Thy magic all together brings;
And man in man but hails a brother,
Wherever rest thy gentle wings.  

Joy springs from nature and is also the link which binds the disparate elements of nature into one holy bond. Joy is personified as an extension of the power of the Absolute:

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Joy moves the dazzling wheels that roll
In the great time piece of creation;
Joy breathes on buds, and flowers they are;
Joy beckons, suns come forth from heaven.

Joy is the reward given seekers after truth, but it is also the source of their energy; Joy smiles from "Truth's pure and lambent fires." Schiller identifies Joy with virtue, faith, truth, and, finally, with the vision of the Absolute: "Through the shatter'd vaults of death / Lo, mid the choral angels, Joy."

The story related about the inspiration of this poem is a significant one. Bulwer-Lytton writes that Schiller had saved a poor theology student from an attempted suicide and had given him enough money to tide him over for a brief time. When Schiller repeated the incident to guests at a wedding party, a subscription was immediately made for the young man, who received funds enough to enable him to complete his studies successfully. Schiller, so the story goes, as a result of the fortunate outcome of this incident, wrote the An die Freude, and consecrated it to the spirit of humanity. The interesting point of this anecdote is its emphasis upon Schiller's identification of Joy with humanity and with humanitarian ideals, for it is Joy, not

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5Ibid., p. 332.
charity, as might be expected logically, that is made the creative motivation for the universal advancement of mankind. One of the favorite ideas of the century is explicit in this poem, for the progress of humanity is envisioned springing naturally and joyously from the progress of the individual. Schiller reconciles what are later to become the sometimes antithetical ideas of the progress of the individual and the progress of society through the power of Joy.

Schiller's concept of Joy is a part of the later eighteenth-century identification of Joy, pleasure, happiness, even luxury, with the essential dignity and worth of the individual human being, an identification which gained important impetus from the political ideals of the French Revolution, and which Tuveson notes in the study cited above. M. H. Abrams provides still another critical insight which makes this historical relationship clear. Abrams writes that "pervasively in both the verse and prose of the period, 'hope,' with its associated term, 'joy,' and its opposites, 'dejection,' 'despondency,' and 'despair,' are used in a special application, as shorthand for the limitless faith in human and social possibility aroused by the Revolution, and its reflex, the nadir of feeling caused by
its seeming failure. . . ." The "Ode to Joy" is a concrete instance of Abrams' argument: the leap from Schiller's obscure act of charity to his identification of Joy with the progress of humanity makes for a complex relationship, which the historical perspective of the French Revolution clarifies. Custom, as Schiller says, "rends us from each other," but Joy "all together brings." Custom is related to the dead hand of eighteenth-century absolutism; the concept of Joy is associated with the wave of the democratic future with its unbounded confidence in the infinite possibilities of ordinary men and women.

Schiller's concept of Joy became a factor in English literature chiefly through the aegis of Coleridge. Frederic Ewen notes that "in the aesthetics of both Coleridge and Schiller, joy (Freude) occupies a significant place. In fact, Schiller would make the end of art sheer joy. And Coleridge seems to echo him when he affirms that 'the proper and immediate object of poetry is the communication of immediate pleasure.'" Coleridge's poem, "Dejection: An Ode," is perhaps the most notable of his many attempts

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to embody the relationship of Joy and the creative imagination of the artist.

In the 1817 version of "Dejection," Coleridge describes the emotional state which he also calls "exsiccation," the spiritual dryness which is the result of a "stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief" that finds no natural outlet. Joy is irrevocably lost; feeling and intellect exist apart; natural beauty is seen, intellectually realized, but not truly felt. Coleridge says that Joy is both the source of man's glory and the "beauty-making power" which enables him to reach that intellectually perceived glory. Joy rescues the artist from a kind of moral inertia, a dreadful sense of the emptiness of life, a paralysis of the will. He addresses the Lady, who does not question the existence of this Joy, the "strong music in the soul," because she is pure of heart:

Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given Save to the pure, and in their purest hour, Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower, Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power, Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower A new Earth and new Heaven. (11. 64-69)

Purity is a necessary prerequisite of the Joy which redeems man from his state of spiritual exsiccation, for Coleridge envisions Joy as being a gift to the worthy. In this respect, Joy is somewhat analogous to the grace given man in the
Christian pattern of redemption. But this purity also denotes the essential innocence that embraces the contradictions of life and restrains the reflective powers that would destroy the experience of Joy. The failure of Joy, Coleridge says, results in the loss of the "shaping spirit of imagination," which weds man to the outer world.

Coleridge makes other explanations of the idea of Joy, deservedly less well known than "Dejection," but nevertheless important. In his Philosophical Lectures, he says that "in joy individuality is lost." This aspect of the concept of Joy has an affinity with Schiller's idea of Joy as the force that "all together brings"; Joy is the power which reconciles opposites within the poetic imagination as well as individuals within the body politic. Coleridge goes on to say that Joy "is therefore liveliest in youth, not from any principle of organization but simply from this that the hardships of life, that the circumstances that have forced a man in upon his little unthinking, contemptible self, have lessened his power of existing universally; it is that [Joy] only which brings about those passions."

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Joy is thus said to be that facet of the creative energy of the artist which enables him to avoid morbid, fruitless introspection, and to exist imaginatively in the universal life of the world around him. Coleridge implies in this passage that it is next to impossible to retain the power of Joy beyond youth, but although this is also the experience embodied in "Dejection," it is not emphasized in his other statements about Joy. Rather, Coleridge stresses the developing, maturing aspects of the idea of Joy and its power to create a kind of equilibrium within the human personality.

For example, Coleridge writes that "happiness" has four distinct states:

We need only appeal to our own consciences to know their distinctions, namely: that of a bodily [appetite], in other words a perfect correspondence of the external stimulants to the frame to be stimulated; the second, a certain joyousness, [gladness, laetitia]. . . as where Pythagoras discovered the proposition that made him cry out "Eureka". . . . The third is a speculative point which arises from the consideration of our extreme dependence upon external things. The fourth I cannot otherwise express than in the words of the liturgy as "the peace of God". . . .

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9Ibid., p. 141. W. B. Yeats echoes Coleridge's idea and indicates its possible source: "We are happy when for everything inside us there is an equivalent something outside us. I think it was Goethe said this."
Coleridge here outlines a theory of the stages of the experience of Joy which is completely embodied by Wordsworth in *The Prelude*. Joy is consistently imaged by both poets as moving along a scale, or ladder, from the realm of the purely physical to the intellectual to the meditative to the spiritual, a development also implied by Schiller in the "Ode to Joy."

Coleridge's son provides yet another of his father's attempts to define the idea of Joy: "He [Coleridge] called it joy, meaning thereby not mirth or high spirits, or even happiness, but a consciousness of entire and therefore well-being, when the emotional and intellectual faculties are in equipoise." This is perhaps the clearest statement that Coleridge provides of his concept of Joy. I. A. Richards, who quotes this passage, goes on to remark that "Coleridge's use of this word here is obviously connected with the 'deep power of joy' in 'Tintern Abbey.'" Wordsworth does indeed embody the idea of Joy in that poem, but *The Prelude* is the most crucial touchstone of the idea of Joy in the early Romantic tradition, and it will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

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It is sufficient now to observe that in the early nineteenth century Joy is identified as the power which destroys individuality, advances the cause of universality within the human realm, and even constitutes the basic dignity of man. Furthermore, Joy produces a state of mind in which emotion and intellect are held in equilibrium, and Joy is thus a condition for aesthetic production and a source of a kind of aesthetic experience. The concept of Joy achieves particular prominence in the literature of the nineteenth century, where it is made to symbolize the transcendent power peculiar to the poet, but accessible to all men through the poet, who is different only in degree, as Wordsworth assures us, from other men. A deep and enduring consciousness of Joy is the poet's hallmark, and the poetic embodiment of Joy is his greatest contribution. Joy is made a supreme and universal value; but the idea of Joy is not, therefore, a uniform concept, because the source of value shifts repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century. Wordsworth finds the highest Joy in the meditative realm of nature; Browning emphasizes the Joy derived from the union of the individual soul with another human being and with God; while Yeats rejoices in the very suffering inherent in the human condition.

Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* is largely concerned
with the theory of the image in the poetry of W. B. Yeats, but he also provides an explicit identification of the Joy motif. Kermode traces the origin of the idea of the isolated artist to its beginnings in the Romantics. The usual idea of the modern artist is a stereotyped account in which the artist is said to be cut off from the life of ordinary men, suffering alienation for the sake of his vision. Kermode identifies Joy as the power which enables the artist to attain this vision: "Some difference in the artist gives him access to this—an enormous privilege, involving joy (which acquires an almost technical sense as a necessary concomitant of the full exercise of the mind in the act of imagination). But the power of joy being possible only to a profound 'organic sensibility,' a man who experiences it will also suffer exceptionally."¹¹ Kermode points out that Wordsworth had hoped to see "joy in widest commonalty spread," but Kermode maintains that his belief, expressed in the Preface of 1800, that the poet is different in degree from other men, necessarily estranges the rest of mankind from the power of Joy, leaving the artist in isolation. Kermode believes that Keats's vision of Joy-in-melancholy is the most significant expression of the idea, more imitable than

Coleridge's "Dejection," and that it is the poet's symbol-making power, his ability to "weld joy and pleasure together in some symbolic blaze," that rescues both his Joy and his sanity.\(^{12}\)

The isolated artist communicates the Joy which he experiences to his fellows; this is his truly moral function. But Kermode points out that it must be a Joy "whose grounds are true," and Matthew Arnold's Empedocles, for example, rejects the Joy of the earlier Romantics because the state of Joy which is based upon the union and intercourse of the mind with a perceived harmony in the universe is only a momentary vision which the poet struggles to embody in the poetic image. But this vision is only an illusion, it is actually false, and the poet's only recourse is, not action, but the creation of more poems written to overcome his isolation and to recapture his Joy, if only momentarily.\(^{13}\) This, for Arnold, is an impossible solution, and Arnold's dilemma becomes the archetypal problem of the modern artist.

Not all writers, however, accept this dilemma as it is defined by Kermode. They, like Schiller, Wordsworth


Coleridge, and Browning, posit Joy as the force which promotes unity among men and universality within the poetic imagination. Joy is made a value both in and of itself, and it is also the aesthetic means to the discovery of value. Joy is at once an expressive and an instrumental experience. Wordsworth says that "we have no sympathy but what is propagated by pleasure." The poet, Wordsworth explains in the 1800 Preface, considers man as "looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies which, from the necessities of his nature, are accompanied by an overbalance of enjoyment." Alienation and isolation are thus completely foreign to the very nature of the poet as Wordsworth defines him. Only in the dimension of Joy does the poet realize the totality and the unity of human experience. The Joy created by the artist enables the reader to enter imaginatively and sympathetically into the experience of art just as the power of Joy is the instrument which enables the artist, in Coleridge's words, to exist universally in the creation of art.

Coleridge maintains that Joy results when emotion and intellect exist in a state of equipoise. This emotional and psychological equipoise, however, is harder and harder to achieve as the nineteenth century advances. The spiritual and poetic strategy of Robert Browning is the most dynamic of the Victorian attempts to fuse subject and object, reason and passion, emotion and intellect, the necessary fusion which is both the power of Joy and the result of Joy. Browning achieves this dynamic concept of Joy by rejecting the idea that equipoise is its necessary condition. He embraces the contradictions of life, its changefulness, and its ultimate imperfection as the source of the highest Joy. Indeed, Browning's rejection of this aspect of the traditional idea of Joy is an indication of his struggle to maintain the concept. The equipoise which his age generally seeks is not the psychological equipoise of the Romantics but is rather an attempt to maintain the status quo against a rising tide of liberalism. Browning's flourishing poetic period, the 1850's through the 1860's, has been called the "age of equipoise" by W. L. Burn, who notes, however, that man's ability to experience the noblest emotions is almost overly stressed and re-stressed by the mid-Victorian generation.
Professor Burn asks, "Have we here a desire to emphasize the uniqueness of Man as a being capable of the noblest feelings in contrast to a society which with its railways, steamships, telegraphs, and limited liability companies was showing dangerous signs of becoming mechanized and materialized?"\textsuperscript{15} Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the other poets of the first generation of English Romanticism use the experience of Joy chiefly as a weapon against a mechanistic philosophy; in turn, the Victorians employ the idea of Joy not only against philosophical mechanists, but also against the Utilitarian ethic and the rapidly developing technology that were beginning to dominate all areas of Victorian life. One facet of Browning's emphasis upon man's "capability for joy" is that Joy is a power and an energy which gives to the soul of man unique dignity.

Browning extends and modifies the more quiescent and meditative Wordsworthian Joy by associating Joy with energy and work. Here his affinity with the thought of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris is evident. If a machine can do work, it cannot work joyously, for joyous work, as opposed to mechanical production, is an attribute peculiar to man.

Since Joy transcends both pleasure and happiness, it indicates that man possesses a capacity for experience that similarly transcends the purely physical. Pleasure has the potentiality of enslaving man to his natural appetites, while Joy has a transcendent power which is potentially liberating but which does not reject man's total humanity. The opposition to the machine in the social theory of Carlyle, Ruskin, and Morris rests upon the idea that mechanization affects man's dignity of soul. We can say that it robs him of his Joy.

Behind this connection of Joy and work is the still more elusive connection which nineteenth-century poets make between energy and Joy. This relationship has been seen already in Schiller and in Coleridge, who identify Joy as a manifest and uniquely human energy because it rests upon a spiritual foundation. Joy is thus associated with a kind of psychic power that has a potential energy which far surpasses the energy of the machine. This power, however, is available in its greatest strength to the man who possesses an essential purity and innocence of soul. In The Victorian Morality of Art, Henry Ladd notes that a theory of energy lies behind Goethe's doctrine of work, and that Browning's will to act, as well as Carlyle's and Ruskin's gospel of work, "hold the combination of moral purity with
physical energy." If it also is remembered that Wordsworth and Coleridge stipulate purity of heart as the necessary condition for the power of Joy, the developing notion of Joy's relationship to power, purity, energy, and work is more meaningful, and mid-Victorian modifications of the idea of Joy are seen to be clearly indebted to the earlier tradition. The nineteenth-century idea of Joy, as it is variously described by Coleridge, Wordsworth, Arnold, and Browning, does not restrict the experience to a purely aesthetic realm: it is bound up within their total vision of life.

In a recent essay, Lionel Trilling traces the evolution of attitudes towards pleasure from the Romantics to the present. Just as M. H. Abrams makes clear the impetus given the concept of Joy by the optimistic social ideals of the French Revolution, Trilling suggests that the origin of the emphasis on pleasure in the chief Romantics can be found in the newly perceived importance of the common man. Before the Revolution, luxury and pleasure were largely considered to be the rights of kings and aristocrats alone and were, therefore, associated by the deprived common man.

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with dignity and with honor. Trilling explains that as a result of the Revolution, pleasure came to be associated with individual human dignity; the ability to experience pleasure was now felt to be the rightful and noble possession of peasant as well as king:

And Diderot himself, the most uncompromising of materialists, as he was the most subtle and delicate, could not have wanted a more categorical statement of his own moral and intellectual theory than Wordsworth's assertion that the grand elementary principle of pleasure constitutes the native and naked dignity of man, and it is by this principle that man knows, and lives, and breathes, and moves.  

Trilling traces the development of this Wordsworthian pleasure principle through Keats to the twentieth-century concept of the spiritual life as it is mirrored in Dostoevsky's "underground man," who scornfully rejects the idea of pleasure because it transforms him into a machine-like puppet at the mercy of whatever gratifies his appetite. Trilling suggests that modern man rejects pleasure in this sense of the term, but it can be demonstrated that he still finds room in his concept of the spiritual condition for the more transcendent idea of Joy.

The special mark of the modern age is said to be more

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17 Lionel Trilling, "The Fate of Pleasure," in Romanticism Reconsidered, p. 80.
the pursuit of meaning than the pursuit of happiness. The idea of Joy serves this aspect of the modern consciousness and is made to do double duty, for Joy is traditionally both an instrument in the artist's search for meaning, as well as the condition transcending mere happiness that rewards that quest. The drama presents what is perhaps the most accurate image of the concerns of the contemporary consciousness, and the drama of the late nineteenth century, as well as that of our own time, contains some of the most notable instances of the changing motif of the "appetite for joy." A few examples from some selected modern plays will suggest the more-or-less contemporaneous concern with the idea of Joy.

Gorki's The Lower Depths embodies the equation of Joy and work. Satin, for example, remarks to the dregs of the industrial system who share his misery that "when work is pleasure, life is a joy! When work is a duty, life is slavery!" Gorki sees the experience of Joy as a liberating factor in human life. In Jean Giraudoux's Madwoman of Chaillot, a "universal joy" is depicted that is

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reminiscent of Wordsworth's dream of "joy in widest commonalty spread." This state of Joy comes when the money lenders and money changers are driven by the Madwoman into the oblivion that awaits them beyond the trap door, and the world is made safe again for the ordinary individual. Giraudoux describes the scene as follows: "Little by little, the scene is suffused with light, faint at first, but increasing as if the very walls were glowing with the quiet radiance of universal joy." We can recognize in these examples from Gorki and Giraudoux Joy's equation with the spirit of humanity and with the revolutionary ideals first advanced in the last eighteenth century.

Chekhov, Sean O'Casey, and T. S. Eliot also evidence a concern with the idea of Joy. Chekhov's futile, tragicomic characters attempt to salvage the experience of Joy from the glory of the past. In The Cherry Orchard, for example, the orchard itself becomes a symbol of lost Joy. Anya tells her mother that the mortgaged orchard can be replaced: "We will plant a new orchard finer than this one, you'll see it, you'll understand; and joy, quiet, deep joy will sink into your heart, like the sun at evening, and you'll smile, Mama!" But Joy is an inward power, as Coleridge insists in "Dejection," and Chekhov makes it clear that the futility of Lyuboff's life cannot be salvaged from
beauty seen but not truly felt. Sean O'Casey makes as militant a stand as does any writer against those conventional forces which would destroy the Joy of life. His Cock-A Doodle-Dandy is a celebration of Joy made to counteract "the fight made by many to drive the joy of life from the hearts of men." O'Casey attempts to dignify the Joy that is rooted in man's whole-hearted acceptance of life, while T. S. Eliot's concept of Joy in Murder in the Cathedral emphasizes a more transcendent aspect of the idea of Joy. In the great speech which concludes with Thomas's quiet assertion that "human kind cannot bear very much reality," Joy is an integral part of the reality that man cannot bear, for Thomas reminds the chorus:

This is one moment,  
But know that another  
Shall pierce you with a sudden painful joy  
When the figure of God's purpose is made complete.

Eliot's Joy is the emanation of a sudden epiphany, a Joy that contains at once the sense of completion described in "Dejection" and Keats's vision of Joy-in-Sorrow.

But it is in Ibsen's Ghosts that the complex threads traced thus far are knitted together, for Ibsen equates Joy with energy, with salvation, and with work. Osvald says of Regine: "I suddenly realized that she could save me; she was so full of the joy of life!" His mother is startled
by this statement, "Joy of life--? Is there salvation in that?" And Osvald replies to Mrs. Alving, "That--and the joy of work. They're really the same thing you know." Mrs. Alving then realizes that she has been entirely unfair to both her dead husband and her dying son. Ibsen makes her see her entire life through the perspective of Joy, and she recognizes for the first time the joyous vitality of life that has eluded her.

These examples suggest the central place given the concept of Joy in the contemporary consciousness and evidence a concern with the possibilities for Joy which implicitly denies the assertion of Samuel Johnson's Imlac that "human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed." Writers in the Romantic tradition overturn this stoic dictum, despite the prophetic warnings of Carlyle, and assert the power of Joy in human life, even though the demonstration often amounts to the fact that each manifestation of Joy is also a defeat for the man, who, after all, "cannot bear very much reality." But if Joy indicates the man's finitude, it also indicates that he possesses a capacity for infinitude, and the defeat of the man is the triumph of the spirit.

This paradox, the paradox of Coleridge's "Dejection" and Arnold's Empedocles on Etna, is given further
ramification by Arthur O. Lovejoy's discussion of Coleridge's poem. Lovejoy contends that as an artist "Coleridge finds a certain triumph in defeat; for he is able to derive, and to impart, aesthetic pleasure from the very emotion aroused by his inability to experience aesthetic pleasure--or at all events, from the poetic utterance of that emotion. The Ode is a paradox among poems in that it not merely--like other poems--makes melancholy enjoyable, but achieves beauty by the description of the loss of feeling for beauty." This is the same paradox which Frank Kermode embodies in his discussion of Matthew Arnold in *Romantic Image*, and both Arnold and Coleridge found the production of poetry on the basis of this paradox impossible. Both men gradually relinquished the poetic exploration of the Joy theme, while neither gave up the attempt to posit for Joy in their prose writings another foundation, available to all men alike, more akin to the universal power of Joy described in Schiller's "Ode to Joy" and in Wordsworth's *Prelude* than to the Joy of the artist in isolation.

Coleridge's attempts at the definition of his concept of Joy have been traced from "Dejection" through the lectures

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and the table talk. A similarly brief look at Matthew Arnold's contribution to the idea of Joy will be helpful at this point, for the loss and recovery of Joy is a consistent concern of Arnold's work and provides both an interesting contrast to Browning's and another touchstone of the idea of Joy in the nineteenth century.

In Arnold's Preface to Poems (1853), the famous rejection of Empedocles on Etna is justified largely on the basis of Schiller's principle of Joy: "'All Art,' says Schiller, 'is dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make men happy. The right Art is that alone, which creates the highest enjoyment.'" Empedocles provides no enjoyment, Arnold contends, because it presents a situation "in which the suffering finds no vent in action"; this is, of course, a statement similar to that embodied by Coleridge in "Dejection," where he depicts a mood in which grief finds no natural emotional outlet. The concept of Joy continues to play an important role in Arnold's poems through the 1867 edition, for Arnold examines almost all of the conventional sources of Joy, and rejects most of them. Childhood, love, nature, religion--none of

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these offer the Joy which is essential to life.

In "To a Gipsy Child by the Sea-Shore," Arnold presents the stoical sorrow of a child, unlike the child of Wordsworth's "Intimations Ode," for "superfluity of joy" does not remove from this child's heart its instinctive knowledge of the inevitable pain and sorrow of life. In "Resignation," Arnold determines that the "general life" of man has as its secret "not joy, but peace." This idea is repeated in "Dover Beach," where the narrator sees in the world of reality "neither joy, nor love, nor light." Marguerite becomes an embodiment of Joy in "Parting," for her smile tells of "the unconquer'd joy in which her spirit dwells." But Arnold, in "A Farewell," cannot accept "the thousand sweet, still joys of such / As hand in hand face earthly life." The love which might bring Joy is impossible to the poet imprisoned within his own personality. Indeed, in "Human Life," Arnold implies that the joys of life must be consciously repudiated by the artist, for he says that as "we stream across the sea of life by night / The joys which were not for our use designed" are left behind.

Finally, to cite one last example, Arnold predicts in "Obermann Once More" that true joy will soon dawn, "one common wave of thought and joy / Lifting mankind again."
This must be a joy, Arnold insists, whose "grounds are true."21

Arnold's chief preoccupation with the idea of Joy is forecast in a letter to Clough in 1847: "Shakespeare says that if imagination would apprehend some joy it comprehends some bringer of the joy: and this latter operation which makes palatable the bitterest or most arbitrary original apprehensions you seem to me to despise."22 In a later letter to Clough, Arnold criticizes Keats and Browning, who begin, he maintains, with "no clear idea of the world," or in other words, no "bringer of the joy." Arnold writes that "as Browning is a man with a moderate gift passionately desiring movement and fulness, and obtaining but a confused multitudinousness, so Keats with a very high gift, is yet also consumed by this desire: and cannot produce the truly

21Ibid., pp. 30, 37, 161, 75, 77, 84, 191. Warren D. Anderson has attempted to define the Joy described in "Obermann Once More" by tracing its meaning to Cicero and Seneca. Anderson writes that "if we turn to the standard Roman authorities for the Stoic definition of joy-- gaudium as opposed to the agitation that is hilaritas--we find Cicero saying that joy is experienced 'when the mind is stirred by reason in a calm and steady manner,' while Seneca's definition is 'elation of the mind trusting its good and true possessions'..." Matthew Arnold and The Classical Tradition (Ann Arbor, 1965), p. 153.

22Ibid., p. 515.
Arnold praises Wordsworth because he, unlike Browning and Keats, does apprehend the "bringer of the joy." In the Preface to his edition of Wordsworth's poems, Arnold contends that the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry lies in the "extraordinary power with which Wordsworth feels the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties; and because of the extraordinary power with which, in case after case, he shows us this joy and renders it so as to make us share it." The most important fact of Wordsworth's power of Joy, according to Arnold, is that it has a universal source, available to all men. But Arnold himself cannot accept the unity of man and the natural world as the "bringer of the joy."

Arnold continues to explore the idea of Joy as the force that can overcome the multitudinousness of the nineteenth century. His final strategy is an outgrowth of his

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23 Ibid., pp. 518-519.

24 Ibid., p. 343. Arnold's emphasis on the Joy-giving power of Wordsworth's poetry is shared by many of his contemporaries. For example, John Stuart Mill in his Autobiography, sees a similar merit in Wordsworth's poetry. Mill writes that in Wordsworth's poems he "seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings. . . ."
lifelong concern with the possibilities of Christianity as the basis of a unifying cultural and spiritual experience. In the Preface to Last Essays on Church and Religion of 1877, Arnold attempts to define his concept of Joy so that its power will be truly universal. He stresses the development of the whole man, the man who possesses both virtue and virtù. Joy is identified in this essay with the Christian spirit of charity, purity, and self-renouncement, three of the great natural truths which Arnold finds in Christianity. Christ, according to Arnold, places bliss not in a future life but in self-renouncement, the giving of self to others. This self-renouncement is the "eternal life" and the "joy" of Christ; this is the Joy that Christ hoped his disciples might share. In self-renouncement, Arnold says, there is a "fount of joy," for "self-renouncement is joy. . . ."25 Christianity will survive the multitudinousness of the nineteenth century, Arnold says, and it will serve as the "bringer of the joy," because it is based in these great natural truths.

Arnold's concern with the idea of Joy, although it is not always specifically identified as such, is one of the most frequently commented upon themes in modern criticism.

25 Ibid., p. 509.
It is the focal point of Lionel Trilling's critical biography of Arnold, and it receives much emphasis in A. Dwight Culler's *Imaginative Reason*, where Arnold's poetic world is charted into three distinct regions, in each of which Joy occupies a prominent position. Culler's summary of these regions clarifies the brief survey of Arnold's use of the Joy motif in his poetry discussed above. The first stage is characterized by Culler as being "a period of joyous energy when one lives in harmony with nature"; the second and third regions of Arnold's poetic world begin, Culler says, in "a period of peace in which suffering subsides into calm and then grows up into a new joy, a joy of active service in the world." Culler explains that Arnold made truth and universality the conditions of Joy, that "the Joy of the Romantic poets, and of childhood, and of the children of the world had some element of illusion about it, of a divine illusion, which is unsatisfactory to modern man. . . . The faculty through which we are to find this [recovered joy], according to Arnold, is the 'imaginative reason.'"26

Now the "imaginative reason," as Culler demonstrates is Arnold's term for a synthesis of feeling and intellect

which he felt that modern man must effect if the "confused multitudinousness," which he associates particularly with Browning, is to be overcome. Arnold's concept of the "imaginative reason" demonstrates the continuity of the idea of Joy, for Wordsworth places the highest Joy at the disposal of the "feeling intellect," while Coleridge maintains that the experience of Joy results when emotion and intellect are held in equipoise. Furthermore, Arnold's emphasis upon the association of purity with the concept of Joy is also a development of the idea of Joy as it is described by Coleridge in "Dejection" and by Wordsworth in The Prelude.

Leon Gottfried has pointed out that there are two apparent ironies in Arnold's position toward the idea of Joy as it is summarized above. In the first place, Gottfried writes that though his loss of religious faith separated Arnold from the more traditional sources of Joy, he bases hope for recovered Joy upon the "great critical effort of European thought," the very effort which had occasioned his original loss. Gottfried also notes, in the second place, that Arnold was unable "to see beyond the power of joy to the power of Vision which Wordsworth sometimes attained." Gottfried defends Arnold's position on this second point, noting that "Arnold seemed to feel that
Wordsworth's visionary powers were less, not more significant than his power of joy, for the former was unique and idiosyncratic, while the latter was based on universal emotion and was universally accessible. The Romantic idea of Joy, however, cannot be sundered in this way, for Joy is more than "universal emotion." The visionary power cannot be separated from the power of Joy, as the references to Coleridge and to Wordsworth's Preface of 1800 make clear. Indeed, Wordsworth says that the visionary power arises in the sympathetic Joy of the poet and that the experience of Joy is, therefore, a kind of power. Arnold recognizes this aspect of the idea of Joy, but he attempts to place the source of its power in the permanent and enduring spiritual truths of Christianity. The power of partial Joy is available to the cultured and fully developed man, the man who sees life "steadily" and "whole."

Like Matthew Arnold, W. B. Yeats also evidences a concern with unity of being as an aspect of the idea of Joy, but his concept of Joy resembles Browning's more than it does that of Arnold. Ezra Pound shared his "rediscovery" of Browning with Yeats. Yeats writes in his Autobiography

that he came to view Browning as a "dangerous influence"; however, despite this disavowal, he is the modern poet who most clearly embodies the idea of Joy which Browning transmitted and transmuted from the earlier Romantic tradition. Yeats, as has been noted briefly earlier in this chapter, echoes Coleridge in his belief that Joy manifests itself in a kind of equilibrium, but he characteristically adds to the condition of equilibrium its converse. He writes that "we are happy when for everything inside us there is an equivalent something outside us. I think it was Goethe said this. One should add the converse. It is terrible to desire and not possess, and terrible to possess and not desire." Yeats maintains, therefore, that Joy is a dynamic value. He writes that "Joy is of the will which labours, which overcomes obstacles, which knows triumph." Furthermore, Yeats considers Joy to be the central emotional experience of tragedy and of life itself. In an essay on the plays of John M. Synge, he writes:

There is in the creative joy an acceptance of what life brings because we have understood the beauty of what it brings, or a hatred of death

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for what it takes away, which arouses within us, through some sympathy perhaps with other men, an energy so noble, so powerful, that we laugh aloud and mock in the terror or sweetness of our exaltation, at death and oblivion.30

Yeat's brief definition of creative joy encompasses in Joy equilibrium, universality, brotherhood, energy, and power, most of the associations of the concept which have been traced thus far through the nineteenth century.

Yeats calls the joyous acceptance of the contradictions and imperfections of the human condition "tragic joy." B. L. Reid, in his study of the Yeatsian concept of tragedy, notes that only in man's acceptance of life as tragedy did Yeats feel that "tragic joy" could be achieved. Reid believes that Yeats best expresses the conditions of his concept of Joy in the last stanza of a late poem, "A Dialogue of Self and Soul":

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything
Everything we look upon is blest. (11. 65-72)

Reid points out the "rather precise echo" of Browning's poem, "Andrea del Sarto," in the opening lines of this passage, but the equally precise echo of Wordsworth's "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" in the closing lines of Yeats's poem indicates in capsule form the major line of the development of the idea of Joy from Wordsworth to Browning to Yeats.

Browning's poetry shows a concern with the concept of Joy as intense as that of Wordsworth or Arnold or Yeats, but though his poetic themes have been well delineated by critics and scholars, polemicists and apologists, their relation to the tradition of Joy has not been explored. Browning, like the earlier Romantics, sees Joy as both an instrumental and expressive value. Joy is at once the source and the result of the "infinite moment," for in this crucial instant of time when two disparate realms are fused, all barriers between the self and the other are lowered, and a brief equipoise of intellect and feeling is attained. The experience of Joy is the impetus to the constant struggle of human life which Browning envisions extending into eternity, and the resulting Joy is an important proof that human love is truly a source of

31 Ibid., p. 206.
redemption from isolation within the individual personality. Browning maintains that one of the chief values of poetry is its demonstration of the worth of the tangible world, the "wild joys of living," as David says in "Saul." One of Browning's chief poetic preoccupations is the characterization of men and women who have failed or succeeded in maintaining an idea of Joy, and one of the important motifs of his poetry is the importance of the concept of Joy as an aspect of the artist's creative energy.

The following chapters will demonstrate that his concept of Joy as a dynamic value places Robert Browning firmly within the Wordsworthian tradition. Like Wordsworth, Browning sees the idea of Joy as a developing value, both a means and an end, part and parcel of becoming, and subject to the larger claims of reason and of love. Browning's characteristic use of the grotesque and his concern with all varieties and types of human personality are intricately related to the traditional Romantic equation of Joy with energy and with universality, an equation that is pervasive in modern poetry and drama.
CHAPTER II

WORDSWORTHIAN JOY:
THE CONCEPT OF JOY IN THE PRELUDE

Continuity is difficult to trace in an era so near our own, especially the continuity of an idea that no longer seems particularly revolutionary. The Joy motif defined here has its most important expression in The Prelude, and it is to this poem that we must turn if Browning's contribution to the Romantic tradition of Joy is to be fully explored.

Joy is a consistent concept in Wordsworth's poetry, occurring almost fifty times at the most crucial points in The Prelude alone.¹ The poet's reiteration of the word, and his insistence that Joy is "a never-failing principle," indicate its importance for the complete

¹Lane Cooper et al., A Concordance to the Poems of Wordsworth (London, 1911), p. 632. Word counts alone are an unsatisfactory index of a poet's use of a concept. With this in mind and for what it is worth, the word Joy, according to my count, occurs forty-five times in The Prelude. This count does not include the forms enjoyment, enjoy, jocund, rejoicing, rejoice, joyous, joyance, etc., which are also numerous.
comprehension of the philosophy of man and nature which is unfolded as the reader follows the growth of the poet's mind through the fourteen books of the poem. The Prelude is the locus classicus of the idea of Joy, and Wordsworth's concept of Joy contains almost all of the associations which the idea assimilated as the century advanced.

Matthew Arnold's recognition of Joy's central importance in Wordsworth's poetry has been discussed in the last chapter, and Wordsworth's use of the idea of Joy has been often noted by critics since Arnold, without, however, any real demonstration of its meaning and importance. James Benziger, for example, writes that "one can, in fact, read a dozen individual poems and find Wordsworth everywhere summoning man to joy: at times joy seems his favorite word and himself joy's greatest celebrant. But one may read as many other poems and find Wordsworth's mind gripped by those facts which make joy most difficult." And Frederick A. Pottle has pointed out the power of Wordsworth's iteration of the concept of Joy. Pottle writes that "of course it is the figures that convey the emotion. No one can make us joyful merely by using the word 'joy' or any of

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\[2\text{James Benziger, Images of Eternity (Carbondale, 1962), p. 61.}\]
its synonyms. But there is impressive agreement among readers of all periods that by giving a simple figure, reinforcing it by certain devices of varied iteration, and explicitly interpreting it, Wordsworth does evoke the emotion of joy.\textsuperscript{3}

George Wilbur Meyer, more than any other Wordsworthian since Matthew Arnold, has emphasized what he terms the poet's "Philosophy of Joy." In "The Rainbow," for example, Meyer finds the most succinct expression of this Philosophy of Joy. He writes that the "subject here is the indestructible continuity of human life. All the stages of our growth and history are joined to the other by the unifying joy we feel in our reaction to external nature, in this poem represented by the rainbow."\textsuperscript{4} Investigations of Wordsworth's vocabulary, however, have not been concerned with the meaning of his concept of Joy. Ellen Leyburn's study of recurrent words in The Prelude includes earth, substantial, being, object, sense (also discussed by William Empson in The Structure of Complex Words), form, image, presence, intercourse, and power. Miss Leyburn recognizes


\textsuperscript{4}George Wilbur Meyer, "'Resolution and Independence': Wordsworth's Answer to Coleridge's 'Dejection,'" TSE, II (1950), 54.
the importance of Wordsworth's deceptively simple diction. She argues that "the symbol and the essence symbolized are both present in the word. . . . The double intent of the diction again reveals Wordsworth's view of God and nature: nature as actuality and in her sensuous forms the means of communication between God and man." Joy, however, is not included in her discussion, nor does it receive attention in Josephine Miles's *Wordsworth and the Vocabulary of Emotion*. An examination of Wordsworth's concept of Joy in *The Prelude* is thus in order.

Wordsworth proposed to draw his poetic vocabulary from a selection of the real language of men; this theory of poetic diction presents a problem to the reader, however, precisely because words such as Joy are quite commonplace. Hugh Sykes Davies has noted the careful attention which must be paid Wordsworth's diction. Davies writes that "few of his words draw any attention to themselves, but many of them deserve and require close attention nevertheless, indeed much the more because their superficial easiness fails to give warning of their full force." Perceptive readers of


Wordsworth have long realized this fact. Robert Southey, for example, wrote to Coleridge in 1802, asking him of Wordsworth, "Does he not associate more feeling with particular phrases, and you also with him, than those phrases can convey to any one else? This, I suspect." Coleridge replied that "Wordsworth's words always mean the whole of their possible meaning."  

In *The Prelude*, Joy's possible meanings are complex and manifold, for Wordsworth formulates a scale of definition which ranges from an ingenuous Joy to a subtler, recondite Joy which links the human soul to nature and to the Divine in a kind of mystic exultation; "lively joy," of course, is a common synonym for exultation. Wordsworth associates the concept of Joy with energy, with power, with unity, and with purity. Joy is a universal and permanent power of the human soul; Joy, indeed, constitutes the essential dignity of the human being, since it is the noblest expression of the creative spirit of the imaginative power of man. In the "Prospectus" to *The Recluse*, Wordsworth says

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that intent thoughts which elevate the mind take their origin in emotion, but emotions such as Joy come from either "outward circumstance," or perhaps from the autonomous movement of the human soul within itself, through "an impulse to herself." Despite the ambiguous nature of their origin, these emotions will be the chief themes of his poetry:

Of Truth, of Grandeur, Beauty, Love, and Hope,  
And melancholy Fear subdued by Faith;  
Of blessed consolations in distress;  
Of moral strength, and intellectual Power;  
Of joy in widest commonalty spread. (ll. 14-18)

Wordsworth's emphasis on "widest commonalty" as the realm of Joy indicates the egalitarian nature of his idea of Joy, and it also indicates the temper of the revolutionary milieu in which he moved.

Wordsworth identifies one facet of his idea of Joy with the intense pleasures of boyhood and early manhood. In Book One of The Prelude, he writes of the "vulgar joy" of the child's activities:

Thus oft amid those fits of vulgar joy  
Which, through all seasons, on a child's pursuits  
Are prompt attendants, 'mid that giddy bliss  
Which, like a tempest, works along the blood.  

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8William Wordsworth, The Prelude, ed. Ernest de Selinscourt. Second edition revised by Helen Darbishire (Oxford, 1959), Book I, ll. 581-584. All subsequent references to this edition will be included in the text and will be to the 1850 version of The Prelude, unless the 1805 version is specified for purposes of comparison.
These "fits of vulgar joy" attend the ordinary pursuits of a boyhood spent in a rural environment—the hunting of birds, ice-skating, running through piles of autumn leaves, picnicking in the midst of sunlit trees, or imitating the call of birds. They are the result of the twofold function of nature which inspires in the child both a sense of awesome beauty and a sense of mysterious fear. This early Joy is most often unreflective and thoughtless; the mere sight of the sun or the moon, for example, gives rise to the ingenuous Joy described in Book Two:

In many a thoughtless hour, when, from excess
Of happiness, my blood appeared to flow
For its own pleasure, and I breathed with joy. (II, 186-188)

Wordsworth's careful differentiation of "pleasure," "happiness," and "joy" in this short passage indicates that the concept of Joy partakes of both, yet finally transcends both. The first experience of Joy is usually the result of physical activity. It is described, for instance, as resulting in "a wantonness of heart" when Wordsworth and his friends travel home from school on horseback, "a joyous band... We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand" (X, 600-604). It is also the sentimental emotion felt by the boy as he visits the old woman with whom he had lived while attending
day school.

Furthermore, the thoughtless Joy of youth is lodged deep within the memory:

--And if the vulgar joy by its own weight
Weared itself out of the memory,
The scenes which were a witness of that joy
Remained in their substantial lineaments. (I, 597-600)

The supposedly forgotten Joys become indissolubly linked to the scenes which inspire them, and Joy thus provides the human being with a permanent source of imaginative sympathy. Joy is, therefore, an integral part of the "spots of time" theory which Wordsworth advances in Book Twelve of the poem. The experience of Joy makes poetic creation possible, for it is these "spots of time," or, as Wordsworth says in The Excursion, the "spiritual power of absent things," which are the sources of poetic creation. Wordsworth asserts in the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" that not "all that is at enmity with joy" can abolish these first affections of the soul.

But Wordsworth also associates the early experience of Joy with intellectual activity, especially with the reading of imaginative literature such as The Canterbury Tales, The Arabian Nights, or Don Quixote, three works which are singled out for special praise because they enable the reader to forget self and to exist imaginatively in more universal
experience. These three are among the "golden store of books" described in Book Five:

And when thereafter to my father's house
The holidays returned me, there to find
That golden store of books which I had left,
What joy was mine! (V, 477-480)

Wordsworth contends that physical Joy cooperates with intellectual Joy. The boy reared in a strenuous natural environment for example, is more amenable to the Joy of poetry:

Is stirred to ecstasy, as others are,
By glittering verse; but further, doth receive,
In measure only dealt out to himself,
Knowledge and increase of enduring joy
From the great Nature that exists in works
Of mighty Poets. (V, 590-595)

This particular coupling of knowledge and Joy is a late addition, for in the 1805 version of the poem, Wordsworth says that such an environment enables the youth to receive "enduring touches of great joy" (V, 617); this becomes, in the passage cited above, "Knowledge and increase of enduring joy." That Wordsworth regards intellect and Joy as co-operative powers is seen, however, not only in this particular

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In the 1805 version of the poem, Wordsworth describes the books "open to my enjoyment," concluding, "What heart was mine." The use of "joy" for "heart" in the final manuscript is a result of the general poetic tightening-up which he effects in his revisions, but it also demonstrates the sense of heart-felt sympathy which the power of Joy provides the developing mind.
revision but also in an earlier passage in the same book, a passage which remains the same in both versions of the poem: "Be these the daily strengtheners of their minds / May books and Nature be their early joy!" (V, 422-423).

Wordsworth thus stresses the enduring qualities of the early Joy found through nature and through the pursuit of imaginative literature, but he also describes, in the nationalistic tones reminiscent of Schiller's "Ode to Joy," the intense Joy which arises from his love of England. He depicts the political and sociological fabric of the years of his early manhood in terms of Joy:

But Europe at that time was thrilled with joy,¹⁰
France standing on the top of golden hours,
And human nature seeming born again. (VI, 339-341)

Patriotic Joy is rooted in his love of liberty and in his recognition of the equality and brotherhood of men. The French people, for example, throw open their hearts to receive the young Wordsworth and his companion, Robert Jones:

Like bees they swarmed, gaudy and gay as bees;
Some vapoured in the unruliness of joy,
And with their swords flourished as if to fight
The saucy air. (VI, 391-394)

Wordsworth describes the universal quality of the Joy which

¹⁰In the 1805 version, "But twas a time when Europe was rejoiced." The revision to "thrilled with joy" is, again, a more emphatic statement of the idea of Joy.
he saw reflected in the faces around him at Calais: "How bright a face is worn when joy of one / Is joy for tens of millions" (VI, 348-349). To have been alive and young in the midst of these early and hopeful days of the French Revolution was "bliss" and "very Heaven," and Wordsworth admonishes the present statesmen whose foreign policy tends to the denial of the intense power of Joy in national pride and in liberty, those politicians who tear "From the best youth in England their dear pride / Their joy, in England. . ." (X, 302-303).

This nationalistic aspect of Wordsworth's idea of Joy stems partly from his disappointment in the course of the French Revolution. Coleridge had written to him in 1799 as follows: "I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse, addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachments. . . ."\textsuperscript{11} The transcendent power of Joy, not the power of political ideals, is thus utilized by Wordsworth in The Prelude, as it had been

\textsuperscript{11}Quoted in de Selincourt, p. 526.
used by the Revolutionary philosophers in its connotation of "pleasure," to indicate the true dignity, worth, and hope for the amelioration of the common man.

The early Joys, whose sources are childhood play, nature, books, or patriotic pride, are necessary components in the growth of a sensitive mind, but they are only contributory to a higher, more spiritual Joy which comes with increasing experience. In Book Eleven, Wordsworth breaks once more into his narrative to address Coleridge directly, wishing for his friend such communion with natural objects as will be "sanative," providing for Coleridge "a ladder for [his] spirit to reascend / To health and joy and pure contentedness." This ladder is the same psychological scale as that described indirectly in "Tintern Abbey." It is an analogue of the scala amoris of Platonic thought in that both the ladder of Joy and the scale of love posit as their ultimate objective a mystic and intimate union with Divine Love, union transcending the artificial limits of time and space.

In the first book of the poem, Wordsworth describes the joy of youth, but points out that he will also reveal "How other pleasures have been mine, and joys/ Of subtler origin. . ." (I, 557-558). Youthful exultation in nature's beauty is thought to be excessive by those persons who do
not understand its ministering quality:

Some called it madness—so indeed it was;
If child-like fruitfulness in passing joy,
If steady moods of thoughtfulness matured
To inspiration, sort with such a name. (III, 149-152)

"Passing joy" is fruitful because it leads to "thoughtfulness matured" and finally to "inspiration," the steps up the ladder of Joy which Wordsworth hopes that Coleridge can also reascend. Even simple walks through the lakeland hills are "richly laden with good" and are remembered "with thanks / And gratitude, and perfect joy of heart..." (IV, 133-135). In Book Three, Wordsworth notes the "just gradation" which leads to "higher things," a "permanent possession, better fruits" (III, 531-532).

Another Joy of "subtler origin" is that resulting from the spirit of brotherhood, from the love of man as man. For example, Wordsworth describes Michel Beaupuy as existing in a veritable atmosphere of Joy:

A kind of radiant joy
Diffused around him, while he was intent
On works of love or freedom, or revolved
Complacently the progress of a cause. (IX, 315-318)

Even when disillusioned by the bloody course which the French Revolution took in the hands of the Terrorists, Wordsworth is inspired by the individual excellence of men like Beaupuy:
So that disastrous period did not want
Bright sprinklings of all human excellence,
To which the silver wands of saints in Heaven,
Might point with rapturous joy. (X, 483-486)

Joy in individual achievement indicates that universal progress is still a possibility, and Wordsworth advances the power of Joy as its means.

The power of Joy receives its more universal impetus from nature. Other Joys pass with youth, enduring in the scenes to which they are linked in memory, but the love of nature for itself is the step which leads to love of man and then to the permanent union of the individual soul with the spirit that permeates nature. At this point in his development, Wordsworth describes his attitude as follows:

Nature herself was, at this unripe time,
But secondary to my own pursuits
And animal activities, and all
Their trivial pleasures; and when these had drooped
And gradually expired, and Nature, prized
For her own sake, became my joy. (VIII, 342-347)

Nature, until the poet's twenty-second year, is a "passion," a "rapture," and an "immediate love" (in the 1805 manuscript, an "immediate joy").

Joy in nature leads the poet to Joy in individual man. Wordsworth credits his sister, Dorothy, with this aspect of his development; his walks with her are described in terms of joyousness:
Between these sundry wanderings with a joy
Above all joys, that seemed another morn
Risen on mid noon; blest with the presence, Friend,
Of that sole Sister. . . . (VI, 196-199)

As a result of his wanderings with Dorothy, the poet begins
to see the dignity inherent in all men, even the humblest.
He is intrigued with the integrity of the men of the Lake­
land farms, of shepherds, and of day laborers, all of whom
are in unconscious union with nature: "Theirs is the
language of the heavens, the power / The thought, the image,
and the silent joys" (XIII, 271-272). Exultation of spirit,
joyousness, gladness, delight—these emotions come to man
through the cultivation of his response to nature, emotions
refined and purified by experience.

In The Prelude, furthermore, the concept of Joy has
an association that is firmly rooted within the tradition
of Christian meditation. Louis L. Martz, in his study of
the meditative style in seventeenth-century English poetry,
uses the words of Gerard Manley Hopkins to define the
meditative style:

Meditative style, then, is "current language
heightened," [G. M. Hopkins, Letters to Bridges,
p. 89] molded, to express the unique being of
an individual who has learned, by intense
mental discipline, to live his life in the
presence of divinity. It is not only the
style of Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw,
or Marvell: it may also be found in Robert
Southwell, Edward Taylor, Blake, Wordsworth,
Hopkins, Emily Dickinson, the later Yeats, and the later Eliot.\footnote{12Louis L. Martz, \textit{The Poetry of Meditation} (New Haven, 1954), p. 342.}

Martz's definition contains several important ideas especially pertinent to the idea of Joy in \textit{The Prelude}. In the first place, Hopkins' definition of meditative style as "current language heightened" is analogous to the then revolutionary concept of the "real language of men" advocated by Wordsworth in his \textit{Preface} of 1800. Furthermore, Wordsworth's purpose in \textit{The Prelude} is to describe the "growth of a poet's mind"--the manner in which the poet has disciplined himself to the recognition of the essential unity of man and the cosmos, or, as he says in Book Fourteen of the poem, a history of "the discipline / And consummation of a Poet's mind" (XIV, 303-304). The "presence of divinity," which Martz contends is the realm of the meditative poem, is, for Wordsworth, the realm of nature.

Wordsworth shows that a joyous, sensory appreciation of nature leads man to the apprehension of the divine. Now techniques of Christian meditation have traditionally stressed the importance of the five sense for fruitful religious contemplation, contemplation that results in a new and joyful apprehension of a revealed truth. St. Ignatius
Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises* is perhaps the best known work, largely because of its effect on the poetry of Hopkins, but Martz describes still another book more analogous to the kind of meditation found in *The Prelude*. This is Richard Baxter's *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650). Baxter attempts to present in this book a style of meditation acceptable to Protestants, but based in the meditative practices of traditional Christianity. *The Saints Everlasting Rest* was immensely popular and became a standard work which greatly influenced preachers and writers, especially those of Puritan persuasion, such as the American poet, Edward Taylor. Baxter's system of meditation results in the virtue of Joy, and *The Prelude* encompasses a similar kind of meditation leading to a similar result.

Consider, for example, the following exhortation to the practice of meditation by Baxter in *The Saints Everlasting Rest*: "Sirs, if you have never tried this art, nor lived this life of heavenly contemplation, I never wonder that you walk uncomfortably, that you are complaining, and live in sorrows, and know not what the Joy of the Saints means." Compare to this statement Wordsworth's many

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expressed desires that Coleridge will be able to mount the scale of Joy; in Book Six, for example, he comments on Coleridge's delight in natural beauty:

    Speed thee well! divide
    With us thy pleasure; thy returning strength
    Receive it daily as a joy of ours. (VI, 247-249)

Again, in Book Eleven, cited earlier in this chapter, Wordsworth expresses hopes for Coleridge's complete restoration through nature:

    Thine be such converse strong and sanative,
    A ladder for thy spirit to reascend
    To health and joy and pure contentedness. (XI, 396-398)

After hearing Wordsworth read The Prelude in 1807, Coleridge expressed his reaction in "To William Wordsworth," and he concluded the poem with this line, "And when I rose, I found myself in prayer" (l. 112), an indication of his recognition of the meditative nature of The Prelude, whose "poetic thought" he describes as being, "industrious in its joy" (l. 22).

In the traditional method of Christian meditation, sense experience was believed to be a necessary avenue for faith. Baxter, for example, writes that "Faith is imperfect, for we are renewed but in part; but sense hath its strength according to the strength of the flesh."\textsuperscript{14} Wordsworth, too,

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 171.
shows that strength comes to man through sensuous apprehension; he describes the source of a sublime Joy in Book Two as follows:

   From manifold distinctions, difference  
Perceived in things, where, to the unwatchful eye,  
No difference is, and hence, from the same source,  
Sublimier joy. . . . (II, 299-302)

In the last book of the poem, the poet commends the power of the fields "in balmy spring-time full of rising flowers / And joyous creatures." The man who has been reared in such an environment of sensuous beauty possesses the fundamental wellspring of Joy:

   But joy to him,  
Oh, joy to him who here hath sown, hath laid  
Here, the foundation of his future years! (XIV, 218-220)

Wordsworth, however, alters a very important aspect of the traditional Christian concept of Joy. Baxter, for example, writes that "the object of Faith is far off; we must go as far as Heaven for our Joyes: But the object of sense is close at Hand." ¹⁵ Baxter opposes an eternal Joy against the transitory present in order to emphasize the power of everyday things as a means of religious meditation. Wordsworth, however, insists that Joy can be had by all men, here and now, through the agency of the imagination which

¹⁵Ibid., p. 171.
re-creates the transitory Joy of sensory perception. The experience of Joy is not deferred entirely to the hereafter.

Wordsworth refers to himself as a "Pilgrim resolute" in Book One of the poem:

To the open fields I told
A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously to clothe in priestly robe
A renovated spirit singled out. (I, 50-53)

Again, in the final book of the poem, he prays that he and Coleridge might be "Prophets of Nature." Pilgrim, Priest, and Prophet—Wordsworth's emphasis on these sacramental functions of the poet places The Prelude firmly within that class of Christian spiritual quests for a kind of moral adequacy which John Holloway had described as a "Protestant kind of character building: nature makes man serious, steadfast, thoughtful, plain-living, high-minded. Another continuity with the antecedent Christian tradition shows in Wordsworth's firm insistence on the primacy, over and above the poet's feeling for nature, of man himself. Wordsworth, as is now recognized, is no nature poet."\(^{16}\) But it is also recognized that although Wordsworth is "no nature poet," he is nevertheless the poet of man and nature, for the

consciousness of the unity with nature is the initial step which leads to the perception of the unity of men.

God is specifically invoked in the sixth book of the poem as "the giver of all joy"; but God's perfect Joy comes to man primarily through nature. Wordsworth begins Book Thirteen with the following explanation:

> From Nature doth emotion come, and moods
> Of calmness equally are Nature's gift;
> This is her glory; these two attributes
> Are sister horns that constitute her strength.
> (XIII, 1-4)

The "emotion" of line one of this passage is probably Joy, for throughout the poem, calm is counterpoised against Joy as the second of nature's two chief gifts, as "emotion" is poised against "calmness" here. The "joyous murmur" of the Derwent River described in Book One, for example, is "a foretaste, a dim earnest, of the calm / That Nature breathes among the hills and groves" (I, 280-281). Nature, through the twofold ministry of the emotion of joy and the emotion of fear, mysteriously contributes to the "calm existence" of the mature poet. Thus nature brings the "joys of subtler origin" which lead to the perception of unity:

> An intellectual charm; that calm delight
> Which, if I err not, surely must belong
> To those first-born affinities that fit
> Our new existence to existing things,
> And, in our dawn of being, constitute
> The bond of union between life and joy. (I, 553-558)
Joy partakes of calm, as awe partakes of fear, and this combination leads to the culmination of growth described in Book Fourteen of the poem, the culmination which is also the goal of Christian meditation, for the power of Joy deepens as experience and knowledge increase:

And so the deep enthusiastic joy,
The rapture of the hallelujah sent
From all that breathes and is, was chastened, stemmed
And balanced by pathetic truth, by trust
In hopeful reason, leaning on the stay
Of Providence; and in reverence for duty. (XIV, 293-298)

The idea of Joy is balanced by man's reason and by his trust in higher law.

The Prelude is a quest for permanence as well as a quest for moral adequacy. In Book Three, Wordsworth says that even as a student at Cambridge he had looked for "universal things." Wordsworth discloses the discovery of a permanent source of Joy, a source both highly individual and universal. The poet records the scale of contemplation which leads to a permanent union between life and Joy, a union for the "uneasy heart" of men, a "never-failing principle":

Ye mountains! thine, O Nature! Thou hast fed
My lofty speculations; and in thee,
For this uneasy heart of ours, I find
A never-failing principle of joy
And purest passion. (II, 447-451)

At the opening of the poem, a breeze fans the poet's cheek,
a breeze which is "half-conscious of the joy it brings."
In the last book of the poem, an opposite situation is
described, a mountain climb on a "breezeless summer night."
As the moon flashes out from behind some murky clouds,
the poet is made aware of yet another rung of the scale
of Joy, a step open, however, only to those endowed with
special gifts. This vision of Mount Snowden becomes
"the emblem of a mind / That feeds upon infinity":

A mind sustained
By recognitions of transcendent power,
In sense conducting to ideal form,
In soul of more than mortal privilege. (XIV, 74-77)

This "soul of more than mortal privilege" is marked by the
power of imagination, by the "feeling intellect":

And he whose soul hath risen
Up to the height of feeling intellect
Shall want no humbler tenderness. (XIV, 225-227)

This power of "feeling intellect" is the highest rung of
the ladder of Joy, available only to the man whose imagin­
ative consciousness envelops all the lesser stages of human
Joy. This faculty is the special attribute of the poet.

The theme of Joy in The Prelude moves along a scale
from the vivid emotions of unthinking pleasure in early
youth, to the Joy rising from the intellectual apprehension
of the unity of man and nature, to a final joyful sense of
thanksgiving. The poet finds in nature a source of value
which leads to a transcendent Joy, a source thus universal and permanent, but available in its ultimate power only to the "feeling intellect," the possession of the man of creative imagination. To the man who possesses this faculty, all creation seems to be suffused in an ambient Joy. The imaginative power, fed by Joy and calm, joins life and Joy into a final mystic state of beatitude:

Wonder not
If High the transport, great the joy I felt,
Communing in this sort through earth and heaven
With every form of creature, as it looked
Towards the Uncreated with a countenance
Of adoration, with an eye of love,
One song they sang, and it was audible.
Most audible, then, when the fleshly ear,
O'ercome by humblest prelude of that strain,
Forgot her functions, and slept undisturbed. (II, 409-418)

This experience of the unity of life and Joy is consistent in Wordsworth's poetry. In the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality," the shepherd boy who exists in perfect harmony with the May morning is called a "Child of Joy," and the poet insists that the years that bring the calmness of the "philosophic mind" do not destroy the essential beatitude, the "perpetual benediction," of the early experience of Joy. The continuity of his thought is also demonstrated by the following lines from "Tintern Abbey," where Joy and calm are said to yield the power of the perception of unity:
We are laid asleep
In body and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things. (ll. 46-50)

In *The Excursion*, the poet is struck by the sight of the rising sun and describes a feeling in which his "spirit was entranced / With joy exalted to beatitude" (IV, 118-19). Thus *The Prelude* is, in large part, Wordsworth's fullest exploration of his lifelong concern with the ascent of the ladder of Joy, the scale described by Coleridge in *The Philosophical Lectures* as culminating in the perfect peace of God.

Besides constituting a psychological and spiritual ladder for the individual soul, Joy is identified as the power which unifies man with nature and man with man. Schiller and Coleridge also stress this unifying function of the idea of Joy. Wordsworth attributes the greatest Joy expressed in the 1805 manuscript of *The Prelude* to his seventeenth year, when, from the experience of the sympathetic social principle of life, or from a kind of revelation (again, as in *The Recluse*, the ultimate source of Joy is relegated to this twofold alternative), he feels a "bliss ineffable": "I saw one life, and felt that it was joy." The highest Joy is a result of union with other men.
and communion with God. This experience of the unity of life, described in Book Eight, has its most powerful manifestation when Wordsworth lingers among the crowds on London streets, and feels "union and communion" with all humanity. In the 1805 version of the poem, Wordsworth says that the experience of unity leads to the Joy of self-knowledge:

When strongly breath'd upon
By this sensation, whencesoe'er it comes
Of union or communion doth the soul
Rejoice as in her highest joy: for there,
There chiefly, hath she feeling whence she is
And passing through all Nature rests with God. (VIII, 831-836)

The concept of the soul rejoicing "as in her highest joy" is given even more emphatic expression in the final version of this passage:

The soul when smitten thus
By a sublime idea, whencesoe'er
Vouchsafed for union or communion, feeds
On the pure bliss, and takes her rest with God. (VII, 672-675)

The union and communion which is manifested in Joy is thus a "sublime idea."

The experience of Joy leads not only to the perception of unity within the cosmos, but also to a sense of integrity within the human soul itself and a sense of identity with the divinity which pervades all things. This twofold sense of the probity of the individual human soul and of generic
human nature receives its chief expression in Book Eight, as is seen above, but earlier, in the 1805 version of this book, Wordsworth explains that he was endowed with a capacious and ample mind which enabled the experiences of nature and of intellect to exert upon his total consciousness the following perception:

The Human nature unto which I felt
That I belong'd, and which I lov'd and revernc'd
Was not a punctual Presence, but a Spirit
Living in time and space, and far diffus'd.
In this my joy, in this my dignity
Consisted. . . . (VIII, 761-766)

The Joy of God's presence creates a consciousness of human dignity which transcends all human compacts, a sense of integrity and worth at once highly individual and universal.

Like Coleridge in "Dejection," Wordsworth also maintains that purity of soul is a necessary concomitant for Joy. In Book One, for example, the "joys of subtler origin" are connected with "hallowed and pure motions of the sense," and in Book Two, "sublimer joy" results from moments of vision which are not only "kindred to [the] purer mind," but also indicative of the sublime dignity of the soul. This purity is the innocence that accepts the complexities of human experience, content to bear these complexities as "the burthen of the mystery," but it is also indicative of the traditional Christian concept of Joy as a virtue related
to moral purity and innocence.

Joy is also associated in The Prelude, as it is to be throughout the nineteenth century, with energy and with power. In the opening lines of the poem, energy is the "gift" that consecrates the Joy of leisure time, the coming liberty, that the poet anticipates. In Book Five, after setting up his theory of excellence in education, Wordsworth makes an even more explicit connection of Joy with power:

May books and Nature be their early joy!
And knowledge, rightly honoured with that name--
Knowledge not purchased by the loss of power! (V, 423-425)

The "deep power of joy" must not be enervated by the identification of knowledge with the analytical reason alone. Furthermore, in Book Two of the poem, Wordsworth carefully examines the reciprocal nature of the give-and-take between nature and mind. The child perceives an active universe through the impetus of Joy:

For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both. (II, 255-258)

In the 1805 manuscript, the growing faculties of sense which impart this spiritual power are specifically enumerated: grief, exultation, fear, and joy (II, 271).

In the concluding book of the poem, when Wordsworth
formulates the effect that Mount Snowden had upon him and begins his description of the imagination and the "higher mind," he once again elucidates the contribution of "the principle of joy," for the power of love itself largely results from the power of Joy in beauty:

To fear and love,
To love as prime and chief, for there fear ends,
Be this ascribed; to early intercourse
In presence of sublime or beautiful forms,
With the adverse principles of pain and joy—. (XIV, 162-166)

R. D. Havens has discussed Wordsworth's own designation of The Prelude as a poem which chiefly describes the growth of power, and in his explanation of "the ministry of fear," Havens writes that "fear is an emotion called forth by the presence or the thought of power. Even the joy which is often derived from the contemplation of power partakes (as most of the keener pleasures have in them an element of pain) to some extent of fear." Havens uses the passage quoted above to reinforce the chief argument of this chapter of his book, the explanation of Wordsworth's idea of the contribution of the emotion of fear to the imagination and the soul of man. Havens omits in his quotation, however, Line 163 of this passage, "To love as prime and chief, for

there fear ends." This line would seem to be the real core of the passage, for Wordsworth specifically says that fear is obliterated by the power of love. Furthermore, Joy is not only "derived from the contemplation of power," as Havens says, but Joy is power, a power identified in this same passage as partaking of beauty itself. Like Coleridge, Wordsworth maintains that Joy has intrinsic expressive value, but also that Joy is an instrumental value which leads to the perception of beauty and of love.

Wordsworth's equation of Joy with power can best be demonstrated through a comparison of the two versions of a passage in Book Three of the poem. The 1805 manuscript reads as follows:

Youth should be aw'd, possess'd, as with a sense
Religious, of what holy joy there is
In knowledge. (III, 395-397)

In the revised manuscript, the idea of Joy is stated more obliquely:

Youth should be awed, religiously possessed
With a conviction of the power that waits
On knowledge. (III, 390-392)

"Holy joy" is thus revised to "a conviction of power" in the final version of the poem, indicating Wordsworth's concept of the symbiotic relationship between Joy and power. Still another example of this equation is found in Book Two, where the assertion of the "sublimer joy" found in the "manifold distinctions" of nature is made possible through
the "most watchful power of love," through "the visionary power." Matthew Arnold's attempt to unite the "sublimer joy" with "the visionary power" found in the natural truth of Christianity is a development of this aspect of Wordsworth's idea of Joy.

The idea of Joy is identified with the imagination in Book Six of The Prelude. In the manuscript of 1805, Wordsworth says that the imagination reveals to the soul that its destiny "is with infinitude, and only there." Possessing this knowledge, the soul can rest content with no other outward sign of its fate:

That may attest its prowess, blest in thoughts
That are their own perfection and reward
Strong in itself, and the access of joy
Which hides it like the overflowing Nile. (VI, 545-548)

This magnificent image of "the access of joy" flowing round the soul as the Nile overflows its banks is revised to "beatitude" in the 1805 manuscript. In many of his revisions, Wordsworth gives his poem a more Christian spirit, and this is an example of that tendency. The revision of "access of joy" to "beatitude," however, is also another example of the presence of the traditional implications of the idea of Joy, for the Christian concept of Joy includes a final state of beatitude, as the passages previously examined in Baxter's The Saints Everlasting Rest
demonstrate. Wordsworth's idea of Joy draws upon a cultural source that strengthens its power and appeal.

Wordsworth refuses to define the ultimate source of Joy in The Prelude, other than to maintain that it arises from union and communion with all things. In a sonnet written between 1812 and 1815, "Surprised by Joy," the poet seems to imply that Joy is a gift or revelation, the result of what James Joyce calls an epiphany; this is much the same idea which Coleridge expresses in "Dejection."

Wordsworth's poetry is true to the complexities of the human condition, and the experience of Joy recorded in The Prelude cannot be reduced to formula, aesthetic or spiritual. This is the ultimate power of the idea of Joy. If all aspects of human experience could be summarized in convenient equations or in the language of Blue Books, as many nineteenth-century Positivists thought, the nature of man itself becomes little more than another problem awaiting final solution. Wordsworth refuses to accept such a reading of human life. Joy's source thus remains deep within the consciousness, but Wordsworth's uniquely personal exploration of his own consciousness demonstrates that dignity of soul, unity, power, energy, and purity accrue to man through and with the power of Joy.
CHAPTER III

WORDSWORTH, BROWNING, AND "KINDRED JOY":
THE JOY MOTIF IN BROWNING'S POETRY, 1833-1850

Wordsworth says in Book Four of *The Excursion* that man who communes with natural forms will be led to find "kindred joy" in his fellow men:

--Needs must feel
The joy of that pure principle of love
So deeply, that, unsatisfied with aught
Less pure and exquisite, he cannot choose
But seek for objects of a kindred love
In fellow-natures and a kindred joy. (IV, 1212-1217)

Wordsworth uses a phrase in this passage that appeals to other Romantic poets as well. Shelley says in *The Defence of Poetry* that poetry must "bear news of kindred joy." The "kindred joy" of Wordsworth and Shelley is embodied by Browning in his poetic characters. The source of Joy moves from Wordsworth's meditative realm of nature to Browning's world of men and women, but Browning continues to employ the essentials of the Romantic idea of Joy.

Browning, together with Tennyson and Arnold, attempted to avoid the introspection which marked, and, they felt marred, the poetry of the earlier Romantics. The search for
a more objective poetic form stems at least partly from the fact that *The Prelude* was not a part of their inheritance from the earlier tradition, for *The Prelude* was not published in its entirety until after Wordsworth's death in 1850, a fact which Morse Peckham has called a tragedy for the subsequent course of English literature. Browning, for example, was thirty-eight years old in 1850 and had been publishing his poetry since 1833: the poetry he composed from 1833 to 1850 reworks many of the same psychological and emotional problems which Wordsworth explores in *The Prelude* without the consummate artistry of Wordsworth's poetic introspection. Tennyson's major poem, *In Memoriam*, was published the same year as *The Prelude*, and Arnold, who later claims that Wordsworth's true genius lay in his shorter poems, was, judging from the entries in his *Note-Books*, chiefly impressed by the more didactic passages of *The Prelude*. Herbert Lindenberger's analysis of the Victorian reaction to the poem makes the following summation:

The poor reception of *The Prelude* in 1850 is rooted in causes more fundamental than its generic strangeness. In the half century between its composition and publication England had passed through political, technological, and social changes far vaster in scale than during any comparable period in her history. . . . To an age preparing to demonstrate its progress and cosmopolitanism at the Great Exhibition Wordsworth's world must have seemed
quaint and provincial. Yet no review, not even the Examiner, was willing to recommend it as a period-piece—it was obviously too introspective to stand next to such vivid reconstructions as A Tale of Two Cities and The French Revolution.¹

Too introspective—this is the heart of the matter, for it is introspection which plagues Browning in Pauline, Tennyson in poems like "The Palace of Art," and Arnold in Empedocles on Etna. Browning's Pauline is the poem which elicited John Stuart Mill's now famous comment that the author of Pauline is "possessed with a more intense and morbid self-consciousness than I ever knew before in any sane human being."² As William Clyde DeVane points out, Pauline is Browning's autobiography to his twentieth year, his Prelude and Sartor Resartus, as the late Parleyings are a more objective autobiography of his own mind. Although Browning certainly changed the form of his introspection, the Wordsworthian impulse to explore the mind of man remains dominant in his concept of poetry. J. Hillis Miller utilizes a striking phrase in describing Browning's characteristic poetic method as being "the introspection


Browning's idea of Joy is clarified if it is explored as it developed within the Wordsworthian-Romantic tradition, although Browning was probably as much influenced by the emphasis on Joy which pervaded the Zeitgeist as he was by a detailed knowledge of Wordsworth's poetry. Browning became personally acquainted with Wordsworth when the latter had assumed the rather aloof stance of the Laureateship; he attacked Wordsworth's political conservatism in "The Lost Leader," an attack which he later regretted, and he assumed an important position in the London Wordsworth society in his later years, an uncharacteristic public act. For his part, Wordsworth (and his position is not unique) found Browning's early poetry obscure; in a rather rare flash of humor, he writes at the time of the marriage of the Brownings that it is probably a very good match since both are unintelligible to anyone else.

Elizabeth Barrett's letters show far more veneration for the elderly Wordsworth than do Browning's, at least partly because Wordsworth was a personal friend of her

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cousin, John Kenyon. Indeed, Elizabeth Barrett singles out a statement by an obscure Victorian critic named Mr. Gurney which has been used again and again to contrast the two poets. She writes, "I have just been looking at a preface of some poems by some Mr. Gurney where he speaks of 'the reflective wisdom of Wordsworth and the profound psychological utterances of a Browning'. . . ." The "reflective wisdom" of the Wordsworthian-Romantic tradition has often been played off against Browning's "psychological utterances" by critics since Mr. Gurney, but to do so distorts not only the genius of both Wordsworth and Browning, but also the character of English Romanticism as well. Like Arnold, Ruskin, Mill, George Eliot, and other Victorians, Browning had to come to terms with the Wordsworthian tradition which dominated his era. He evolved a poetic theory that is strikingly similar to that of Wordsworth. In their approach to the basic principles of poetic creation, to the dramatic possibilities of lyric form, to the importance of isolated moments of time, to the nature of poetic truth, and to the dramatic characterization that "makes a case," Browning and Wordsworth have analogous positions.

One of Browning's few extended prose comments about

4 The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett (New York, 1899), I, 73.
his concept of poetry occurs in 1855 as a result of John Ruskin's charge of obscurity. Browning replies to Ruskin: "I know that I don't make out my conception in my language, all poetry being a putting the infinite within the finite."\(^5\) This statement is comparable to Wordsworth's much expressed concern with the inadequacy of the poet's language when dealing with the "fallings from us, vanishings" that characterize the Romantic sense of infinity. Browning even employs the metaphor of a mountain climb, the usual Romantic symbol of infinity, in his explanation to Ruskin of the manner in which his poetry should be read: he advises Ruskin to make the mental leaps that his diction sometimes requires without poking his alpenstock into every nook and gorge. Wordsworth, to single out one example, explained to Walter Savage Landor, Browning's close friend, that "even in poetry [it] is the imaginative only, viz., that which . . . turns upon infinity, that powerfully affects me . . . passages where things are lost in each other, and limits vanish, and aspirations are raised."\(^6\) Furthermore,  


\(^6\)Quoted in Havens, p. 240.
Browning's idea of the basic principle of aesthetic production is similar to that expressed by Wordsworth in the Preface to Lyrical Ballads. In a letter written to Elizabeth Barrett in 1845, Browning says: "'Reflection' is exactly what it [the creative process] names itself—a re-presentation, in scattered rays from every angle of incidence, of what first of all became present in a great light, a whole one." Browning's idea of poetic re-presentation of an experience which first flashes upon the poetic imagination as a whole is essentially the Wordsworthian concept of emotion that is recollected in tranquillity until a reaction causes the tranquillity to disappear, and a kindred emotion comes into existence. Browning's use of "re-presentation" and "reflection" as names for the creative process is analogous to Wordsworth's use of "recollection" and "reaction," both pairs of words implying the active mind of the poet engaged in the re-creation of experience.

Browning's use of the dramatic monologue and the dramatic lyric are anticipated by Wordsworth. Both poets wrote plays and were interested in the dramatic possibilities of lyric form, possibilities called forth by the poetic

7The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, I, 98.
exploration of the human mind. Wordsworth gives one expression of his idea of the dramatic principle of poetry in a letter to Coleridge in 1808: "If the Poet is to be predominant over the Dramatist, —then let him see if there are no victories in the world of spirit, no changes, no commotions, no revolutions there, no fluxes and refluxes of the thoughts." Browning's *Paracelsus*, a forecast of his poetic career, is just such a drama of "the world of spirit" as Wordsworth describes in this letter. In his *Preface* to the poem, Browning explains that it is an attempt "to display somewhat minutely the mood itself in its rise and progress" without the usual machinery of the drama. From this early base, Browning slowly evolved the dramatic monologue as his most successful poetic medium.

Browning is also in the Wordsworthian tradition in his utilization of a moment of historical or personal crisis as the occasion of his dramatic monologues. Hugh Sykes Davies, in his discussion of Wordsworth's kinship with some of the theories of Freud, contrasts their stress on decisive moments with writers in the empiricist tradition who employ the stream-of-consciousness technique as the most satisfactory method for depicting the flux of the

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moments that constitutes reality, each moment receiving as much emphasis as the next. In contrast to this latter technique, Davies writes that the Wordsworthian tradition is marked by the following traits:

A writer inclined to agree with Wordsworth and Freud will need to find the means of describing the more crucially formative moments and impulses of his own mind, and the minds he wishes to represent. The unselectiveness, the evenness of the "stream of consciousness" may serve him occasionally for preparatory and explanatory passages of experience, for those in which the climactic events are prepared and presaged; but for the climactic events themselves, for the crucial "spots of time," his technique will need to be more traditional, for it cannot but select, shape and pose almost in isolation those moments which were so highly selected, so specially shaped and isolated in experience.®

The concept of time which underlies Browning's choice of climactic moments for his dramatic monologues is analogous to Wordsworth's. Browning shapes the material of his poems into carefully detailed, artistic patterns through the use of traditional poetic techniques so that the crucial nature of the moment itself becomes the main aesthetic goal. Browning, like Wordsworth, believes that certain moments of time are stamped with the special mark of infinitude which yields a sudden revelation of Joy. His concept of the climactic "infinite moment" thus occupies as central a

®Davies, p. 171.
position in his poetic theory as do the "spots of time" in the Wordsworthian aesthetic.

Wordsworth and Browning, furthermore, have comparable concepts of the nature of poetic truth. Aubrey de Vere, for example, recollects that Wordsworth often spoke of the meaning of "truth" as follows: "Truth in its largest sense, as a thing at once real and ideal, a truth including exact and accurate detail, and yet everywhere subordinating mere detail to the spirit of the whole--this, he affirmed, was the soul and essence not only of descriptive poetry, but of all poetry."\(^\text{10}\) This Wordsworthian concept of truth is similar to Browning's; for example, he insists that he has presented truth in The Ring and the Book, although he has subordinated some details of his sources "to the spirit of the whole." Like Wordsworth, however, he maintains that this is not a falsification of essential truth.

Browning is also firmly within the Wordsworthian tradition in his emphasis upon man's imaginative apprehension of truth, an analogue of the previous point. As W. C. DeVane points out, "Man is distinguished from the rest of creation by the mind--which to Browning means not the intellect, but the emotions or the imagination--and it is

\(^{10}\) Quoted in Havens, p. 248.
through this faculty that he attains contact with God. . . . He does not want intellectual comprehension; he wants to experience through his emotions that he has a kinship with God.  

Wordsworth demonstrates in The Prelude that Joy is the wellspring of this power of the emotional and moral consciousness of the presence of divinity, and Browning continues this Romantic tradition.

Like Wordsworth, Browning is attracted to the dramatic characterization of the somewhat disreputable character: his Victorian admirers were shocked by his apparent endorsement of the lovers in "The Statue and the Bust," of Bishop Blougram, or of Don Juan in Fifine at the Fair. Wordsworth's contemporaries displayed a similar attitude, as the following remarks by R. D. Havens demonstrates:

His tolerance of sexual irregularities shocked Miss Fenwick, and his apparent indifference to lying in "Beggars" and its sequel "Where Are They Now?", to stealing in "The Two Thieves" and "The Farmer of Tylbury Vale," and to drunkenness in "The Waggoner" may have shocked others. In these poems, he intended to point out that, reprehensible as such sins are, that is not the whole story—as Godwin might have supposed. Where the reason saw only lying, thieving, and riot, the heart and the aesthetic sense saw beauty, joy, youthful exuberance, kindness, or the sheer delight of living and these are so precious that we must prize them wherever they appear and must make the best of their possessors.

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12 Havens, p. 147.
This explanation of Wordsworth's aims is much the same as that employed by modern Browning apologists, and if Miss Fenwick sounds like many of Browning's Victorian admirers, we forget that Wordsworth lived his last twenty or so years in the Victorian era.

Thus the critical impulse, dominant from the time of Elizabeth Barrett's Mr. Gurney, which relegates "reflective wisdom" to Wordsworth and "psychological utterances" to Browning is misleading and simplistic. Wordsworth is deeply interested in psychological processes in The Prelude and The Excursion; indeed, The Prelude is poetic "depth psychology" at its finest. He analyzes states of mind in the Lyrical Ballads, and he creates a cast of characters as grotesque as that of Browning: Betty Foy, Martha Ray, the Cumberland Beggar, and Peter Bell. Certainly Browning's departures from the earlier tradition must be recognized and the relationship not overstated. Browning's early poetic career, however, can be seen as an attempt to come to grips, as it were, with the best of the Wordsworthian tradition, as an effort to unite the psychological utterances of the "objective poet" with the reflective wisdom of the "subjective poet" into the "whole poet," whom he
describes in the *Essay on Shelley*. Browning's concept of kindred Joy contains three of the major elements which dominate the Wordsworthian-Romantic idea of Joy. Joy results from the harmony of soul and body, from the kinship of man with man, and from the unity of God and man.

*Pauline*, *Paracelsus*, and *Sordello* are Browning's earliest attempts at the formulation of the possibilities of the power of Joy in human life and are comparable in his poetic career to *The Prelude* in Wordsworth's. Like Wordsworth, Browning explores his own mind in order to establish the nature of his moral and aesthetic beliefs, and he examines the necessary conditions for the idea of Joy as thoroughly as does Wordsworth in *The Prelude*. The speaker of *Pauline* voices one of the central themes of the three poems when the realization of his own mortality flashes upon him: "I cannot be immortal, taste all joy."  

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13 Thomas J. Collins has recently summarized the critical confusion surrounding this essay. His own position is that Browning converts Shelley into a "'whole poet' who possesses both objective and subjective powers." However, Collins maintains that Browning "is not really talking about Shelley at all, but projecting into the name and purpose of Shelley the ideals and aspirations which he himself had assimilated by 1851," in *Robert Browning's Moral-Aesthetic Theory, 1833-1850* (Lincoln, 1967), p. 114.

This statement is more than the adolescent awakening of Robert Browning. It is the chief moral and aesthetic problem of the artist as Browning sees him, for Browning maintains throughout his career that the artist must develop a deep and humble consciousness of the limits of his own consciousness. The artist has unique powers which impose unique responsibilities; he, more than other men, must have, as Paul Tillich has phrased it for twentieth-century man, the "courage to accept his finiteness."

Browning struggles with this problem from the time of the publication of *Pauline* in 1833, to the completion of *Sordello* in 1840.

The moral-aesthetic resolution of these three poems centers, as Thomas J. Collins observes, upon the regenerative experience of the central figure in each poem. Collins points out that through this regenerative experience, the poet discovers the following:

Infinites are unattainable to man in his present state of imperfection; imperfection qualified by the necessity and inevitability of progress, is the law of life; progress, through imperfection, depends on the recognition that the flesh is not a "carnal mesh," but a temporal element which can contribute to man's ultimate perfection; and finally, God rejoices and resides in all aspects of his creation even to the
extent of allowing man, in his weakness, to reflect his grandeur.¹⁵

A central perception in Browning's early poetry, in other words, is that the poet must both nurture and discipline his consciousness to the perception of the Joy immanent in the world around him.

In Pauline, however, Browning does not effect this resolution in his poet-hero. The speaker of the poem attempts to define the character of his past and present life for the ever-patient Pauline, and Joy occupies a central place in each stage of the narrative. Browning's speaker dreams of a Shelleyan Utopia in which "Men were to be as gods and earth as heaven." This dream, which will encompass all Joy, is to be realized through the study of "real life":

Mankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys; And, as I pondered on their ways, I sought How best life's end might be attained--an end Comprising every joy. I deeply mused. (ll. 444-447)

His Utopian dream is soon shattered, however, by the exigencies of life in the world.

The next phase of his quest takes the speaker of the poem to the world of nature. Here, in a setting reminiscent of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," he finds a clump of trees

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¹⁵Collins, p. 43.
set atop a hill, overlooking cottages and hedgerows. This
closed-in natural setting affords security, but unlike
Wordsworth in "Tintern Abbey," Browning's speaker has no
experience of "the deep power of joy":

The bushes close and clasp above and keep
Thought in—I am concentrated—I feel;
But my soul saddens when it looks beyond:
I cannot be immortal, taste all joy. (ll. 807-810)

The consciousness of the existence of Joy only reminds him
of his own finitude, a fact which he is unable to accept
at this point in his development. The speaker of the poem
tells Pauline that he will "look within no more" (l. 937),
a determination that indicates that Browning, like Coleridge,
sees the power of Joy as the primary condition for the
avoidance of morbid introspection.

The speaker of Pauline, despairing because the power
of Joy seems to be inextricably tied to youth, says that
he walks a kind of spiritual tightrope:

I knew while youth and health so lifted me
That spite of all life's nothingness, no grief
Came nigh me, I must ever be light-hearted;
And that this knowledge was the only veil
Betwixt joy and despair: so if age
Came, I should be left--a wreck linked to a soul. (ll. 492-497)

The force which is to be the redeeming factor in his life
is his escape with Pauline to a primitive world, where they
will experience "perfect joy." The speaker of the poem
concludes, "No less I make an end in perfect joy" (l. 994), and this phrase is used as a refrain in the last section of the poem. If his dream of love fades, he will, nonetheless, "end in perfect joy"; if a higher goal arises only to elude his grasp, he will, again, "end in perfect joy."

Browning, however, does not concretely embody this perfect Joy within the speaker's experience. The assertion of Joy in Pauline is thus weak and unconvincing, although the poem does demonstrate that Browning recognizes the experience of Joy to be a central value in the development of the poetic mind. The speaker of the poem identifies his "first free joy" (l. 103) with the realization of his poetic powers. He is unable, however, to bridle this imaginative energy into an achievement of Joy:

I envy—how I envy him whose soul
Turns its whole energies to some one end,
To elevate an aim, pursue success
However mean! So, my still baffled hope
Seeks out abstractions. I would have one joy,
But one in life, so it were wholly mine,
One rapture all my soul could fill. (ll. 604-610)

These "struggling aims" end in the assertion of "perfect joy," but this Joy is actually only another abstraction of an obscure and frightening reality that the speaker of the poem, and Browning himself, cannot now face with mature composure and ready acceptance.
In *Paracelsus*, published in 1835, two years after *Pauline*, Browning again attempts to define the place of Joy in the aesthetic and moral realms, this time more successfully. As the poem opens, Paracelsus refuses to admit the central importance of Joy to the human soul. When rebuked by Festus, his oldest friend, for his intellectual pride, Paracelsus replies that he is indeed aware of the "simple joy," of "all the joys" that he must renounce in order to carry out his plan to pursue perfect knowledge. He argues that Festus does not understand his dedication to intellectual pursuits:

> When Festus learns  
> That every common pleasure of the world  
> Affects me as himself; that I have just  
> As varied appetite for joy derived  
> From common things; a stake in life, in short,  
> Like his; a stake which rash pursuit of aims  
> That life affords not, would as soon destroy. (I, 89-95)

Paracelsus, despite the warnings of Festus, does not believe that his arduous course necessitates the quenching of his "appetite for joy." He proudly longs for some "real sacrifice to make" for his goal; he declares that Festus's "friends the sages threw their joys away, / While I must be content with keeping mine" (I, 658-659). He will undertake the quest for perfect knowledge alone, confident that he will attain perfect Joy from perfect knowledge.

In the second canto of the poem, Paracelsus has failed
in the search for perfect knowledge that he began fourteen years before. He realizes that his quest has been futile, partly because he has neglected his own need of Joy:

It has been monstrous: yet, till late, my course
So ardently engrossed me, that delight,
A pausing and reflecting joy, 't is plain,
Could find no place in it. (II, 269-272)

He hopes that the God "who clothes summer" can also renew him. Aprile, the Shelleyan poet, enters the poem at this point and identifies himself as one who aspired to infinite love, as Paracelsus has sought to achieve infinite knowledge. Aprile declares to Paracelsus that his own failure lay in the rejection of Joy:

--Because I could not curb
My yearnings to possess at once the full
Enjoyment, but neglected all the means
Of realizing even the frailest joy. (II, 388-391)

Paracelsus, however, distorts this counsel into a determination to seek, as Aprile has futilely sought, perfect love. Again his quest is unsuccessful. He explains to Festus, in Canto Three of the poem, that his search for infinite love has been in vain because he has made Joy only an auxiliary and peripheral part of his life:

That 't was my purpose to find joy or grief
Solely in the fulfillment of my plan
Or plot or whatsoever it was; rejoicing
Alone as it proceeded prosperously,
Sorrowing then only when mischance retarded
Its progress. (II, 264-269)
Paracelsus, however, refuses to act upon the basis of this insight. He has not yet advanced beyond his initial position because he still ignores the power of Joy in human life.

In Canto Four, Paracelsus desperately resorts to wine drinking in an effort to deaden his sensibilities, and to cynicism in an attempt to justify the causes of his failure. Festus stresses the necessity of the experience of Joy, but Paracelsus drunkenly replies to him:

Aprile was a poet, I make songs—
'T is the very augury of success I want!
Why should I not be joyous now as then? (IV, 225-227)

Festus angrily tells Paracelsus that he has destroyed his capacity for Joy:

Joyous! and how? and what remains for joy?
You have declared the ends (which I am sick
Of naming) are impracticable. (IV, 228-230)

But Paracelsus tenaciously holds to the belief that he can successfully yoke together his double aim: "I seek to know and to enjoy at once" (IV, 240). He slowly regains his power of reason as this canto advances, but he declares again to Festus that he will maintain his original goal:

I told you once, I cannot now enjoy,
Unless I deem my knowledge gains through joy;
Nor can I know, but straight warm tears reveal
My need of linking joy to knowledge:
So, on I drive, enjoying all I can,
And knowing all I can. (IV, 360-365)
Festus offers Arnoldian advice:

Forswear the future; look for joy no more,
But wait death's summons amid holy sights,
And trust me for the event—peace, if not joy. (IV, 530-532)

Paracelsus, however, refuses to forego the Joy that is the highest fruit of love and knowledge.

In the fifth and final canto of the poem, which Browning entitles "Paracelsus Attains," the true nature of the Joy that has eluded him is recognized and defined by Paracelsus. Man must struggle, he says, with the forces of nature that determine the conditions of his humanity if he is to obtain the Joy that dignifies his soul:

And grappling Nature, so prevail on her
To fill the creature full she dared thus frame
Hungry for joy; and, bravely tyrannous,
Grow in demand, still craving more and more,
And make each joy conceded prove a pledge
Of other joy to follow—. (V, 607-612)

In this speech, Paracelsus recalls his original metaphor: the "appetite for joy" is the distinguishing mark of the human soul. Joy is the missing link between God and man, and man's hunger for Joy propels his soul to an overwhelming consciousness of his immortal destiny. This knowledge marks the end of his lifelong search: now Paracelsus perceives the relationship between life and Joy, a perception that partakes of perfect knowledge:
What life is—how God tastes an infinite joy
In infinite ways—one everlasting bliss,
From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds; in whom is life forevermore,
Yet whom existence in its lowest form
Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is he. (V, 643-648)

Browning's Paracelsus, like Schiller, Wordsworth, and Coleridge, identifies infinite Joy with God Himself, and extends this identification to include all aspects of creation. Paracelsus dies, but he has attained the knowledge that the present, with its "distinct and trembling beauty," is mankind's proper realm:

But thou shalt painfully attain to joy
While hope and fear and love shall keep thee man! (V, 836-837)

This knowledge is the highest wisdom in Browning's poetic universe, and it becomes the leading principle of his idea of Joy throughout his career.

Sordello has acquired the dubious distinction of being the most obscure poem of the nineteenth century. It is, in many respects, an inchoate work, but Browning, nonetheless, effects in this poem some of his most meaningful, early statements of the idea of Joy. In Book One, Sordello, now living in retirement, ponders the proper sphere of the poet in society, the nature of his creative powers, and the source of his "peculiar joy":
They are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
Availing it to purpose, to control,
To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
And separate interests that may employ
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake. (I, 490-495)

The poet derives "peculiar joy" from the contemplation of beauty for beauty's sake, but other men desire a share in his Joy. The poet is described as a man who is diverted by his artistic powers from the natural course pursued by ordinary men, and is both blessed and cursed by his experience of Joy:

Of joys—contrive some yet amid the dearth,
Vary and render them, it may be, worth
Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence
Selfish enough, without a moral sense
However feeble; what informed the boy
Others desired a portion in his joy? (I, 681-686)

The narrator of Sordello here reiterates the conflict which Browning has also explored in Pauline and Paracelsus: can the poet really bridle his creative power of Joy into a Joy in which all men can share? Like Wordsworth in The Prelude, Browning answers this central question by envisioning Joy as a ladder. All men must attempt the climb, but the highest rung on this metaphoric ladder of Joy is available, however, only to the man endowed with the power of imagination. The mastery of the poet's craft, for example, is one rung on the ladder of Joy:
Sordello could explore
By means of it, however, one step more
In joy; and, mastering the round at length
Learn how to live in weakness as in strength. (II, 277-280)

At this point in his development, however, Sordello is convinced that his imaginative powers only doom him to a life of isolation, a life of "tasting joys by proxy" (I, 728).

Sordello thinks that the artist must remain aloof from the Joy of ordinary men, and that he must renounce the idea of Joy completely:

He caught himself shamefully hankering
After the obvious petty joys that spring
From true life, fain relinquish pedestal
And condescend with pleasures--one and all
To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain
Himself to single joys and so refrain
From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,
His prime design; each joy must he abjure
Even for love of it. (II, 547-555)

In this passage, Browning embodies Sordello's inner conflict between Man and Poet in terms of Joy. The man-portion of Sordello demands Joy; the poet-portion, however, feels that Joy must be held in abeyance in order to intensify its power, in order to taste its "quintessence":

His constant faith (the Poet-half's to wit--
That waiving any compromise between
No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
Beyond most methods)--. (II, 664-667)

Sordello, like Paracelsus, wonders if he must "leap o'er
paltry joys," or if he can "enjoy like men." This conflict is resolved in the sixth book of the poem.

Sordello has failed to perceive, the narrator of the poem says, that the artist's Joy results from struggle the dies with attainment:

For what is Joy?--to heave
Up one obstruction more, and common leave
What was peculiar, by such act destroy
Itself; a partial death is every joy. (VI, 261-264)

Joy must be wrenched from sorrow. Mankind desires and deserves a "portion" of the poet's "peculiar joy," and the poet must leave the realm of "peculiar joy" for the realm of universal Joy. Legitimate sympathy for mankind and humanitarian ideals, however, must not be allowed to encroach upon his creative Joy:

Why should sympathy command you quit
The course that makes your joy, nor will remit
Their woe? Would all arrive at joy? (VI, 307-309)

Like Matthew Arnold, Browning sees that man has "such need of joy," and he maintains that the Joy-giving potentiality of poetry is as powerful as is direct and immediate action, that poetry is, indeed, an expressive embodiment of Joy's intrinsic value and instrumentally effective as a weapon against isolation and alienation. But he does not arrive at this resolution without further exploration of the problem of the poet's Joy versus mankind's Joy.
In a phrase that recalls Wordsworth's "deep power of joy," the narrator of *Sordello* elaborates this conflict. The poet's imaginative, creative energy is potentially "gigantic with its power of joy":

His time of action for, against, or with
Our world (I labor to extract the pith
Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide,
Gigantic with its power of joy, beside
The world's eternity of impotence
To profit through at his whole joy's expense. (VI, 321-326)

Can "all arrive at joy," and can the artist function for, with, or against "the world's eternity of impotence" without forfeiting his idea of Joy? Browning's own faltering attempt to comprehend the nature of the poet's power of Joy is evident in the syntax of this passage. Robert Preyer has commented that poems such as *Sordello* reveal much of interest about the early Victorian milieu. Preyer says that "it is as though the authors have been stunned by the inhumanity of both Tory repression and middle class industrialism. They can conceive of no joy or dignity or meaning in the toil such a society offered its victims. Hence they stand aloof, become revolutionary, or fill the void with some magical dream of poetry."¹⁶

Aloofness, revolutionary action, or pure poetry—Browning utilizes none of the three alternatives which Preyer mentions in the final resolution of the conflict which centers in the concept of Joy. Sordello does not realize, the narrator of the poem says, that the poet must, as a first step up the ladder of Joy, "fit to the finite his infinity." Before he can be effective in the world of men, the poet must define his goals and accept the necessity of his own limitations. Such acceptance sharpens the Joy.

Browning's most succinct definition of the idea of Joy in these early poems occurs at this point in *Sordello*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Soul on Matter being thrust,} \\
\text{Joy comes when so much Soul is wreaked in Time} \\
\text{On Matter, --let the Soul's attempt sublime} \\
\text{Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent} \\
\text{By more or less that deed's accomplishment} \\
\text{And Sorrow follows: Sorrow how avoid? } \text{(VI, 492-497)}
\end{align*}
\]

Joy is not a static entity which the poet contemplates, nor is it a perfect, changeless goal towards which he climbs. Joy results from a conflict between the temporal and the eternal. The poet, no less than any other man, cannot abjure the struggle; he cannot live in isolation in an attempt to save his power of Joy from its inevitable defeat by Time and Matter, for Time and Matter, paradoxically, are the dynamic forces which produce Joy.

Although the soul of man is immortal and "permanent,"
while his body is finite and "temporal," the narrator of
Sordello reconciles this apparent dualism through the idea
of Joy:

Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—
Scarcely its minute for enjoying here,—
The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
Run o'er its capabilities and wring,
A joy thence, she held worth experiencing:
Which, far from half discovered even, --lo,
The minute gone, the body's power let go
Apportioned to that joy's acquirement! (VI, 514-521)

The soul, therefore, according to its "capabilities,"
determines the nature of Joy from an infinite perspective,
but works through the finite "minute" of the body: it is
in this sense that all men "attain to joy."

Browning both extends and modifies the Romantic idea
of Joy in his early poetry. He associates Joy, as did the
earlier tradition, with aesthetic creation, with purity,
and with psychic energy. He emphasizes, however, the
struggle for Joy, the Joy resulting when "Soul is wreaked
in Time on Matter," as he says in Sordello, far more than
do Wordsworth and Coleridge, who stress its developing and
revelatory nature. In this emphasis upon the importance of
the human will in the drive for Joy, Browning looks forward
to Yeats. Furthermore, Browning views man's infinite
"appetite for joy" as the central paradox of life, a para-
dox which Wordsworth accepts as "the burthen of the mystery."
Browning insists, however, in these early poems and throughout his career, that man's hunger for Joy is a direct manifestation of his hunger for God. The artist, therefore, must accept Joy in a partial, incomplete, and limited guise, mainly through his recognition of its manifestation in other human beings and its source in God Himself.

Two aspects of the Christian tradition of Joy are evidenced in the Victorian idea of Joy, and, contradictory as it may seem, both would seem to have their origin in the Evangelical Christianity which pervaded the early Victorian milieu. G. M. Young describes the impetus given a more liberal Christian tradition by the narrower Evangelicalism in the following statement: "On one of its sides, Victorian history is the story of the English mind employing the energy imparted by Evangelical conviction to rid itself of the restraints which Evangelicalism had laid on the senses and intellect; on amusement, enjoyment, art; on curiosity, on criticism, on science."17 Matthew Arnold and Thomas Carlyle employ what is basically an Evangelical emphasis on "restraint" and "self-renouncement" as the condition of the idea of Joy; the asceticism of the Christian tradition is

implicit in this concept. Browning, on the other hand, does not advocate a nineteenth-century version of the Land of Cockaigne, but he is attracted to the equally Christian idea of Joy as a positive value which man must struggle to attain. Like the earlier Romantics, Browning identifies the capacity for Joy as the distinguishing characteristic of the soul and the source of its essential dignity. By endowing his idea of Joy with a spiritual basis and by insisting upon the divine origin of man's "appetite for joy," Browning cuts the ground from under the restraint imposed by Evangelicalism, as Young indicates, and restores to the joyous life of man in the world a new rationale, not Evangelical, but possessing the energetic fervor of Evangelicalism.

Wordsworth says in The Excursion that the power of Joy results in "kindred joy," but he does not employ other human beings as the primary source of Joy as does Browning. In Sordello, Browning maintains that what he calls an "out-soul," another human being who recognizes and is attuned to one's uniquely individual needs is a necessary concomitant for Joy, and the concept of the out-soul is employed as a structural and thematic device in his early poems. Pauline is the out-soul of the narrator of that poem; Paracelsus learns before his death that he has misconstrued the
counsel of his out-soul, Aprile; and Palma, though
Sordello fails to recognize her, is meant to be his out-
soul. The function of this kindred soul is explained in

Sordello:

How dared I let expand the force
Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource
It grew for, should direct it? Every law
Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,
Must One determine whose corporeal shape
Would be no other than the prime escape
And revelation to me of a Will
Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable. (III, 319-
326)

The out-soul guarantees that spiritual power will be fruitfully directed; it is a manifestation of God's Joy to His finite creatures. Browning's belief in the Incarnation is yet another aspect of his theory of the out-soul, for Christ is the central signification of God's love for, and guidance of, man.

Kindred Joy thus moves on two planes: Joy is manifested imperfectly in union with the human out-soul, and perfectly in union with Christ, the divine out-soul. Browning, therefore, incorporates the idea of Joy closely within his Christian faith. Pauline, Paracelsus, and Sordello contain the seeds of this developing idea of kindred Joy, but it comes to fruition in Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day and in "Saul."
Christmas-Eve is a less crucial exploration of the idea of Joy than is Easter-Day. In the former poem, Browning, speaking in his own person, identifies Joy with the vision of Christ which enraptures him as he leaves the Dissenters' chapel. His pulses "leap for joy / Of the golden thought without alloy" (ll. 448-449)—the Incarnation of Christ. Browning's dream takes him to St. Peter's in Rome and to a lecture room in Germany. He rejoices in the richness of the Roman Catholic Christmas service, but rejects both it and the rationalism of the German professor in favor of the unaesthetic, but nevertheless humble and sincere, worship of the Dissenters, who seem to him to encompass more fully the Joy of Christian love.18

Easter-Day is more directly and explicitly concerned with the idea of Joy. Browning voices the troubled opinions of an unnamed friend, an objectification of his own doubts about his Christian faith. This dialogue looks forward to a similar debate between Reason and Fancy in La Saisiaz.

18 Browning's visionary resolution of this religious conflict in favor of his own early religious training is anticipated by Wordsworth. R. D. Havens notes that in The Excursion, "the restoration of the Solitary was to have been accomplished not by reasoning but by the sight of a religious ceremony . . . which, by recalling to his mind the days of his early childhood. . . might have dissolved his heart into tenderness," p. 148.
The friend wonders if he should reject the "joys of sense" for "God's eternity of joy":

As sorrows and privations take
The place of joy--the thing that seems
Mere misery, under human schemes,
Becomes, regarded by the light
Of love, as very near, or quite
As good a gift as joy before. (ll. 216-221)

Browning, however, replies that the renunciation of Joy is not required for fullness of Christian life. Did Christ take human form, he asks, "only to give our joys a zest /
And prove our sorrows for the best?" (ll. 239-240). He maintains that the power of Joy is intended for man's use in the present. He recounts a visionary experience in which Christ himself speaks and explains the nature of human Joy:

'Here the probation was for thee,
To show thy soul the earthly mixed
With heavenly, it must choose betwixt.
The earthly joys lay palpable,--
A taint, in each, distinct as well;
The heavenly flitted, faint and rare,
Above them, but as truly were
Taintless, so, in their nature, best.' (ll. 671-678)

This earthly Joy, Christ says, is an imperfect indication of the perfection of eternity. Browning, like his own Paracelsus, at first maintains that he will seize perfection now, in nature, in art, and in knowledge. He will break the chain that binds him to the imperfection of the human realm:
Should the whirl slacken there, then verse,
Fining to music, shall asperse
Fresh and fresh fire-dew, till I strain
Intoxicate, half-break my chain!
Not joyless, though more favoured feet
Stand calm, where I want wings to beat
The floor. At least earth's bond is broke! (ll. 883-889)

This image of the chain that binds man to earth will also
be employed in La Saisiaz, where Browning will again demon­
strate that man's attempt to escape his link to earth does
not result in Joy. In Easter-Day, the vision of Christ
brings the poet to the perception of the most important
aspect of his concept of Joy: human Joy is imperfect, but
it is a promise that man possesses a capability for infinite
Joy which will be fulfilled in eternity.

Browning extends this idea in "Saul." David attempts
to awaken Saul from his despair through a poetic catalogue
of the Joy around him. Saul, however, like Coleridge in
"Dejection," is experiencing a condition of spiritual
exsiccation, and the naturalistic catalogue of the "wild
joys of living" fails to inspirit him. David asserts the
goodness of life:

How good is man's life, the mere living!
how fit to employ
All the heart and the soul and the senses,
for ever in joy! (ll. 78-79)

This consideration has only a slight effect upon Saul, and
Browning broke the poem off at this point in 1845. After the religious experiences embodied in *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* in 1850, he had resolved the conflict of the reality of the imperfection of human Joy with man's desire for infinite Joy through the mystery of the Incarnation. He then continued "Saul" to its culmination in David's prophetic vision of Christ's entry into human history. The fact that God so dignified human nature by assuming its form indicates that the Joy of the tangible universe is not to be rejected, but that man lives in perfect Joy only through and with the Joy of Christ. Browning joins the "reflective wisdom" of the subjective poet with the "psychological utterances" of the objective poet in his characterization of David. David is poet, priest, and prophet. Wordsworth had stressed these overlapping poetic roles in *The Prelude*, and he too associates these sacramental poetic functions with the idea of Joy.

David, as Saul's human out-soul in this poem, brings the king to a recognition of the human Joy that leads to divine Joy. "Saul" is thus Browning's fullest early expression of the idea of kindred Joy, for the human out-soul reveals to Saul the Incarnation and Christ's role as the divine out-soul. The despairing lament of the speaker of *Pauline*, "I cannot be immortal, taste all joy," is, therefore,
ultimately resolved by David, who assures Saul, suffering from a comparable despair, that man is immortal, and that he will taste all Joy through the power of the Incarnation. The two planes of kindred Joy, the struggle to achieve communion with the human out-soul and the divine out-soul, become one of Browning's major poetic concerns.

Browning demonstrates that the power of Joy is essential to the artist, that it is possible to all men, and he indicates the manner in which it is to be experienced. Browning's evaluation of man's "capability for joy" is not unlike John Ruskin's. In an Oxford lecture of 1870, Ruskin defines the idea of Joy as follows:

You must first have the right moral state or you cannot have art. . . . For instance, take the art of singing, and the simplest perfect master of it--the skylark. From him you may learn what it is to sing for joy. You must get the moral state first, the pure gladness, then give it finished expression, and it is perfected in itself and made communicable to others capable of such joy.19

The "pure gladness" of Joy is the "right moral state" if the poet is to overcome the stance of alienation and communicate to others what Shelley calls the "news of kindred joy." Like other poets of the Romantic tradition,

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especially Wordsworth and Shelley, whose joyous skylarks Ruskin includes in this passage, Browning makes Joy the primary moral state for the poetic consciousness, and he defines and masters his own capability for Joy before writing his finest poetry.
CHAPTER IV

"CAPABILITY FOR JOY":
MEN AND WOMEN AND DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The idea of kindred Joy which Browning evolved from 1833 to 1850 emphasizes the Joy resulting from the struggle of the human soul to achieve communion with other human beings and with God. Wordsworth, as has been seen, emphasizes union and communion as the source and result of Joy, the loss of a burdensome isolation achieved through the contemplation of the organic unity of the individual soul with the outer world. Browning, however, is more interested in the idea of union and communion between human beings as the source of the most intense Joy, and there is no more striking evidence of the vigor with which Browning contributed to the developing nineteenth-century concept of Joy than in the poems written between 1850 and 1864, especially the poems that comprise Men and Women and Dramatis Personae.

The reason for Browning's overriding concern with all types of human personality lies both in his own poetic aims and in the changing concept of nature. Josephine Miles
provides striking statistical evidence of this change. She notes that the most common metaphor for nature in the poetry of the eighteenth century is "face," while Wordsworth and the other poets of his generation employ the word "breath," indicating the living, moving spirit of the natural world. By mid-century, however, the dominating metaphor for nature is "pulse." This concept of nature's "pulse," Miss Miles points out, "is stronger [and] also sets nature more strongly apart as its own organism intrinsic to its own spirit." Miss Miles notes that through the 1840's, the standard usage of what John Ruskin called pathetic fallacy, the communication between the creative energy of the human imagination and images of the outer world, is once in every fifty or sixty lines of English poetry. After the 1840's, perhaps because man became more and more estranged from the natural world, the use of pathetic fallacy is reduced to once in every hundred or more lines of poetry. In Browning's poetry, however, the reduction of pathetic fallacy as a source of poetic imagery is even more strikingly dramatic. Miss Miles, who uses the poems of Men and Women as the basis of her computation, writes that "Browning's frequency is once in two hundred and eighty lines, more than a halving again of a device
already halved." She concludes that for Robert Browning, the "pattern of the world was an outward pattern. He described not scene plus emotion from it, but scene plus people in it..."\(^1\) This is a succinct summation of one of the basic poetic differences between Wordsworth and Browning. People are Browning's main interest, and it is in his men and women that he incorporates his idea of Joy.

However, inherent differences in personality and in poetic aims, in addition to the changing concept of nature, should not be ignored. Browning naturally enjoys the diversity of human personality as Wordsworth instinctively enjoys the diversity of the natural world. Wordsworth, moreover, attempts to find the permanent and universal truths that unite men, but the actuality of the hustle and bustle of men in large numbers bemuses and agitates him. In *The Prelude*, he describes the "huge fermenting mass of human-kind" which pours through the streets of London:

> How oft, amid those overflowing streets, . .
> Have I gone forward with the crowd and said
> Unto myself, 'The face of every one
> That passes by me is a mystery!' (VII, 626-629)

He then remembers having once seen a blind Beggar, who carried a placard telling his name, his birthplace, and the

\(^1\)Josephine Miles, *Pathetic Fallacy in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1942), pp. 224, 227, 228.
cause of his blindness. Wordsworth concludes that the 
Beggar's printed card signifies that these bare facts are 
really all that man can know of man:

This label seemed of the utmost we can know,
Both of ourselves and of the universe;
And, on the shape of that unmoving man,
His steadfast face and sightless eyes, I gazed,
As if admonished from another world. (VII, 645-649)

Wordsworth thus emphasizes the "mystery" inherent in the 
lives of other human beings, and he feels that divinity 
 itself admonishes him for his attempt to solve that mystery. 

Browning, on the other hand, says that the poet is a 
divinely appointed emissary, whose task is to delve into 
the mysteries of human personality. In "How It Strikes a 
Contemporary," he describes a poet whose business it is to 
examine the variety of the human types found in the crowded 
streets of Spain--the cobbler, the coffee-roaster, the 
book-vendor:

He took such cognizance of men and things,
If any beat a horse, you felt he saw;
If any cursed a woman, he took note;
Yet stared at nobody,--you stared at him,
And found, less to your pleasure than surprise,
He seemed to know you and expect as much. (ll. 30-35)

Browning's poet knows men and what to expect of them. He 
is the "recording chief-inquisitor" of the town, reporting 
his findings to God; he is the general-in-chief of the "whole 
campaign of the world's life and death." The poet is an
cause of his blindness. Wordsworth concludes that the
Beggar's printed card signifies that these bare facts are
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his findings to God; he is the general-in-chief of the "whole
campaign of the world's life and death." The poet is an
active citizen of the world, recording the outward show of human life and indicating the inner springs of men's actions. This tangible world of men and women— rogues, saints, artists, poets, lovers—is the chief source of Joy in Browning's poetry, and, like the poet in "How It Strikes a Contemporary," he records their communion with each other and with God.

Browning is as precise as is Wordsworth in his use of the word "Joy." The poetry itself is the ultimate proof of that precision, but his letters also give ample evidence of his careful use of the term. In a letter written in 1846, for example, he speaks of the "joy's essence" in contrast to "the mere vulgar happiness." In another letter, he writes of his feeling of "deep joy," adding, "I know and use to analyse my own feelings, and be sober in giving distinctive names to their varieties; this is deep joy." Furthermore, Browning writes in still another letter of the Joy that resists the flux of time, referring to Keats's idea of Joy in the "Ode on Melancholy": "Now Keats speaks of 'Beauty, that must die—and Joy whose hand is ever at his lips bidding farewell' [sic]. . . . There is a Beauty that will not die, a Joy that bids no farewell. . . ."²

²The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, I, 460, 279, 388.
A large number of the poems of *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae* are concerned with the exploration of the Joy that bids no farewell. This is the Joy that manifests itself in the discovery of the human out-soul as a first step to the discovery of the divine out-soul, the characteristic progression of the experience of Joy in Browning's poetry, a progression which has already been seen in "Saul."

In "One Word More," the concluding poem of the *Men and Women* volume, Browning includes special mention of "Cleon" and *In a Balcony*. These two poems are among his own favorites, and they include some of his most important embodiments of his concept of Joy. *In a Balcony* was first published in the 1855 edition of *Men and Women*, but in 1868 Browning had the poem placed between *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae*. This final placement of the poem serves to link the two volumes, for *In a Balcony* contains many of the themes which Browning explores in both volumes. In this poem, Browning differentiates love as it is experienced by men and by women, the decay of love, the loss of the "good minute" because of failure to declare love, the man's Joy versus the artist's sorrow, and the power of Joy that results when communion between out-souls is complete.

The Queen is the tragic figure of *In a Balcony*. She believes that the capacity for Joy is to be found only in
youth. She watches Constance and Norbert and ponders her own predicament:

My flower of youth, my woman's self that was,
My happiest woman's self that might have been!
These two shall have their joy and leave me here. (ll. 458-460)

When Norbert appears before the Queen, to ask her for the hand of her cousin and a member of her court, Constance, the Queen mistakenly believes that the devotion that he declares for Constance is love for her. The power of love manifests itself in Joy, and the experience of Joy has the power to restore her wasted youth:

Am I so old? This hair was early grey;
But joy ere now has brought hair brown again,
And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel. (ll. 481-483)

Joy's power could rejuvenate the aged Queen, but her belief in Norbert's love, the one moment of Joy in her life, is the result of a grotesque misunderstanding.

Constance stands between the Queen and her prime minister. She has attempted to convince Norbert that he should defer the announcement of their love until the Queen has permanently rewarded him for his statesmanship. Norbert, however, is impetuous; he would attempt to win Constance at any cost:

But just to obtain her! heap earth's woes in one
And bear them--make a pile of all earth's joys
And spurn them, as they help or help not this;
Only obtain her! . . . (ll. 158-161)

Constance is eventually won over to his position, but she feels her own way to be the wiser course of action:

Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole
Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,
With a new largess still at each despair)
And force you keep in sight the deed, preserve
Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,
My giving and your taking; both our joys
Dying together. Is it the wiser way? (ll. 611-617)

This is indeed the wiser way, but it results in the death of Joy. Constance thus chooses Norbert's simpler course and gives all of her love at once.

The moment when love is declared should be a moment when "joy explodes," but for the Queen this moment is destroyed. She overhears Norbert's declaration of love for Constance, and the poem ends with the measured step of the palace guard advancing towards the lovers on the balcony. This ending is somewhat lame, and only Browning's statements outside of the poem itself resolve the basic ambiguity: does the guard advance to seize the prime minister or does it come to announce the Queen's suicide? Browning advances the latter interpretation, and the ambiguity turns on the intense Joy of the Queen. A friend, who heard Browning read the poem, thought that "the step of the guard should be heard coming to take Norbert to his doom, as, with a nature
like the queen's, who had known only one hour of joy in her sterile life, vengeance swift and terrible would follow on the sudden destruction of her happiness." Browning, however, says that he means quite the opposite of this interpretation. He says that "the queen had a large and passionate temperament, which had only been touched and brought into intense life. She would have died as by a knife in her heart."\(^3\) The Queen's intense awareness of life, which is the fruit of the experience of Joy, would not lead to the death and destruction of the agent of that Joy, but rather to the destruction of her own life, which, once having tasted Joy, is meaningless without the continuance of it. The promise of Joy which remains unfulfilled is destructive. Past Joy must lead to present Joy if the consciousness of the power of Joy is to retain viability in human experience.

The conflict in many of Browning's lyrics centers on past Joy and present Joy. Joy is often associated, in a way analogous to the Joy that Wordsworth attaches to the "spots of time," with scenes from the past. Browning, however, more often utilizes the historical sense of the

\(^3\)Quoted in DeVane, A Browning Handbook, p. 253.
past, while Wordsworth uses the personal sense of the past. In "Love Among the Ruins," for example, the speaker of the poem reconstructs the scene before him as it might have existed in the past and contrasts that scene with its living counterpart in the present. He considers the "plenty and perfection" of the past, and thinks of the human passions associated with that glorious time:

And such plenty and perfection, see, of grass
Never was!
Such a carpet as, this summer-time, o'erspreads
And embeds
Every vestige of the city, guessed alone,
Stock or stone--
Where a multitude of men breathed joy and woe
Long ago. (ll. 26-32)

The speaker of the poem prefers the less grandiose Joy of the present, the Joy resulting from the love of the girl with the yellow hair who waits for him where kings once stood. He concludes, therefore, unlike the earlier Romantic poets, who cherish the Joy of the past associated with such cities as Venice or Rome, that this present Joy is supreme: "Love is best."

In "By the Fire-Side," Browning again contrasts the Joy of the past with the Joy of the present. The speaker of the poem considers the ruined chapel of the Alpine gorge which he and Leonor had visited in their youth:

And all day long a bird sings there,
And a stray sheep drinks at the pond at times;
The place is silent and aware;
It has had its scenes, its joys and crimes,  
But that is its own affair. (ll. 96-100)

As they walk about this scene permeated with the sense of the Joy of the past, present Joy comes, the "moment, one and infinite" when content is quickened to bliss. In "Two in the Campagna," an opposite result is described. Again, as in the description of the Alpine gorge in "By the Fireside," past Joy suffuses the scene:

The champaign with its endless fleece  
Of feathery grasses everywhere!  
Silence and passion, joy and peace,  
An everlasting wash of air—  
Rome's ghost since her decease. (ll. 21-25)

The sense of Joy attached to the past makes the speaker of this poem desire a share of Joy in the present. But he is unable to achieve the desired communion, the "good minute goes," and he is left to ponder the paradox of "Infinite passion, and the pain / Of finite hearts that yearn."

Finally, in "Dis Aliter Visum; or, Le Byron de nos Jours," another poem which contrasts with the joyful moment of union described in "By the Fireside," the woman who is the speaker of the poem chides her would-be lover of ten years before. They did not seize the moment. The Joy of the old Norman ruin which they explored together led to no present Joy:
Was there nought better than to enjoy?
No feat which, done, would make time break,
And let us pent-up creatures through
Into eternity, our due?
No forcing earth teach heaven's employ? (ll. 116-120)

The speaker concludes that they failed to gain the present joy of love, "the sole spark from God's life," and their lives are now inwardly sterile and empty, though outwardly successful and prominent. The "good minute" of "Two in the Campagna" is the moment when, as Constance says in In a Balcony, "joy explodes." The experience of joy, however, cannot be maintained at such a level of intensity.

The Queen of In a Balcony declares that the joy of the soul transmits its power to the beauty of the body. Browning incorporates this aspect of joy into "Fra Lippo Lippi" and "any Wife to Any Husband." Lippi says that art should deal not just with outward form, but also with the human soul:

Why can't a painter lift each foot in turn,
Left foot and right foot, go a double step,
Make his flesh liker and his soul more like,
Both in their order? . . . (ll. 205-208)

The Prior's niece, Lippi says, has a beautiful face, but it is not so beautiful that the artist should overlook the source of the beauty:

You can't discover if it means hope, fear,
Sorrow or joy? won't beauty go with these?
Suppose I've made her eyes all right and blue,
Can't I take breath and try to add life's flash,
And then add soul and heighten them threefold? (ll. 210-214)
Lippi says that the artist and the lover should be moved not so much by beauty as by that soul-power which is the creator of beauty. This is also the conclusion of the aging wife, who, as the speaker of "Any Wife to Any Husband," analyzes the cause of the death of love. The loss of physical beauty is perhaps one reason for love's decay:

Oh, I should fade--'t is willed so! Might I save, Gladly I would, whatever beauty gave Joy to thy sense, for that was precious too. It is not to be granted. But the soul Whence the love comes, all ravage leaves that whole; Vainly the flesh fades; soul makes all things new. (ll. 13-18)

The Joy to which love gives birth could make "all things new," but this love is now dead. Browning, as in "Dis Aliter Visum," images human love as a spark from God's "fire of fires," a spark which, in this poem, the married couple has let die.

The highest Joy is not a static entity which the poet contemplates or the lover seizes once and for all. It is touched by the same imperfection which touches all human things; in its imperfection is its life. The speaker of "Old Pictures in Florence" says that "what's come to perfection perishes." The Joy that is static is worthless:

Shall Man, such step within his endeavor, Man's face, have no more play and action Than joy which is crystallized for ever, Or grief, an eternal petrifaction? (ll. 141-144)
The Joy "crystallized for ever" is false to the facts of human existence. The speaker of the poem praises the early painters, who, scorning the artificial perfection of Greek art, became the "self-acquainters" of mankind:

Make new hopes shine through the flesh they fray,
New fears aggrandize the rags and tatters:
To bring the invisible full into play!
Let the visible go to the dogs--what matters? (ll. 149-152)

The speaker of "Old Pictures in Florence" rejoices in change as does Fra Lippo Lippi.

The speaker of "James Lee's Wife" comes to a comparable perception. She hears the moaning of the wind, which seems to say to those who listen:

'Here is the change beginning, here the lines
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns.' (ll. 209-211)

Changeless beauty and changeless love are impossible; the speaker realizes that change should be a cause of Joy:

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die,
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled! (ll. 217-221)

But the wind replies, "Nothing endures," and the fact that God endures is a faint consolation at this point in the development of James Lee's wife. The paradox of change is explicit in this poem, for if James Lee, by some strange reversal, were to declare his love and their union be made
complete, the resulting Joy would overpower her hold on life:

You might turn myself!—should I know or care
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee? (ll. 371-372)

The speaker of "Childe Roland" expresses the same fear after the old cripple points out to him the Dark Tower which he had sought for so long:

What with my search drawn out thro' years, my hope Dwindled into a ghost not fit to cope With that obstreperous joy success would bring. (ll. 20-22)

Joy deferred too long overwhelms the man's capacity for it.

These are inverse statements of the Queen's experience in *In a Balcony*, for her death results from the Joy tasted but once and then lost. On the other hand, too much Joy is equally deadly. Karshish, in "An Epistle," notes the effect of Lazarus' experience of eternity through the use of the same paradox. Lazarus' restoration to life after his death is compared to the experience of a middle-aged beggar who is suddenly given a treasure:

With straitened habits and with tastes starved small, And take at once to his impoverished brain The sudden element that changes things, That sets the undreamed-of rapture at his hand And puts the cheap old joy in the scorned dust? (ll. 128-132)

The imperfection of human Joy is, paradoxically, its very perfection, and "the cheap old joy" of life, nevertheless,
is the Joy designed for an imperfect creation.

Joy in human life, even the Joy of human love, is at best a fleeting and tenuous experience. Browning reinforces this quality of human Joy by associating the experience of Joy with the image of a thread. Wordsworth characteristically associates Joy with a ladder or with a scale, and he is confident that all men can mount this ladder, although the poet will climb highest. Browning, too, uses the ladder image in his discussion of Joy in his earlier poems, as we have seen in the last chapter. The sturdy image of the ladder, however, is replaced by the fragile image of the thread in several of the poems of *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae*, a change in imagery which indicates the difficulties that Browning sees human beings experiencing as they attempt to maintain the idea of Joy. Lazarus, for example, is described by Karshish in "An Epistle" as holding on "to some thread of life" which runs between the spiritual and the physical realms and which separates him from full enjoyment of either state.

In "Two in the Campagna," the speaker seems to seize the thread that will explain the paradox of love, but it eludes his grasp and winds through the champaign which is associated with the Joy of the past. The lovers do not achieve union, separated, as it were, by only a slight
thread, a moment:

Just when I seemed about to learn!
Where is the thread now? Off again!
The old trick! Only I discern—
Infinite passion, and the pain
Of finite hearts that yearn. (ll. 56-60)

What the speaker discerns in this last stanza is not "only" man's finite capacity for Joy as compared to an infinite desire: it is actually an ironic understatement of the highest truth of human life as Browning sees it.

Browning uses the image of the thread again in "Too Late." The speaker of the poem did not declare his love, and Edith, whom he once loved, married another man and is now dead. The speaker says that, as a young man, he had delayed taking any decisive action, waiting as if for some special revelation to direct the course of his life. His life was thus stopped, as if by a huge stone, at midcurrent, and he rested apart from the sea of human struggle. He considers the stone which symbolizes his own incapacity for action, but does nothing to remove it:

But either I thought, 'They may churn and chide
Awhile, my waves which came for their joy
And found this horrible stone full-tide:
Yet I see just a thread escape, deploy
Through the evening-country, silent and safe,
And it suffers no more till it finds the sea.' (ll. 25-30)

His capacity for Joy has dwindled until his life can be compared to a tiny thread of water which wanders through
old age, the evening-country, to eventual death. He is secure and safe, but incapable of the Joy which rises from the struggle in the open sea of life.

Browning also employs the image of the thread to symbolize the life-choking tyranny of one soul over another, as it does in "Mesmerism." The speaker recognizes that his power to conjure up and to invade the very soul of the lady is like the "sudden thread" which the spider weaves around his prey. His psychic power is similar to an "iron nerve" which he has knitted for the purpose of trapping her very soul's essence. He winds her spirit in the toils of his leaden line and is drawn out into the night:

Swifter and still more swift,
As the crowding peace
Doth to joy increase
In the wide blind eyes uplift,
Thro' the darkness and the drift! (ll. 91-95)

The fact that "peace" increases to "joy" as the speaker winds his thread closer and closer indicates that this "joy" of his dream is actually only frenzied emotion. The usual progression of Joy in Browning's poetry, as it is in the earlier Romantic tradition, is from Joy to peace. In "A Grammarian's Funeral," for example, as the old scholar is buried atop the mountain, his students ask that Joy, and then peace, bless the dead Grammarian:
Browning associates Joy with life and peace with death. The joy of the storm signals the Grammarian's triumphant struggle and the peace of the dew his reward for that struggle. The subtle inversion of this development in "Mesmerism" demonstrates Browning's distrust of the powers of the spiritualists.

It is in "Cleon" that Browning centers his most important discussion of the idea of Joy in *Men and Women* and *Dramatis Personae*. Cleon, a Greek poet, philosopher, and artist, now residing on an island off the mainland, writes in reply to a letter from the Greek king, Protus. He begins his letter by thanking the king for his generous gifts which indicate to all men that the wise king recognizes the artist as the chief Joy-giver to men, and that Joy is the "use of life":

Well-counselled, king, in thy munificence!
For so shall men remark, in such an act
Of love for him whose song gives life its joy,
Thy recognition of the use of life. (ll. 19-22)

The king's work, in contrast to the poet's, is the wise rule of the vulgar, Cleon says, but the king demonstrates his spirit's power in the gifts bestowed upon the poet and in
the tall burial tower which he is having built for his final resting place. The tower, significantly, faces East, symbolizing the king's desire for immortality and the chief questions which he has asked Cleon. After these initial compliments, Cleon next attempts to answer the king's questions.

The king has asked if Cleon is indeed the accomplished artist that men say that he is. Cleon replies that he is the author of an epic poem, which the king has had engraved on one hundred golden plates; that he is the composer of a popular chant, a favorite of Greek fishermen; that he carved the image of the sun-god on the lighthouse; that he designed and provided paintings for a magnificent portico in Athens; that he has written three philosophical tracts on the nature of the soul; and that he has made important contributions to music theory. "In brief," Cleon says, "all arts are mine." That one man can incorporate such achievement into a brief lifetime indicates, Cleon maintains, the progress of the race:

So, first the perfect separate forms were made,  
The portions of mankind; and after, so,  
Occurred the combination of the same.  
For where had been a progress, otherwise?  
Mankind, made up of all the single men,—  
In such a synthesis the labour ends. (ll. 89-94)

But when one man, a man such as Cleon, reaches this great
synthesis, the king might ask, what then is the purpose of life? Cleon replies that the purpose of life is growth, the struggle of the soul to create new and better syntheses of past achievements.

Cleon explains that he had long before considered the possibility of direct revelation from Zeus as to the use of life. He had even written out a story of the incarnation of Zeus, or some other god, who came into human history and showed once and for all, "the worth both absolute and relative / Of all his children from the birth of time" (ll. 120-121). Now he goes on to imagine that this revelation might be extended to show the presence of Zeus latent in all things. However, Cleon says, this last is but an empty dream while man knows that progress occurs: the fields now yield richer grapes, the grapes richer wine, and even the king's mistress is more beautiful than were the women of Cleon's time. The soul is not immortal, Cleon tells the king, but this is no cause for despair. Cleon himself, for example, is no Homer, nor Terpander, nor Phidias, but he has encompassed their separate arts of poetry, music, and sculpture into one lifetime; his life thus shows "a better flower if not so large."

The king wonders if Cleon, who, as an artist, will attain immortality through his work, fears death as he
himself fears it. Cleon quotes from the king's letter at this point in the poem:

'Thy life stays in the poems men shall sing,
The pictures men shall study; while my life,
Complete and whole now in its power and joy,
Dies altogether with my brain and arm,
Is lost indeed; since, what survives myself?' (ll. 170-174)

The king thinks that his memory will be effaced when his progeny are eventually driven from the throne; the artist's works, however, will never be driven from men's hearts. Cleon answers this question of the king with the assurance that "imperfection means perfection hid." He asks the king to imagine himself present in the distant past when Zeus was preparing the world for man's appearance. If Zeus had asked him how he might improve upon his creation, the king would have replied to him that he should grant self-consciousness to his creatures, for the Joy of the natural world is wasted on creatures who are "mere matter":

'And all this joy in natural life is put
Like fire from off thy finger into each,
So exquisitely perfect is the same.
But 't is pure fire, and they mere matter are;
It has them, not they it: and so I choose
For man, thy last premeditated work
(If I might add a glory to the scheme)
That a third thing should stand apart from both,
A quality arise within his soul,
Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself,
And so be happy'... (ll. 203-214)
The "intro-active" power of the soul is man's self-consciousness, a power which reflects upon the force of Joy and judges itself conscious of happiness. The more man experiences the "intro-active" power, the more "joy-giving" is life:

The more joy-giving will his life become.
Thus man, who hath this quality, is best. (11. 219-220)

Cleon, however, next shows that self-consciousness is not the blessing that it appears to be.

He tells Protus that in such a hypothetical situation he would have more reasonably requested Zeus not to endow man with reflective self-consciousness. Browning employs the contrasting imagery of ladder and thread to support this part of Cleon's argument. Self-consciousness is imaged as the ladder of a tower which man climbs to greater and greater awareness of the Joy of life:

The soul now climbs it just to perish there!
For thence we have discovered ('t is no dream—
We know this, which we had not else perceived)
That there's a world of capability
For joy, spread round about us, meant for us,
Inviting us; and still the soul craves all. (11. 236-241)

Man's capacity for Joy is not equal to the Joy which his soul can imagine. Cleon thus exclaims that an increasing measure of self-consciousness does not really increase life's "joy-giving" power after all:
It skills not! Life's inadequate to joy
As the soul sees joy, tempting life to take. (ll. 249-250)

Man's capacity for Joy is better imaged as a thread. A fountain in his garden, Cleon says, could spout oceans of water, but it is designed to be supplied by a thread of water from the river. It would do the Naiad, who reigns supreme over the thread of water in the fountain, no good to know that vast oceans exist:

She cannot lift beyond her first thin thread:
And so a man can use but a man's joy
While he sees God's. . . . (ll. 260-262)

Cleon thus reverses his former statement about the glory of human progress and concludes that the discouraged King Protus is right. Wider vision means deeper disappointment; self-consciousness is man's curse—"Most progress is most failure: thou sayest well."

Cleon now moves to answer the king's last question. The king supposes that the Joy of the artist is the highest Joy available to man, that the artist is an exception to the disappointment which life holds in store for the general run of mankind:

Holding joy not impossible to one
With artist-gifts--to such a man as I
Who leave behind me living works indeed. (ll. 274-276)

Cleon replies that the king is mistaken in his assumption that poems and paintings "live":
What? dost thou verily trip upon a word,
Confound the accurate view of what joy is
(Caught somewhat clearer by my eyes than thine)
With feeling joy? Confound the knowing how
And showing how to live (my faculty)
With actual living?— (ll. 278-283)

The artist sees and feels Joy more intensely than other men,
but this does not mean that he "lives" its power more deeply. To show men's actions in an epic poem does not mean that the poet himself has performed great deeds, or to paint a young god does not restore the artist's youth.

No, Cleon says, the artist's Joy is as inadequate as is any other man's:

Indeed, to know is something, and to prove
How all this beauty might be enjoyed, is more:
But, knowing nought, to enjoy is something too. (ll. 291-293)

Cleon concludes that though he knows "the joy of kingship,"
Protus, nevertheless, is king.

Protus, however, would insist that Sappho and Aeschylus live in their songs and plays. Cleon sarcastically replies that if they live they should come forward and enjoy life, drink his wine and speak his speech. He maintains that his fate, the fate of all artists, is actually far worse than the fate of the king, for the artist is endowed with a greater sensibility and with greater self-awareness:
Say rather that my fate is deadlier still,
In this, that every day my sense of joy
Grows more acute, my soul (intensified
By power and insight) more enlarged, more keen. (ll. 309-312)

But physical weakness and advancing age dictate that Cleon
will never be able to exploit this increased capability for
Joy. This is such a horrible fate, Cleon says, that he
sometimes imagines a life-after-death:

I dare at times imagine to my need
Some future state revealed to us by Zeus,
Unlimited in capability
For joy, as this is in desire for joy,
--To seek which, the joy-hunger forces us. (ll. 324-328)

Such immortality of soul is not revealed, Cleon says, and
were such a state possible to man, Zeus would have made
it known to the Greek mind. Cleon thus closes his letter
with a caution to Protus not to attempt to contact Paul,
the leader of the Christians, for "their doctrine could be
held by no sane man."

"Cleon" is accepted by most scholars as Browning's
fullest reply to Matthew Arnold's Empedocles on Etna.
W. C. DeVane points out that "Browning thought of Empedocles'
condition as illustrating the logical result of Greek
paganism, and created Cleon as a later philosopher and poet
who represented the final product of Greek culture, and who
in the blindness of his pride rejected the Christianity
which fulfilled every one of the needs already recognized
by his own superb mind." Browning admired Arnold's poem,
and he persuaded Arnold to republish Empedocles in his New
Poems of 1867. Arnold's Empedocles, like Browning's Cleon,
is much concerned with the source and the power of Joy.
He too feels the inadequacy of human Joy:

The world hath fail'd to impart
The joy our youth forebodes,
Fail'd to fill up the void which in our breasts we bear.
(I. ii. 374-376)

Empedocles concludes that man should, therefore, "trust
the joys there are," and "nurse no extravagant hope." This
solution is not enough for his own desperate situation,
however. Empedocles determines that suicide is the only
possibility; he must return to the elements before his
power of Joy is completely dead. He must release his soul,
which is now the prisoner of his consciousness:

Before the soul lose all her solemn joys,
And awe be dead, and hope impossible,
And the soul's deep eternal night come on--
Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home! (II,
33-36)

Empedocles insists that man is isolated and that the artist
is the victim of even greater alienation because his power

\[^{4}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 274.}\]
of self-consciousness is greater. In his later essays, as has been seen, Arnold suggests that partial Joy is possible to man in the Christian spirit of purity, charity, and self-renouncement. Browning also explores the myth of the alienated artist in "Cleon," and rejects isolation by implicitly positing the divine out-soul as the basis and promise of man's Joy. Browning maintains that man can achieve communion with the out-soul, if only for a moment, and if only a communion maintained by a tenuous thread.

Furthermore, Browning believes that the very imperfection of human Joy leads to the logical conclusion that perfect Joy must exist. He rejoices, for example, in the imperfection of his own age and insists that it is "worthy" of reproduction in art. In a letter written in 1846, Browning credits Carlyle with this aspect of his thought:

Carlyle has turned and forged, reforged on his anvil that fact "that no age ever appeared heroic to itself" . . . and so, worthy of reproduction in art by itself. . . I thought after Carlyle's endeavors nobody could be ignorant of that,—nobody who was obliged to seek the proof of it out of his own experience. The cant is, that "an age of transition" is the melancholy thing to contemplate and delineate—whereas the worst thing of all to look back on are times of comparative standing still, rounded in their important completeness.5

5The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Barrett, II, 159.
Browning thus enjoys living in "an age of transition" and rejects the ideal of perfection represented by Hellenic culture. Arnold, however, in a letter written in 1849, expresses longing for the perfection and calm of the Greek world and damns the nineteenth century and Carlyle:

My dearest Clough these are damned times—everything is against one—the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical enervation, the absence of great natures, the unavoidable contact with millions of small ones, newspapers, cities, light profligate friends, moral desperadoes like Carlyle, our own selves, and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties...6

It is ironic, in the light of these two passages, that Arnold's final position on the idea of Joy, that in self-renouncement there is "a fount of joy," is much closer to Carlyle's thought than is Browning's claim that Joy must be seized in time as in eternity.

Arnold laments the imperfection and change that debilitate Joy in many of his poems other than Empedocles, although it is the fullest embodiment of the idea. In "The Scholar-Gipsy," for example, he says that change wears out man's capacity for life:

For what wears out the life of mortal men?  
'T is that from change to change their being rolls;  
'T is that repeated shocks, again, again,

6Arnold, p. 520.
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers. (ll. 142-146)

Browning, however, finds strength and power in change. The following passage from "James Lee's Wife," quoted earlier in this chapter, seems to be a point-for-point refutation of these lines from Arnold's "Scholar-Gipsy":

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the world;
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and die.
Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is hurled
From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled! (ll. 217-221)

To be rolled "from change to change" in Arnold's poem exhausts the soul's energy and numbs its elasticity; to be hurled "from change to change" in Browning's poem, however, is a source of strength and Joy, exercise for the soul's wings. Man should, Browning says, rejoice in change and imperfection.

There is concrete evidence that Browning means "Rabbi Ben Ezra" to serve not only as an answer to FitzGerald's Rubáiyát, but also as another reply to Arnold's Empedocles. Browning employs the same stanza which Arnold uses in his poem, but with a strident assertion of the immortality of the soul. The speaker of the poem declares that life would

7 The crosscurrents of debate in Browning's poetry are one of its most interesting sidelights. DeVane believes that Arnold replies in turn to "Rabbi Ben Ezra" in "Growing Old," in A Browning Handbook, p. 295.
be no challenge if man were "but formed to feed / On joy, to soley seek and find and feast" (ll. 20-21). Man's being is united to God's by a "spark" of love. Cleon had imagined such a possibility, but the Rabbi, like Saul, is certain of its truth:

Rejoice we are allied
To That which doth provide
And not partake, effect and not receive! (ll. 25-27)

The soul's hunger for Joy is a manifestation of its immortal destiny. The Joy attained in human life, therefore, is necessarily "three-parts pain."

Browning develops this facet of the idea of Joy even further in "A Death in the Desert." Life, John declares, is a testing ground, and "all it yields of joy and woe" is just man's chance to learn the fact of immortal love. It is the condition of man's "creatureship" that the completion of Joy be delayed beyond the present life. If man "renounces this pact of creatureship" with God, he will not taste the ultimate Joy:

'If ye demur, this judgment on your head,
Never to reach the ultimate, angels' law,
Indulging every instinct of the soul
There where law, life, joy, impulse are one thing!' (ll. 630-633)

In The Prelude, Wordsworth ascribes the greatest Joy experienced in his life to his seventeenth year, when, from a kind
of revelation, he had an intimation of the unity of life and Joy that Browning's John describes here. Wordsworth says that he saw one life "and felt that it was joy."

Browning, however, firmly attaches the unity of Joy and life to the Incarnation in the gloss added to the account of John's dying speech. The gloss says that if Christ is not the son of God, then he is the most wretched of men:

'For see; Himself conceived of life as love,
Conceived of love as what must enter in,
Fill up, make one with His each soul He loved:
Thus much for man's joy, all men's joy for Him!' (ll. 670-673)

Browning thus employs again the paradox which he applies to the artist in "Cleon." Like the artist in that poem, Christ, if he is only a supreme man, has a greater capacity for Joy than do other men. He requires not just "man's joy," but "all men's joy." If he does not, indeed, share in the Godhead, all men are the slaves of Cleon's "horrible fate," but Christ, the highest man, suffers most because he possesses the greatest share of self-consciousness.

Browning both extends and modifies most of the aspects of the idea of Joy which have been seen in the Wordsworthian-Romantic tradition. The Joy of the artist is the most intense Joy possible to man, it sets the artist apart, and it grows as his consciousness expands with greater
universality and energy. The experience of Joy is most supreme, however, if the artist nurtures the essential purity that holds his reflective powers in check. Joy is the power which destroys the artist's alienation from the rest of men, for the experience of Joy is conclusive proof of a spiritual realm that includes all men. The artist must attempt to share his Joy, the "use of life," with those men, who, like Protus in "Cleon," are capable of such experience. Joy transforms the pleasures of sex so that love between human out-souls is a sacramental and redemptive relationship indicative of and leading to the love of the divine out-soul. The experience of Joy inevitably leads man to intimations of immortality. Browning, however, makes explicit what the earlier Romantics imply. The concept of Joy depends, in Browning's poetry, not upon intimations of the immortality of the human soul, but upon a faith in God's revelation of this immortality as a fact of human history. The Incarnation is the ultimate test of Joy.

In "Cleon," Browning describes three main sources of Joy—the Joy of art, the Joy of knowledge, and the Joy of experience. Cleon judges all three to be inadequate to man, whose imaginative faculties give him unlimited capability for Joy. If these three categories are applied to one of
Browning's notoriously obscure poems, "Women and Roses," this poem can be seen as a symbolic statement of Cleon's idea of Joy. The speaker of "Women and Roses" says that he dreams of a red-rose tree around which three groups of women dance. The circling figures of the women about the rose tree call to mind the circling figures which Keats sees in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" and in the "Ode on Indolence," and the longing for permanence in a world of change which Browning describes in this poem is not unlike that which Keats embodies in the "Ode on a Grecian Urn":

Round and round, like a dance of snow
In a dazzling drift, as its guardians, go
Floating the women, faded for ages,
Sculptured in stone, on the poet's pages. (ll. 4-7)

These women symbolize the Joy of knowledge gleaned from the study of the past. The next group belongs to the present, to the Joy of experience:

Then follow women fresh and gay,
Living and loving and loved to-day. (ll. 8-9)

The third and final group is symbolic of the Joy of art, for these women belong to the incipient future and are created by the poetic imagination:

Last, in the rear, flee the multitude of maidens,
Beauties yet unborn. And all, to one cadence,
They circle their rose on my rose tree. (ll. 10-12)

The circling groups of women embody the Joy that should inhere in the continuity of human life from the past to the
future, but their relentless circular movement only under-
scores the inevitability of the life-death cycle. The
speaker of the poem now addresses each of the three groups
in turn.

The women from the past are known, but their Joy eludes
him. He cannot "fix," "fire," or "freeze" them in the
present. The women of the present, who image the Joy of
experience, are living, and their "joy's undimmed," but
this present Joy also escapes his grasp:

Prison all my soul in eternities of pleasure,
Girdle me for once! But no--the old measure,
They circle their rose on my rose tree. (ll. 34-36)

The speaker of the poem then thinks that the women yet un-
created can insure that his Joy shall live on in his art;
the works of his imagination will embody Joy in the future:

Roses will bloom nor want beholders,
Sprung from the dust where our flesh moulders.
What shall arrive with the cycle's change?
A novel grace and a beauty strange. (ll. 42-45)

This beauty and grace of art will survive the life-death
cycle. He will create an image of Joy that surmounts
change:

I will make an Eve, be the artist that began her,
Shaped her to his mind!— (ll. 46-47)

But the Joy of creation is also doomed by the relentless
cycle of time: "—Alas! in like manner / They circle their
rose on my rose tree."
The Joy of knowledge, the Joy of experience, and the Joy of art which Cleon defines are given symbolic projection in "Women and Roses" in the figures of the women from the past, the women of the present, and the women of the future. The moment of perfect union eludes the speaker of "Women and Roses," as it eludes the speakers of "James Lee's Wife," "Two in the Campagna," and "Too Late." His state is comparable to that of Lazarus, who is described by Karshish as being a man torn by the consciousness of two realms: "His heart and brain move there, his feet stay here" (1. 185). This speaker's heart and brain long for the permanence of the rose tree, but his feet must move to the "one cadence" of time. He has the power to re-create the Joy of the past, to experience Joy in the present, and to project imaginatively the Joy of the future, but he, like all men, is bound by the conditions of "creatureship," and is thus subject to the flux of a temporal realm. The stationary rose tree around which the women circle indicates, however, that perfect Joy is a possibility outside the dimension of time.

The restrained lyrical intensity given the idea of Joy in "Women and Roses" is unique in Browning's poetry. Joy characteristically "explodes," as it does in In a Balcony, or it appears, as in "The Worst of It," as "a
blaze of joy and a crash of song." Joy comes with the recognition that man is "hurled from change to change," as in "James Lee's Wife," or Joy is manifested by the wild outbreak of a storm, as it is in "A Grammarian's Funeral."

In "The Last Ride Together," Browning again returns to the theme of the man's Joy versus the artist's sorrow, a theme which he first explores in Sordello. The speaker of the poem feels "joy and fear" as the woman he loves leans against him—Joy for the union that could be, and fear because he senses that this moment is the end of love. The speaker of the poem says that one moment of union with his companion is worth more than all the glory of statesmen, soldiers, poets, sculptors, or musicians. Like Cleon, he admits that the poet can tell the use of life, while other men can only mutely feel it, but, also like Cleon, he maintains that living is better:

'T is something, nay 't is much: but then,
Have you yourself what's best for men?
Are you--poor, sick, old ere your time--
Nearer one whit your sublime
Than we who have never turned a rhyme? (11. 72-76)

The poet's ability to imagine and to express the beauty of the world is a great gift, this speaker says, but his consciousness envisages a sublimity he himself is incapable of enjoying. The speaker of "The Last Ride Together" thus
dismisses the poet. Sing, he says, but realize that the real Joy of life lies in action: "Sing, riding's a joy; For me, I ride." The Joy of the ride is symbolic of the quest for the eternal that also haunts Cleon and the speaker of "Women and Roses," the quest for what Browning calls in this poem. "the instant made eternity." It is an instant which contains a foretaste of man's eventual transition to a state beyond the temporal realm where his unlimited capacity for Joy will be infinitely fulfilled.

The man's Joy versus the artist's sorrow is also a motif of the concluding poem of *Men and Women*. In "One Word More," Browning dedicates the fifty poems of the volume to his wife. He says that, like Dante and Raphael, he would like to express his love, if only once, in another artistic medium:

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's pictures? This: no artist lives and loves, that longs not Once, and only once, and for one only, (Ah, the prize!) to find his love a language Fit and fair and simple and sufficient— Using nature that 's an art to others, Not, this one time, art that 's turned his nature. (ll. 58-64)

When the painter makes a poem or the poet makes a painting, he escapes the demands of his natural talents and achieves a pure expression of the love that is Joy:

So to be the man and leave the artist, Gain the man's joy, miss the artist's sorrow. (ll. 71-72)
Browning, however, is no Cleon. He admits that painting, sculpture, and music are all beyond his powers. His one perfect gift, therefore, must be his fifty men and women:

Hardly shall I tell my joys and sorrows,
Hopes and fears, belief and disbelieving:
I am mine and yours--the rest be all men's,
Karshish, Cleon, Norbert and the fifty. (11. 133-136)

It is in this sense only that Browning maintains that the Joy of both man and poet can be achieved simultaneously. The Joys, sorrows, hopes, fears, beliefs, and disbeliefs that his imaginative vision perceives in the life around him are expressed in his poetic creations. The fifty men and women enable him to achieve a universality that both deepens and restrains his own Joy-hunger. In a very real sense, Browning's characters are the poetic images that implicitly assert the artist-man's "capability for joy."
CHAPTER V

JOY, ENERGY, AND THE GROTESQUE:
THE RING AND THE BOOK

Robert Browning's acknowledged masterpiece is The Ring and the Book, and in this poem, first published in 1868, Browning demonstrates his full artistic maturity and embodies his moral and aesthetic theories in their most complete expression. The Ring and the Book is his most searching analysis of human character and the nature of human truth. The twelve books of the poem re-create a seventeenth-century murder case from the varying points of view of both its protagonists and imaginary citizens of Rome. Henry James describes the complexity of the poem and indicates the difficulty inherent in any critical discussion of its characteristics:

"The Ring and the Book" is so vast and so essentially Gothic a structure, spreading and soaring and branching at such a rate, covering such ground, putting forth such pinnacles and towers and brave excrescences, planting its transepts and chapels and porticoes, its clustered hugeness or inordinate muchness, that with any first approach we but walk vaguely and slowly, rather bewilderedly, round and round it, wondering at what point we had best attempt
such entrance as will save our steps and light our uncertainty. . . .

One possible "entrance" to The Ring and the Book is from the standpoint of the relationship between what James calls the "Gothic" nature of the poem and the idea of Joy.

In the Romantic tradition, the power of Joy is said to enable a man to exist universally in the life around him. Coleridge says that "in joy individuality is lost," and that "to have genius is to live in the universal, to know no self but that which is reflected not only from the faces of all around us, our fellow creatures, but reflected from the flowers, the trees, the beasts. . . ."

Browning also maintains that the poetic consciousness must envelop the imperfection of the world with a universal and energetic response, a response that rises above both the formal demands of the traditional literary genres and the claims of conventional morality. Imperfection, energy, and universality are three keynotes of the idea of Joy; these three factors result in the grotesque or Gothic texture of Browning's mature poetry, for imperfection, energy, and universality are also the keynotes of the

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1Henry James, "The Novel in 'The Ring and the Book,'" The Quarterly Review, CCXVII (1912), 68.

2Coleridge, p. 179.
nineteenth-century concept of the grotesque. The grotesque is manifest throughout Browning's poetry, but it is especially evident in The Ring and the Book. Before that poem is discussed, however, Browning's own view of the grotesque should be examined and the term itself defined.

Some of Browning's fullest expressions of his concept of the grotesque occur in Fifine at the Fair and Aristophanes' Apology. In the first place, the grotesque is the price that man pays for his imperfect humanity. It results from the working of spiritual energy outward to the physical form. The ability to perceive the grotesque as an integral part of human life is a result of the poet's joyous universality of vision. The speaker of Fifine at the Fair says:

I want, put down in black and white,
What compensating joy, unknown and infinite,
Turns lawlessness to law, makes destitution—wealth,
Vice—virtue, and disease of soul and body—health? (ll. 140-143)

The fact that Browning ultimately denies this "compensating joy" to the morally marginal character who speaks the poem reinforces the fact that the Joy that transmutes the illusion of vice into the reality of virtue, or the illusion of disease into health, is the universal Joy of the poetic imagination, that aspect of the idea of Joy that enables the
poet to celebrate the imperfection of human existence in all of its paradoxical reality.

Don Juan, the speaker of *Fifine*, describes his disgust when he first observed the carnival-like atmosphere of the Venice streets:

'T was easy to infer what meant my late disgust
At the brute-pageant, each grotesque of greed and lust
And idle hate, and love as impotent for good. (ll. 1861-1863)

This is, however, a hasty reaction; it results from a distorted perspective. Since "the proper goal for wisdom" is "the ground / And not the sky" (ll. 1866-1867), Don Juan next describes his view of Venice from a different vantage point. He is now able to see that what was formerly considered ugly is actually beautiful:

Enough and not too much of hate, love, greed and lust,
Could one discerningly but hold the balance, shift
The weight from scale to scale, do justice to the drift
Of nature, and explain the glories by the shames
Mixed up in man, one stuff miscalled by different names
According to what stage i' the process turned his rough
Even as I gazed, to smooth--only get close enough! (ll. 1871-1877)

If justice is done "to the drift of nature," incongruity and imperfection are seen to be the law of life:
A love, a hate, a hope, a fear, each soul a-strain
Some way through the flesh—the face, an evidence
0' the soul at work inside; and, all the more
intense,
So much the more grotesque. (ll. 1718-1721)

The energy of human passion stamps every human soul with the intense evidence of the grotesque. The "compensating joy, unknown and infinite," which is the reward of the poetic consciousness, as well as the source of its power, enables the poet to see "the soul at work inside."

Furthermore, the experience of Joy enables the poet to rise above the traditional claims of comedy and tragedy to a new poetry which combines both, a poetry which Browning calls "complex." He describes this ideal poetry in Aristophanes' Apology,3 and his description is an indication of the effect which he attempted to achieve in The Ring and the Book. First, he presents the claim of comedy:

Ay, the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,
She who evolves superiority,
Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that's incomplete in human life. (ll. 1353-1356)

Man's apparent physical and spiritual deformities are cured and made whole again by the power of the comic vision:

3C. N. Wenger, in The Aesthetics of Robert Browning (Ann Arbor, 1925), pp. 202-203, says that "it is safe to say" that the theory of the tragi-comic advanced by the speakers of this poem is Browning's own. The present discussion is based upon the assumption that this poem is indeed a reliable statement of Browning's own idea of "complex poetry."
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man. (ll. 1358-1361)

The comic grotesque emerges through the poet's use of both exaggeration and contrast:

Hail who accept no deformity
In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil. (ll. 1375-1378)

Browning relegates the prime role of comedy to the worldly pretensions of man, while the tragic vision concerns itself with his spiritual aspirations and with his will:

She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'
Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence! (ll. 1394-1398)

The comic mode should not be separated from tragedy, however, any more than man's physical nature can be sundered from his spirit. Either mode of vision is incomplete without the other, but blended together into "complex poetry," the tragi-comic adequately reflects the complexities of the human personality.

Browning, therefore, advocates a poetry which combines both the comic and the tragic, the "complex poetry" that is his term for what is commonly called the tragi-comic. He describes this "complex poetry" as follows:
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves—
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius--complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both. (ll. 1468-1474)

The tragic-comic vision enables the poet to see the whole man;
it unites man's disparate faculties through a resolution
which recognizes his necessary state of perfection-in-
imperfection:

For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature--what avails the Head
Left solitary predominant,--
Unbodied soul,--not Hermes, both in one? (ll. 1487-1491)

Hermes, the winged god, symbolizes the coalescence of body
and soul, each a "god-grace" of the whole man. It is only
man's folly, Browning says, that judges any created thing
as "freak"; the freak is an integral component in the joy
and fruitfulness of nature which the universal vision of
the poet embodies in "complex poetry."

This tragi-comic vision would remove not only the
traditional barriers between comedy and tragedy, but also
the artificial duality of body and soul, as well as the wall
between past and present:
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Make Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
Euripides with Aristophanes
Coöperant! this, reproducing Now,
As that gave Then existence: Life today,
This, as that other--Life dead long ago! (ll. 3439-3445)

The universal vision of the complex poet would destroy all conventional classifications of the beautiful and the ugly. This poet would glory in the total reality of life, what Wordsworth calls life's "coarse nature and truth." Browning says that any other view of human life cheapens its complex tangibility:

No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—
That 's certain somehow! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No!
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what is most ugly proves most beautiful. (ll. 2166-2172)

It is the "compensating joy, unknown and infinite," which is described in *Fifine at the Fair*, that enables the poet to strip away the illusion of ugliness which surrounds the actual beauty of the imperfect creation and to fathom Keats's mystery of Beauty-in-Truth and Truth-in-Beauty. The grotesque arises from the poet's ability to exist universally in the life around him, in the eagle as well as in the lark, in the fir tree as well as in the rose bush. This universal vision shatters the conventional molds of life, literature,
and language. The tragi-comic is grotesque because it is an expression of a rebellion against an assumed perfection of aesthetic form.

John Ruskin was among the first to perceive the relationship between the concept of Joy, energy, universality, imperfection, and the spirit of Gothic art, a relationship which he describes in *The Stones of Venice* and which he makes a cultural goal for the nineteenth century. Modern critics apply some of these same qualities of the Gothic spirit to the grotesque, and the latter is the term used most often to describe the peculiar quality of Browning's work, as the following survey of critical opinion will demonstrate.

Walter Bagehot, for example, identifies the grotesque as Robert Browning's distinguishing poetic characteristic. He maintains that grotesque art "takes the type, so to say, in difficulties. It gives a representation of it in its minimum development, amid the circumstances least favorable to it, just while it is struggling with obstacles, just where it is encumbered with incongruities. It deals, to use the language of science, not with normal types but with abnormal specimens; to use the language of old philosophy, not with what Nature is striving to be, but with what by some lapse
she has happened to become." We have just seen in Browning's own description of the grotesque his argument that the difficulties and incongruities which Bagehot cites are endemic to the human condition, and that to overlook them in poetry is to "mutilate" the very "drift of nature." Bagehot further argues that Browning has not made his grotesquely medieval subject matter pleasant, and that the poet has chosen topics which he could not "charm." Browning, Bagehot concludes, estranges the reading public by his use of the grotesque.

It is obvious, then, that the term "grotesque" has a pejorative connotation in Bagehot's critique of Browning's poetry. Most critics, however, see the grotesque as a necessary and quite legitimate aesthetic strategy.

Lily Bess Campbell's study, *The Grotesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning*, is more thorough and more sympathetic than is Bagehot's. She concludes that the grotesque can be

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4 Walter Bagehot, "Wordsworth, Tennyson, and Browning; Or Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art in English Poetry," in *Literary Studies* (London, 1895), II, 366. John M. Hinter, in "Browning's Grotesque Period," *VP*, IV (Winter, 1966), 1-13, offers a convenient summary of Browning's use of the word "grotesque." Hinter, however, employs as the basis of his study a biographical argument that is somewhat questionable. He traces Browning's use of the grotesque in the 1840's and the 1870's to the "bursts of bile" which the poet experienced when writing for the stage and again after his wife's death. "Grotesque" thus has an implicit pejorative connotation in Hinter's discussion, just as it does in Bagehot's.
placed into three broad categories: the artificial grotesque, the fanciful grotesque, and the great grotesque. Browning's work exemplifies all three of these classes, but he excels in the great grotesque, which Miss Campbell defines as "the attempt of the mind through the imagination to remove its limitations. It is the result of activity and of strength." She argues, further, that the grotesque arises naturally from Browning's vision of life: "It was, then, in this struggle between his idealism and his realism that he became the poet of the grotesque. An ever constant struggle thus to attain the absolute through the finite, to reconcile fact and truth, to comprehend the infinite ordering of things through the finite, this made Robert Browning the poet of the great grotesque." Miss Campbell thus posits for the grotesque in Browning's poetry an intellectual and philosophical basis that touches the very core of his most deeply held convictions.

G. K. Chesterton, however, reaches a somewhat different conclusion:

They [Browning's admirers] believe that what is ordinarily called the grotesque style of Browning was a kind of necessity

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boldly adopted by a great genius in order to express novel and profound ideas. But this is an entire mistake. What is called ugliness was to Browning not in the least a necessary evil, but a quite unnecessary luxury, which he enjoyed for its own sake. . . . He had a love of the grotesque of the nature of art for art's sake. 6

Chesterton stresses the link which exists between energy and the grotesque; he says that "the element of the grotesque in nature, means, in the main, energy, the energy which takes its own forms and goes its own way." Chesterton, furthermore, hints at the relationship between the idea of Joy and the grotesque, the thesis of the present discussion, although he does not develop the idea. "Energy and joy," Chesterton writes, are "the father and the mother of the grotesque." 7 Chesterton's view of the grotesque in Robert Browning's poetry presages the opinions of more recent critics.

W. O. Raymond, for example, notes that allied with the "love of energy in the physical world is Browning's keen perception of the grotesque. For the grotesque is the bold and preceptory shattering of conventional molds." 8

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7Ibid., pp. 149, 148.
Miller, like Chesterton and Raymond, also stresses the role of energy in grotesque art. Miller contends that all men are grotesque in Browning's world, because each man is an imperfect expression of a Divine perfection. Miller explains that "grotesque visible forms and grotesque language are really the same, for both are the result of the pushing out of a novel internal energy, an energy which may express itself in appearance or in speech. . . . Inside, the intense energy, the eccentric seal of life--outside, the grotesque visible form. Each person, by doing what comes naturally, becomes just that self God intended him to be, and in that process becomes grotesque." These last four critical opinions are consonant with Browning's own view of the grotesque as he expresses it in Fifine at the Fair and Aristophanes' Apology.

Wolfgang Kayser's provocative attempt to define the grotesque should be briefly mentioned, although it is devoted to continental art and literature and contains only a brief reference to Lily Bess Campbell's study of the grotesque in Browning. Kayser's conclusions, moreover, are of limited value to a study of Browning. Kayser finds that the grotesque is basically a structure; it is the estranged

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9Miller, pp. 135-136.
world; it instills a fear of life; it is a play with the absurd; and, finally, that the grotesque is "an attempt to invoke and subdue the demonic aspects of the world."\textsuperscript{10}

This definition has some validity for Browning's poetry, but it does not provide the necessary critical vocabulary which will concretely specify the uniquely grotesque quality of the poetry. These studies, however, are the chief aids that twentieth-century criticism offers for the exploration of Browning's use of the grotesque.

Chesterton says that the grotesque springs from joy and energy; Campbell, Raymond, and Miller echo this judgment with similar assertions. Victorian criticism is even more enlightening on this point. John Ruskin explains the relationship between energy and the concept of Joy that emerges in the grotesque in \textit{The Stones of Venice}, and his chapters on "The Nature of Gothic" and "Grotesque Renaissance" provide just the critical vocabulary needed for a discussion of the grotesque quality of \textit{The Ring and the Book}.

The universality and energy that are central to the Romantic idea of Joy are equally crucial to Ruskin's definition of the nature of Gothic. The moral and imaginative

\footnote{Wolfgang Kayser, \textit{The Grotesque in Art and Literature}, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, 1963), p. 188.}
qualities which Ruskin finds in the Gothic spirit are savageness, changefulness, naturalism, grotesqueness, rigidity, and redundance. Savageness, the most important of these six characteristics, manifests itself in the quality of imperfection. Ruskin says that "in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty. All admit irregularity as they imply change; and to banish imperfection is to destroy expression, to check exertion, to paralyze vitality."11 This is Ruskin's statement of the "philosophy of the imperfect," which so appeals to Browning and which he also expresses in "Old Pictures in Florence," "Fra Lippo Lippi," "Andrea del Sarto," and in numerous other poems, including the passages from Fifine and Aristophanes' Apology cited above. Imperfection, according to Ruskin and Browning, is a source of beauty because it indicates that

11John Ruskin, "The Nature of Gothic," in The Genius of John Ruskin, ed. John Rosenberg (Boston, 1963), p. 184. It seems impossible to determine if Browning is indebted to Ruskin for the "philosophy of the imperfect." DeVane, in A Browning Handbook, p. 271, points out that the Brownings read The Stones of Venice in 1854, but concludes that "the idea, of course, is as truly the expression of Browning's personality as it is of Ruskin's." Furthermore, Lawrence Poston has noted that any discussion of the theories of Ruskin and Browning must proceed from an analogical point of view, since "we can make no final decision as to where the indebtedness lies; it may be that both were proceeding quite independently," in "Ruskin and Browning's Artists," English Miscellany, XV, (1964), 196.
incompletion is the fundamental law of life and that progress is a real possibility. All other qualities of the Gothic spirit rest upon the principle of imperfection.

The second characteristic of the Gothic spirit, as Ruskin defines it, is changefulness. Ruskin says that the love of variety manifests itself in "culminating energy," and he defines this "changepfulness" as follows: "It is that strange disquietude of the Gothic spirit that is its greatness; that restlessness of the dreaming mind, that wanders hither and thither among the niches, and flickers feverishly around the pinnacles, and frets and fades in labyrinthine knots and shadows along wall and roof, and yet is not satisfied, nor shall be satisfied." This passage could be applied, without even altering the architectural metaphors, to the peculiar quality of Browning's verse in poems such as Fifine or "Caliban," which critics, for lack of suitable terminology, usually label "difficult" or "grotesque." In

12 Ibid., p. 190.

13 Robert Preyer, for example, in "Two Styles in the Verse of Robert Browning," ELH, XXXII (March, 1965), 84, notes that in Byron, Dickens, and Browning, "sensibility operates at an abnormal speed and intensity. I have not found a way of formulating these similarities. One gets the impression that there is a literary form or intention that they share." The "changepfulness" of the Gothic spirit, as Ruskin defines it in The Stones of Venice, is perhaps the formulation which Preyer seeks. Henry James, in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter, employs
Pauline, Browning's narrator describes the dominating quality of his own mind as "restlessness." He says that he possesses a most "clear idea of consciousness," dominated by "a principle of restlessness / Which would be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all--" (ll. 277-278). This "restlessness" is analogous to the Gothic quality of changefulness, the disquietude of the mind in its search for the universality of vision which Ruskin describes.

Naturalism, the third quality of the Gothic mind, Ruskin defines as the love of objects for their own sakes and the careful, factual description of those objects. This factor is analogous to Browning's poetic objectivity, that quality of his poetry which dwells on the perception of outward forms without imputing human feelings to them as Wordsworth, for example, characteristically does. Furthermore, Ruskin says that the rigidity of the Gothic spirit manifests itself in "an elastic tension and communication of force from part to part," while the quality of redundance results from a "love of decorative accumulation: a magnificent enthusiasm, which feels as if it could never do enough to reach the fulness of its ideal."\(^{14}\) The twelve books of The Gothic architectural metaphors similar to Ruskin's to describe The Ring and the Book.

Ring and the Book embody both Ruskin's idea of rigidity and redundancy, essentially in Browning's choice of the multiple presentation of the same facts, a poetic dramatization that results in a tension between the monologues and an accumulation of specific detail which communicates the force of Browning's own judgments.

The sixth characteristic of the Gothic spirit is the grotesque, which Ruskin describes in his chapter on the "Grotesque Renaissance." He argues that the grotesque is composed of two elements:

First, then, it seems to me that the grotesque is, in almost all cases, composed of two elements, one ludicrous, the other fearful; that, as one or the other of these elements prevails, the grotesque falls into two branches, sportive grotesque and terrible grotesque; but that we cannot legitimately consider it under these two aspects, because there are hardly any examples which do not in some degree combine both elements: there are few grotesques so utterly playful as to be overcast with no shade of fearfulness, and few so fearful as absolutely to exclude all ideas of jest.¹⁵

Ruskin contends that the grotesque appears wherever and whenever there exists in the cultural climate a "joyful energy of the mind." In the Romantic tradition, Joy is said to result when intellect and emotion exist in a state of equipoise. The concept of Joy manifests itself in the

¹⁵Ibid., p. 207.
universal poetic vision which enables the artist to exist imaginatively in an Ancient Mariner, a Betty Foy, or a Guido Franceschini, as well as in a Christabel, a Michael, or a Pompilia. Ruskin maintains that this cultural condition, which the earlier Romantic tradition identifies as an aspect of the idea of Joy, provides the necessary basis for the grotesque. He explains that "wherever the human mind is healthy and vigorous in all its proportions, great in imagination and emotion no less than in intellect, and not overborne by an undue or hardened pre-eminence of the mere reasoning faculties, there the grotesque will exist in full energy."16

Dante, Ruskin says, exhibits this balance more than any other artist, partly because "he was born both in the country and at the time which furnished the most stern opposition of Horror and Beauty."17 Nineteenth-century artists attempt to revive this stern opposition. Browning praises Dante in "One Word More," and he describes his genius in much the same way as does Ruskin:

Dante, who loved well because he hated.  
Hated wickedness that hinders loving.  (11. 42-43)

16 Ibid., p. 214.  
17 Ibid., p. 213.
Wylie Sypher points out a passage from Victor Hugo, which is applicable to the grotesque in Browning, and which also contains the same elements of the grotesque that Ruskin employs in his definition. Sypher writes that many nineteenth-century artists "discovered the grotesque as Hugo understood it and as Browning, a retarded romantic, exploited it. Hugo insisted that romantic drama would present the 'abnormal and the horrible, the comic and the burlesque,' the beast as well as the beauty." The grotesque grows out of this opposition, an opposition which Browning encompasses in his characterization of Guido and Pompilia in The Ring and the Book.

John Ruskin, therefore, sees the grotesque as a distinguishing quality of the Gothic spirit. Modern critics, however, often use the term "grotesque" for the sum of the characteristics which Ruskin defines as Gothic. This difference in terminology makes little actual difference; whether one calls them grotesque or Gothic, the six characteristics which Ruskin enumerates in The Stones of Venice provide the most meaningful set of criteria for the analysis of what modern critics usually term Browning's grotesque.

When The Ring and the Book is examined as a whole, the

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elements which Ruskin describes—savageness, changefulness, naturalism, redundance, rigidity, and grotesqueness—are seen to develop chiefly from Browning's use of a classic, twelve-book epic structure to tell an obscure seventeenth-century murder story. This is a juxtaposition of form and content which shatters the conventional expectations of epic form and which emphasizes the grotesque texture of the poem. The structure of the poem, moreover, exhibits both the rigidity and the redundance that Ruskin describes. The quality of rigidity in the poem, "the tension and communication of force from part to part," appears as the facts of the Roman murder case gather greater and greater force and meaning as they are repeated and ramified by each speaker in turn. The tension of the poem arises not from one particular monologue, but from the cumulative force of the details of the case as they are variously interpreted by each of the speakers. Tension operates on a second level in Browning's poem in that the speakers actually reveal their own motivations and their own strengths and weaknesses as they ostensibly relate the story of Guido and Pompilia; this individual revelation is inextricably tied to Browning's own judgment of each of the speakers, which he has already presented in the first book of the poem.
Furthermore, the structure of the poem indicates the Gothic quality of redundancy. The virtuoso enthusiasm that Browning demonstrates, the "love of decorative accumulation," appears, for example, as Guido is given not one, but two separate opportunities to present his version of the case. The naturalism of the Gothic spirit is evident in Browning's delight in "the pure crude fact" of the poem's sources, fact which he insists that each speaker presents as objectively as is consonant with his character. Ruskin's description of the Gothic quality of changefulness, or variety, is seen in Browning's presentation of ten different speakers, who present as many interpretations of the same essential facts. The murder of Pompilia and her parents, for example, is described twice by Browning himself in Book One, and each of the nine other speakers also renders a version of this central episode, as does Fra Celestino in the transcript of his sermon given in the final book of the poem.

The content of The Ring and the Book indicates its savageness, the most important of the six characteristics of the Gothic spirit which Ruskin describes in The Stones of Venice. The murder case appeals to Browning because its very savagery demonstrates not only man's imperfection, not only the imperfection of man's truth, but also their essential
vitality and endurance. Thomas Carlyle, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning, felt that Browning had wasted his powers on an "Old Bailey" story, but Carlyle failed to see that the fact that an "Old Bailey" story can be transformed by the poetic imagination is precisely Browning's point. Furthermore, The Ring and the Book exhibits the grotesqueness which Ruskin describes in the sharp contrast between the horror of Guido's violence and the beauty of Pompilia's suffering. The poem is grotesque, finally, in that it represents an endeavor to fuse the conventional comic and tragic modes into the tragi-comedy that Browning calls "complex poetry."

In the final book of the poem, Fra Celestino warns the people of Rome against the too facile belief that perfect truth always triumphs. He recalls once again the facts of the case and reinforces its grotesque character in the following description:

'Be otherwise instructed, you! And preferably ponder, ere ye judge, Each incident of this strange human play Privily acted on a theatre That seemed secure from every gaze but God's— Till, of a sudden, earthquake laid wall low And let the world perceive wild work inside And how, in petrification of surprise, The actors stood, --raised arm and planted foot,— Mouth as it made, eye as it evidenced, Despairing shriek, triumphant hate, --transfixed, Both he who takes and she who yields the life.' (XII, 542-553)
Savagery, surprise, rigidity, and redundancy—these are the elements which are of central importance to the priest's description of the frozen moment of Guido's crime and to the poem as a whole. Consider, for example, that Browning has Bottini enclose the priest's sermon in a letter to an unnamed friend. The unprincipled Bottini is preparing to turn against Pompilia in order that he might seize her property; his judgment of the sermon is, therefore, a grotesque travesty of the priest's intention. This much is evident. But Browning provides still another accumulation of tension, for the priest himself doubts his own ability to judge the case.

Significantly, since Fra Celestino is performing not only a priestly role but also a poetic role as he interprets the facts of the case in his sermon, his doubts about himself turn on his experience of Joy:

'I answer, at the urgency of truth:  
As this world seems, I dare not say I know  
---Apart from Christ's assurance which decides---  
Whether I have not failed to taste much joy,  
For many a doubt will fain perturb my choice---.'  (XII, 621-625)

Thus, we have Bottini, whom we know not to trust, harshly judging Fra Celestino's judgment, and the priest in turn doubting himself. Browning certainly intends for us to accept Fra Celestino as a reliable interpreter—Christ's
assurance of his Joy is, after all, the ultimate endorse-
ment of its probity— but the twistings and the turnings of
this one passage, the communication of tension and force
from one speaker to the next, with the consciousness of
Browning himself behind the sermon-within-the-letter-within-
the-monologue and the Old Yellow Book behind all three,
indicate Ruskin's description of the Gothic spirit as surely
as if the poem were concluded with an image of a grinning
gargoyle.

An attempt to trace these grotesque, or Gothic,
elements through each of the twelve books of the poem would
be an impossible task, and perhaps even a self-defeating one,
for these qualities are palpably present in the first book
and in Browning's presentation of the dramatic conflict.
Browning relishes the pure fact of the case as he considers
it in Book One, and he delights in the joyous creative
response that it elicits from him:

The Book! I turn its medicinable leaves
In London now till, as in Florence erst,
A spirit laughs and leaps through every limb,
And lights my eye, and lifts me by the hair,
Letting me have my will with these. (I, 774-778)

In the naturalistic spirit of Ruskin's nature of Gothic, he
rejoices in the case in and for itself; it is said to be
"medicinable." He denies that having his "will" with the
old murder case means that he "creates" the resulting poem:

Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps,
Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
Which turns thought, act—conceives, expresses too! (I, 719-721)

The energy of the creative spirit "resuscitates" and re-
invigorates imperfect forms; the poet projects this energy
into the already created object:

Something with too much life or not enough,
Which, either way imperfect, ended once;
An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
Completes the incomplete and saves the thing. (I, 730-
734)

The poet can bring the dead facts to life again:

The life in me abolished the death of things,
Deep calling unto deep: as then and there
Acted itself over again once more
The tragic piece. (I, 520-523)

The "tragic piece," however, is made tragic, Browning insists,
only by virtue of the imaginatively alloy of the poetic vision:

A book in shape but, really, pure crude fact
Secreted from man's life when heart beat hard.
And brains, high-blooded, ticked two centuries since. (I, 86-
88)

The rudeness, the savagery, the imperfection of the "pure
crude fact" is the domain of the poet, who, like a goldsmith,
"repristinates," or restores, reality with the alloy of his
creative energy.

The changefulness which marks the Gothic spirit as it
is described by Ruskin, that culminating energy which manifests
itself in the love of variety, is also given explicit ex-
pression in this first book of *The Ring and the Book*.
Browning prepares his readers for the monologues to follow
by an analogy with the infinite variety of the seasons of
the year. Any attempt to freeze any one aspect of the year
into some perfect landscape would only abolish the life of
that season:

The land dwarfed to one likeness of the land,
Life cramped corpse-fashion. Rather learn and love
Each facet-flash of the revolving year!--
Red, green and blue that whirl into a white,
The variance now, the eventual unity,
Which makes the miracle. (I, 1359-1364)

Just as the seasons of the year admit life through change,
man demonstrates the same vital principle of changefulness:

See it for yourselves,
This man's act, changeable because alive!
Action now shrouds, nor shows the forming thought;
Man, like a glass ball with a spark a-top,
Out of the magic fire that lurks inside,
Shows one tint at a time to take the eye. (I, 1364-
1369)

If the glass ball that is Guido, Browning says, is tilted only
a little, he flashes forth an entirely different color and
baffles man's absolutes. It is the poetic vision alone that
can stay the merging of this changeable rainbow of human life.

Rigidity, or elastic tension and communication of force,
as well as redundance, or love of decorative accumulation,
grow out of the changefulness which marks the Gothic spirit
of this first book. Without the energy of the poetic vision, which imparts tension and force to the facts of the case, the Old Yellow Book is worthless; it contains, Browning says, no "truth of force":

Was this truth of force?
Able to take its own part as truth should,
Sufficient, self-sustaining? Why, if so—
Yonder's a fire, into it goes my book,
As who shall say me nay, and what the loss?
You know the tale already. (I, 372-377)

To know only the facts of the tale is not enough. In the thirty-two verse paragraphs of this first book, Browning repeats the essential facts of the case no fewer than five times. This repetition reinforces his view of the essential meaninglessness of fact without the alloy of imagination. Furthermore, in his presentation of the nine speakers in turn, Browning establishes a tension between the monologues that each will deliver and the judgments that he would have the reader make of each of the speakers.

The opposition between horror and beauty provides the polarities out of which the grotesque character of the poem emerges. Browning evokes this opposition through the use of imagery, especially the imagery of sheep and wolves, which he first introduces in the initial book of the poem and which accumulates greater and greater force with the variation and repetition of it in the subsequent monologues. Horror and
beauty, Guido and Pompilia, sheep and wolves—the distinction between these should be as obvious to the human mind as if they were marked off from each other by a granite pillar:

The fact that, wolves or sheep, such creatures were,—
Which hitherto, however men supposed,
Had somehow plain and pillar-like prevailed
I' the midst of them, indisputably fact,
Granite, time's tooth should grate against, not graze. (I, 662-666)

The granite of indisputable fact proves to be only sandstone, however, and the horror and the beauty merge with the passage of time. The poet who chances upon the square Old Yellow Book renews the tension of their opposition; the book itself is like an "abacus" which the poet uses to calculate the style of the granite pillar which formerly separated the sheep from the wolves, the beauty from the horror. The ensuing poem is to be a metaphorical granite pillar against which, now that the poetic repristination is complete, time's tooth can only grate, leaving the poet's judgments of Guido and Pompilia clearly and finally set off from each other.

The Ring and the Book is Browning's most extended attempt to produce the "complex," or tragi-comic, poetry that he describes in Aristophanes' Apology. It is not Browning's mingling of the burlesque and comic machinations of Dominus Hyacinthus and Bottinius with the anguished, soul-searching
utterances of the Pope or Pompilia that gives the poem its tragi-comic character. It is, rather, the dramatic conflict itself. Now the dramatic conflict in the poem arises ostensibly out of the opposition of Pompilia to Guido's tyranny, but in actuality it arises out of the struggle of the central characters to be true to their own imperfections. It is this interior conflict that takes the poem out of the realm of melodrama and into the realm of the tragi-comic. C. N. Wenger, who notes that Browning believes that comedy and tragedy must be combined to some extent in any great modern poem, suggests that the dramatic struggle in Browning "is always the struggle of the spirit to be true to a loyalty to some person, or cause, or ideal, always an aspiration within the individual soul in any case, and against the limitations imposed by the individual's own forms and by the outward forms in the way of circumstances and institutions. . . . The struggle merely becomes comic or tragic as one sees it from the standpoint of the freedom attained by spirit over forms or from the standpoint of the limitations suffered."19 If Wenger's observation is applied to Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope, the tragi-comic nature of their

19Wenger, pp. 202-203.
respective conflicts will emerge.

Pompilia, for example, struggles to be true to the glorious promise of her unborn child, and it is only the necessity of loyalty to the spirit of new life that prompts her flight from Guido. In turn, Caponsacchi's conflict is embedded in his struggle to maintain a human loyalty to Pompilia, a loyalty which has a prerogative over the loyalty which is due the church. Pope Innocent is caught up within a struggle to be loyal to not only the duties of his office, but also to the church and to Pompilia, as well as to Guido. Ruskin writes that "all things are literally better, lovelier, and more beloved for the imperfections which have been divinely appointed, that the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment, Mercy."20 *The Ring and the Book* obliquely embodies the same truth. The tragic-comic vision which Browning employs demonstrates both the freedom and the limitation of each character, their individual efforts and the mercy due those efforts, Pompilia, Caponsacchi, and the Pope are as imperfect, and therefore as grotesque, as is Guido, but they struggle against their imperfection and grow in that struggle, while Guido remains a

stunted animal, a frightened wolf.

Coleridge says that Joy is given "only to the pure and in their purest hour." Pompilia is the embodiment of this innocence that characterizes the idea of Joy. It is an innocence that does not assert the self or demand absolutes. It is content to accept and to rejoice in the complexities of human life. Guido describes Pompilia's self-possession in his last speech:

This self-possession to the uttermost,
How does it differ in aught, save degree,    
From the terrible patience of God. (XI, 1378-1380)

Coleridge describes the highest Joy as the perfect peace of God, and Pompilia's self-possession, her "terrible patience," is analogous to this perfect peace that joyously embraces whatever indignities the human condition may merit. Pompilia, however, when the life of her unborn child is threatened, demonstrates the energy that also characterizes the idea of Joy, and her flight with Caponsacchi is the expression of this creative energy. When Guido overtakes the fleeing pair at the inn, his entrance blots out "all peace and joy and light and life" (VI, 1526). Pompilia moves quickly to stop him from inflicting injury to Caponsacchi, and the full energy of her Joy is manifested:
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him, seized, 
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy. (VI, 
1544-1545)

The Pope judges Pompilia's drawing the sword—surely her 
most uncharacteristic act—as the noblest expression of her 
character, precisely because it does require such an act of 
will.

Through Pompilia, furthermore, Browning gives expres­
sion to the idea of kindred Joy. When Guido claims her as 
his wife, his loveless lust burns the Joy from her life:

He laid a hand on me that burned all peace. 
All joy, all hope, and last all fear away, 
Dipping the bough of life, so pleasant once, 
In fire which shrivelled leaf and bud alike. (VI,776-779)

The promise of her unborn child, however, restores her to 
ergy, and the planned flight from Guido is a flight to Joy. 
She hears again the building-sparrows above her singing with 
one voice, a voice of Joy, and the chance that Caponsacchi 
will not aid her is a "doubt that first paled joy" (VII, 
1365). During one stage of the flight, the priest brings to 
her a new-born child in the hope of distracting her troubled 
thoughts for a moment:

A new-born babe?--and I saw faces beam 
Of the young mother proud to teach me joy, 
And gossips round expecting my surprise 
At the sudden hole through earth that lets in heaven. 
(VII, 1556-1559)

This image of heaven flashing suddenly through to earth serves
a double function in Pompilia's characterization. The supreme Joy experienced by Pompilia is the birth of her son, and Browning describes the home of the Comparini after the birth of Gaetano in images of Joy. He is the infant that "the great joy was for" (I, 404), and the Joy of Pompilia is explicitly compared to the Joy of Christ's mother.

Gaetano is born two weeks before Christmas, and heaven's Joy manifests itself both in his birth and in the celebration of the Incarnation that follows: Gaetano's birth is thus an expression of kindred Joy, and Pompilia is able to judge her entire life on the basis of this experience:

All has been right; I have gained my gain, enjoyed
As well as suffered,--nay, got foretaste too
Of better life beginning where this ends--. (VII, 1668-1670)

Kindred Joy in Browning's poetry is again manifested on two planes: the infant "the great joy was for" is both Gaetano, a human out-soul who redeems Pompilia from Guido's tyranny, and Christ, the divine out-soul, whose incarnation she celebrates and towards whom she moves. The Joyful and Glorious mysteries of the Christian tradition are centered upon Mary's divine motherhood, from the annunciation of God's choice of her to bear his son to Christ's assumption of her into heaven. Pompilia's life evidences the same implicit pattern,
from her joy in the discovery of her pregnancy to the last words of both her monologue and of her life, "And I rise" (VII, 1845).

Furthermore, Pompilia is also an out-soul to Caponsacchi. She compares herself to a flower whose growth is stinted by the lack of the sun's warmth:

But if meanwhile some insect with a heart Worth floods of lazy music, spendthrift joy--
Some fire-fly renounced Spring for my dwarfed cup,
Crept close to me, brought lustre for the dark,
Comfort against the cold--what though excess
Of comfort should miscall the creature--sun? (VII, 1519-1524)

The "spendthrift joy" of Caponsacchi enables her to save her unborn son, and she recognizes Caponsacchi in his role as the "sun," her out-soul. Caponsacchi, in turn, reaches the same conclusion: "I assuredly did bow, was blessed / By the revelation of Pompilia" (VI, 1864-1865). He decides that his agreement to aid her in her escape is obedience to God's command through the agency of Pompilia:

Sirs, I obeyed. Obedience was too strange,--
This new thing that had been struck into me
By the look o' the lady, -- to dare disobey
The first authoritative word. 'T was God's
I had been lifted to the level of her. (VI, 1010-1014)

The human out-soul is thus a channel of God's continuing revelation in the world. The Pope reinforces the truth of Caponsacchi's judgment. He says that Pompilia's life is also a revelation to him:
I see in the world the intellect of man,
That sword, the energy his subtle spear,
The knowledge which defends him like a shield—
Everywhere; but they make not up, I think,
The marvel of a soul like thine, earth's flower
She holds up to the softened gaze of God! (X, 1014-1019)

Her life is "perfect in whiteness" (X, 1006), the Pope says, and she thus presages the condition to come when the whole world itself will blaze with Joy: "So should the frail become the perfect, rapt / From glory of pain to the glory of joy" (X, 1801-1802).

Guido's hatred of Pompilia centers on the self-possess-ion of her Joy. In this respect, Guido's character is similar to that of the Duke in Browning's "My Last Duchess." The Duke, for example, hates the "spot of Joy" (11. 14-15) that shines through his wife's face, a Joy that his presence does not evoke. The Duchess, the Duke reiterates, is too liberal with her inner Joy. The slightest courtesy, he says, is "cause enough / For calling up that spot of joy" (11. 20-21). The pure and peaceful self-possess-ion of Joy eludes the attempts of both the Duke and Guido to dominate their wives' very souls. Both men take drastic action to destroy the Joy they cannot possess, and both decide that violence is the only weapon effective against such Joy.

It is significant that the images of Joy associated
with Pompilia's innocence, Caponsacchi's energy, and the Pope's universal vision are not associated with Guido. Guido speaks in images of pleasure, and he voices a Utilitarian ethic:

> For, pleasure being the sole good in the world
> Any one's pleasure turns to some one's pain,
> So law must watch for everyone, --say we,
> Who call things wicked that give too much joy,
> And nickname mere reprisal, envy made,
> Punishment: quite right! thus the world goes round.
> (XI, 529-534)

Guido gives Joy the connotation of sensual pleasure. The Pope recognizes this aspect of Guido's mind in his description of him:

> 'I have my taste too, and tread no such step!
> You choose the glorious life, and may, for me!
> I like the lowest of life's appetites,--
> So you judge, --but the very truth of joy
> To my own apprehension which decides.' (X, 1932-1936)

The "very truth of joy" is, for Guido, simply the enjoyment of "the lowest of life's appetites," and he scorns the Joy that he does not understand and cannot possess.

The images of the Joy of nature, the Joy of new life, the Joy of creative energy, and the Joy of Christ are denied Guido. The Joy of Christmas, for example, only goads Guido to greater fury in his planned revenge upon Pompilia and her parents. In Guido's mind, the image of Christ's face becomes merged with Satan's, old and wrinkled, as the Joy "withers" off:
But, day by day, joy waned and withered off:
The Babe's face, premature with peak and pine,
Sank into wrinkled ruinous old age,
Suffering and death, then mist-like disappeared. (V, 1602-1605)

Guido cannot move beyond the limitation of pleasure to the freedom of Joy. For Guido, therefore, Joy remains simply indulgence in "wicked" pleasures of sense which merits the reprisal of law. His conflict is thus more "tragic," as Browning uses the term, than are those of Pompilia, Caponsacchi, or the Pope, for their struggle partakes of the freedom of Joy, of a "divine" comedy.

Browning embodies in The Ring and the Book both the Gothic spirit and the idea of Joy in their greatest Victorian expression. John Ruskin's "The Nature of Gothic" is not so much an accurate historical description as it is the presentation of an ideal toward which he felt his own age should aspire. His desperate struggle to instill this spirit into all aspects of English life was eventually given up in despair of the architectural horrors that it spawned. Perhaps, however, the Gothic spirit is better conveyed in other media than architecture, for the idea of Joy, which is really the poetic manifestation of the Gothic spirit, flourishes in both Wordsworth and Browning and survives the nineteenth century. The grotesque quality of Browning's poetry, especially of The Ring and the Book, influenced the
Pre-Raphaelites and paved the way to the idea of Joy in W. B. Yeats. Wordsworth perceived the Gothic quality of his own work, and he describes the relationship of The Prelude to his other poems as that of an ante-chapel to a Gothic church. The Ring and the Book is the other great nineteenth-century poem that embodies the Gothic spirit, for although they are certainly vastly different kinds of poems, both Wordsworth and Browning attempt to encompass on an epic scale the energy, the universality, and the perfection-in-imperfection that marks Ruskin's Gothic spirit.

The idea of Joy, like the spirit of Gothic, is an attempt to tap a source of traditional cultural energy which could rejuvenate a mechanized society. Ruskin praises Gothic art because it indicates a culture that possesses a "joyful energy of the mind." The cultural conditions that produce Gothic art (whether they are historically justified is not the point) are the cultural conditions that produce Joy, and when these conditions are absent or unavailable to ordinary men, poets like Wordsworth and Browning must re-create the "compensating joy, unknown and infinite" in their poetry.
The Romantic tradition of Joy emphasizes the equipoise or equilibrium of the human intelligence and the human emotions within the individual consciousness as the source and the result of the highest Joy. This condition of equipoise, however, does not occupy a significant place in Browning's idea of Joy. In *The Ring and the Book*, the Other Half-Rome makes a statement which is a convenient summation of Browning's position. The speaker of the monologue describes the life of Pietro and Violante as a happy one:

All at the mean where joy's components mix.  
So again, in the couple's very souls  
You saw the adequate half with half to match,  
Each having and each lacking somewhat, both  
Making a whole that had all and lacked nought. (III, 126-130)

But such a condition is not natural to human life as Browning sees it; the Other Half-Rome explains that perfect equipoise is as debilitating to the soul as it is to the body:

But, as 't is said a body, rightly mixed,  
Each element in equipoise, would last
Too long and live forever,—accordingly
Holds a germ—sand-grain weight too much i' the scale—
Ordained to get predominance one day
And so bring all to ruin and release,--. (III, 137-142)

Equipoise destroys an otherwise healthy imbalance in the human soul, and the moment when perfect union is attained, "the mean where joy's components mix," can be only a fleeting experience at best. Browning says in *Sordello* that "Joy comes when so much Soul is wreaked in Time / On Matter." His attempt to express the nature of the struggle for Joy occupies as prominent a position in several of the late poems of the 1870's and 1880's as it does in the earliest poems of the 1830's and 1840's.

The keynote of the idea of Joy in Browning's late poems is struck in "St. Martin's Summer":

For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
Ask else Penelope, Ulysses--
Old in youth! (11. 69-72)

The speaker of this poem recognizes the awe and fear that Wordsworth also associates with the experience of Joy. Genuine Joy is sober because it reminds man of an immortal destiny whose attainment requires a tremendous effort of the human will. Genuine Joy is sober because it is the means by which the artist overcomes his alienation, but it also imposes unique responsibilities. Genuine Joy is sober because it brands the human soul with the innocent
humility that enables it to embrace joyously the pact of creatureship with God. Genuine Joy is sober because it transforms and transcends the otherwise irreconcilable antinomies of the human condition. Finally, genuine Joy is sober because it is so tenuous, so fleeting an experience, as to almost persuade the man that it is actually only an illusion. Browning insists, indeed, that the experience of Joy is a kind of divine illusion that presages the reality of eternity.

The speaker of Browning's "Numpholeptos" embodies the vain search of the human soul to be completely fulfilled in time by the Joy of eternity. Shelley says in "Adonais" that "Life, like a dome of many-colored glass, / Stains the white radiance of eternity"; Browning makes somewhat different use of a similar metaphor as the basis of "Numpholeptos." The speaker of the poem is nymph-enchanted. He would be, as the Pope says of Pompilia, "perfect in whiteness," for the nymph who holds him in thrall is moon-beam white and demands the same of him. She requires that he experience all of the kaleidoscopic colors of the seven orbs without absorbing their stain and that he return to her as white as she herself is:

Your own permission--your command, indeed, That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bonds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge. (ll. 95-100)

He returns to the nymph stained from his quest but nevertheless desirous of the reward of perfect Joy.

The speaker of the poem longs to find in the nymph's eyes some acknowledgment of a love that overcomes death:

My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy! (ll. 28-34)

The "resurging joy" of perfect love is denied the man who must traverse the stained and merging colors of human experience. The "resurging joy" thus withers off, and the speaker renews his vain quest:

You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon coloured shaft: this crimsons thence
That purples out its precinct through the waste. (ll. 61-65)

He stands before her again, suffused "with crocus, saffron, orange." He receives, however, no hint of approval from his quest in the yellow orb:
As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay--flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. (ll. 85-89)

Life, this speaker implies, should be a quest which includes
all of the tints of the "quintessential whiteness"; man
should struggle to "obtain experience of each tinge." But
such experience will inevitably stain the man, who is,
after all, "flesh disguised."

The speaker of "Numpholeptos" rebels against the vain
adventure which is imposed upon him, but finally submits
and begins again, this time "the crimson-quest." He,
like Andrea del Sarto, has gained the realization that he
is wedded to an ideal of human conduct beyond the resources
of his own humanity. The nymph resembles the silver-grey,
placid perfection that Browning rejects in "Andrea del
Sarto," and like Andrea, this speaker cannot break the bond
with the achromatic, cold, but nevertheless enchanting
ideal of perfection represented by the nymph. In Browning's
world, it is good and necessary that life stain "the white
radiance of eternity," and he embodies in this poem the
actual beauty of the chromatic stains of experience and the
futility of life on any other terms than the fully human.
Like the speaker of "Women and Roses," the speaker of
"Numpholeptos" finds himself ineffectually circling the whiteness of perfect Joy while vividly stained with the exigencies of his own humanity.

As far as it goes, this is a legitimate reading of "Numpholeptos," consonant with Browning's statements in other poems, but this poem is a rich artistic achievement and embodies several levels of meaning. W. C. DeVane, for example, endorses Betty Miller's interpretation of the poem as a biographical allegory of Browning's bondage to the memory of his dead wife. However, if the poem is seen as another ramification of Browning's concept of the grotesque, still another level of meaning will emerge. The grotesque signals imperfection, universality, energy, and Joy. It determines the necessity of human struggle. Ruskin justifies the imperfection that marks the grotesque from both a human and a divine point of view: he says that imperfection is divinely appointed so that "the law of human life may be Effort, and the law of human judgment, Mercy."

In The Ring and the Book, the grotesque quality of human

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life is viewed from a divine perspective and is judged a positive good. The poet, in other words, has a godlike, universal vantage point and an omnipotent control over the characters in the poem. Their imperfect struggles are said to partake of the freedom of Joy. But the human values of effort and mercy are equally important in the poem. From their internal points of view, Pompilia and Caponsacchi, for example, acknowledge their own imperfection, and their struggles against it become a source of Joy as soul is wreaked on matter in time. They are out-souls and their Joy is thus truly reciprocal and kindred, for it moves each of them closer to a knowledge of the divine out-soul. The perfection they struggle for is, therefore, initially a manifestly human ideal.

When seen from the vantage point of what Ruskin describes as the rationale of the imperfect, the grotesque is a source of Joy, but when seen from the point of view of the coldly perfect, it is an ugly and frightening quality of human life. The speaker of "Numpholeptos" is mesmerized by a false out-soul who represents an inhuman ideal of perfection. By her very nature, the nymph cannot reciprocate in the kindred Joy of humanity, but the colors of human experience are seen from her deadly perfect perspective. She possesses a "blank pure soul, alike the
source / And tomb of that prismatic glow" (ll. 73-74). The polychromatic colors which stain him are vividly and grotesquely human, but from an inhuman point of view, the strong and vibrant hues of the crimson, purple, topaz, saffron, orange, and scarlet merit only "forebearance, then repulsion, then disdain" (l. 40).

The speaker of this poem is bound by what Ruskin calls the condition of effort, for he must achieve the experience of each color, but he is not judged with the correlative mercy due his humanity. He thus comes to see his own condition from the nymph's perspective and judges it "absurd":

Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns--absurd
As frightful--in that sulphur-steeped disguise. (ll. 124-126)

His very soul is mesmerized by the nymph, however, and he relapses and acquiesces in the vain struggle which yields no Joy. His recidivism is comparable to that of Paracelsus, but Paracelsus achieves a final freedom that is denied this speaker. By viewing the human struggle from the point of view of the equipoise of the nymph, Browning effects a quite different expression of his concept of the grotesque, extending and enriching its meaning beyond his statements in Fifine at the Fair.
In *La Saisiaz*, Browning, speaking in his own person, again returns to the Joy theme which he dramatized in "Cleon." "Does the soul survive the body?"—this is the blunt and insidious question that the sudden death of a friend brings forth again from the depths of his consciousness, clamoring for an answer. Without a firm belief in the immortality of the soul, man's experience of human Joy is an inadequate and wholly futile process:

Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happiness
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we count
Life a curse and not a blessing, summed-up in its whole amount,
Help and hindrance, joy and sorrow? (ll. 204-207)

If the experience of Joy has to be computed as one would add a column of figures, it would be found to be totally lacking in spiritual import. Such computations of man's Joy without the consideration of eternity, Browning says, make human life "brutish." It is the desire for immortality which makes human life worthy of man's own reflective self-consciousness:

This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that promise joy: life done--
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete fulfilment? none. (ll. 245-246)

Browning argues that human Joy is necessarily incomplete, and if this incompletion does not signal potential completion, life becomes futile and joyless. As in "Saul," Browning
demands that the present life be seen as only a "prelude" to the full and complete harmony of eternity.

Browning says that if he would set aside all human desires and examine his life solely on the terms of his own human experience, he still finds the same inadequacy in his experience of Joy, an inadequacy which Cleon also finds. Browning maintains that the sorrow of life far outweighs its Joy:

Still--with no more Nature, no more Man as riddle to be read,
Only my own joys and sorrows now to reckon real instead,--
I must say--or choke in silence--'Howsoever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise,--life well weighed,
--preponderate.' (ll. 330-333)

In this poem, as in "Numpholeptos," man's life is envisioned as being stained by the vivid and variegated colors of his "flesh disguise," and if death is to result in the perfect whiteness that man is capable of imagining, there must be a promise of future life in which to attain that condition of perfection.

In an attempt to resolve the problem of his belief in immortality, Browning introduces into the poem a debate between the Reason and the Fancy. F. E. L. Priestley, who provides the most incisive reading of La Saisiaz, points out that Browning, by placing the debate between these two
human faculties at this point in the poem, returns to the ring metaphor of *The Ring and the Book*. In that poem, Browning images the imagination as the retraining alloy which cooperates with the "pure crude fact" to arrive at truth. Priestley writes that, as in *The Ring and the Book*, Browning selects "the vulgar (and empiricist) opposition of Reason and Fancy (vulgarly concerned with 'truth' and 'fiction', 'fact' and 'surmise'). . . . Reason and Fancy in actuality cooperate in the search for truth, as the dialogue that follows suggests."² Browning maintains that Fancy conducts Reason to the ultimate knowledge that man can grasp. An important part of the recognition which the cooperating human faculties achieve lies in the realization of the nature of Joy.

The Reason accepts the Fancy's assertion of three "facts" of human existence: God is, the soul is, and the soul survives death. The Reason then proceeds to build upon these propositions a superstructure of belief:

Life to come will be improvement on the life that's now; destroy Body's thwartings, there's no longer screen betwixt soul and soul's joy. (ll. 411-412)

²F. E. L. Priestley, "A Reading of 'La Saisiaz,'" UTQ, XXV (October, 1955), 53.
The "screen" that separates the soul from its Joy is man's finite, physical nature. Browning consistently utilizes the screen image for this concept. In "By the Fire-Side," for example, he images the human body as the "fine flesh-stuff" and as the "mortal screen" that impedes more than a momentary achievement of the perfect union of out-souls, while in "The Last Ride Together," the body is imaged as a "fleshly screen" which the speaker of the poem cannot transcend. The perfect transcendence of the "fine flesh-stuff" comes only in eternity, where all barriers between "soul and soul's joy" are removed. The Reason thus concludes that man can do little more than "wait" for the translation to eternity; the soul must "take the joys and bear the sorrows--neither with extreme concern!" (l. 467). The Fancy, however, leads the Reason to comprehend the fact that man must do more than simply "bear" the Joys and sorrows of life:

   Life has worth incalculable, every moment that he spends
   So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life depends. (ll. 477-478)

The Fancy employs the concrete imagery of commerce in order to appeal to the Reason which insists upon "fact." Browning confronts the Gradgrinds of the nineteenth-century Coketowns with the imagery that appeals to them, and in its very use demonstrates its inadequacies. The experience of Joy, as
Browning has already shown, cannot be computed on the basis of losses and gains.

In *La Saisiaz*, Browning insists upon the Joy of human life, no matter how imperfect that Joy appears to be; with a tenacity like that of his own Fra Lippo Lippi, he asserts that "life means intensely and means good." The poet's business is to find and to convey that meaning, but in this markedly personal utterance, Browning still maintains that the poet's meaning is not to be identified with the individual's belief. Each man, he says, must build his own faith upon the substructural propositions of knowledge, and his faith must find its ultimate truth and meaning in the facts of his individual experience.

F. E. L. Priestley notes that in the short envoi which concludes *La Saisiaz*, Browning describes the poem as a chain of thoughts, and Priestley discusses the "obliqueness" of this conclusion and the questions that it raises in relation to the poem as a whole. However, the envoi can be clarified somewhat if it is realized that Browning uses in his conclusion imagery similar to the ladder and thread images that are found in several of the poems of *Men and

\[\text{3Ibid.}, \ 59.\]
Women and Dramatis Personae. In "Cleon," for example, the climb up the ladder of the tower represents man's increasing power of Joy-consciousness, but Cleon rejects the ladder imagery in favor of the image of the thread of water, which signifies man's finite capability for Joy in contrast to the infinite oceans which his soul can envisage from its vantage point at the top of the ladder of consciousness.

In La Saisiaz, Browning similarly employs the imagery of mountain climbing as a contrast to the image of the "fleshly chain" that binds man to earth. The struggle up the mountain is analogous to the climb up the ladder of Joy-consciousness, while the chain image is analogous to the thread that signifies at once man's finitude and the tenuity of his separation from infinitude.

The poem begins with a description of the climb that the poet makes in memory of his dead friend. As he stands at the top of Mt. Salève, he is face to face with the mightiest possible symbol of infinity in Romantic poetry:

(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched by shrub and tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn set free,
Stationed face to face with--Nature? rather with Infinitude). (ll. 9-11)

The mountain signals to his consciousness not only an awareness of infinitude, but also an awareness of the profound
vastness of the separation between life and death. The poet and his friend had climbed together prior to her death only five short days before this one, and the climb had seemed to be a joyous experience:

Up and up we went, how careless—nay, how
joyous! All was new,
All was strange. 'Call progress toilsome? that
were just insulting you!' (ll. 41-42)

As in "Cleon," however, this joyous progress is interrupted, this time by the chilling reality of sudden death, and again in this poem, Browning sees increasing progress in Joy-consciousness issuing in despair. Browning now introduces the contrasting image of the chain just as he had introduced the thread image in "Cleon" after a similar perception.

He wonders if perhaps immortality means only that man is linked to succeeding generations by the power of the human memory. His friend survives death as long as he keeps her memory alive, and they both are linked beyond his own life in the memories of his friends. This is, however, an unsatisfactory supposition, Browning concludes, for in actuality it means that "both memories dwindle, yours and mine together linked" (l. 185). They are linked more firmly by the "fleshly chain" of their own humanity, and the mountain climb only reinforces their bondage:
Stalwart body idly yoked to stunted spirit, powers, that fain
Else would soar, condemned to grovel, groundlings through the fleshly chain,—. (ll. 199-200)

The profundity of their separation no longer seems so vast as it did from the perspective of the mountain top; even after death, he is yet bound to her by the fleshly chain, and he must attempt to judge the chances of the eventual transcendence of the fleshly chain while still remaining a finite link. When Browning comes to the envoi of the poem, he includes the imagery of the mountain climb and the fleshly chain as symbolic indications of the experiences which they shared. If these aspects of the contrasting imagery of mountain climb and fleshly chain are kept in mind, the envoi seems less oblique and can be understood as a meaningful and organic part of the poem.

In the envoi, Browning first describes his exaltation as he descended the mountain. From the vantage point of infinity, all things had taken on the illusion of solidity and purpose:

Not so loosely
thoughts were linked,
Six weeks since as I, descending in the sunset from Salève,
Found the chain, I seemed to forge there, flawless
till it reached your grave,—. (ll. 606-608)

This is the chain of their humanity which seems "flawless" from the mountain top. The realization of the vulnerability
of the fleshly chain, however, coming so soon after the
mountain climb which indicates his capacity for infinitude,
only hurls him into a recognition of the terrible "flaws"
that death rends in any comfortable metaphysical system:

Not so filmy was the texture, but I bore it in my
breast
Safe thus far. And since I found a something in
me would not rest
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of the
chain. (ll. 609-611)

The deeper consciousness of infinitude is the "something"
in him, and his mastery of the mountain is indissolubly
linked to the fact of human mortality. The poem is a "chain
of thoughts," as Priestley points out, but it is also the
poet's recognition that he is bound to all humanity by the
fleshly chain. The poem is a tribute to, and an acknowledg-
ment of, the link that exists between the poet, his friend,
and, by extension, all humanity. La Saisiaz is at once a
"memory evoked from slumber" and the poet's realization that
both the memory and the slumber have meaning. However loose
and vulnerable the links may seem as they wind down the
mountain to the grave, the soul has gained a memory of Joy-
consciousness that lies beyond the dimension of time, a
dimension which the poet now sees to be as fragile as the
life-breath of the human links.

Browning maintains that although the fleshly chain
must be broken and eventually transcended, it must not be rejected. When stated as baldly as this, this belief would appear to make Browning another drab Victorian prophet of the possible, but his idea of Joy runs far deeper than the simple exploitation of the prosaic possibilities of the Joy that resides in sensory pleasures. James Benziger, who observes that beauty and joy are really what Romantic poetry is all about, has noted this aspect of Browning's poetry. Benziger writes that it is indeed a "religious truism that the thought of heavenly joy means little to one who has no vivid experience of its earthly counterpart. Truisms like this are what original poets infuse with new life and vigor. The experiences of beauty and joy are what the Romantic poets most seriously explore, and they explore them precisely as they intimate some truth of great significance."^4

Browning's idea of Joy imbues the life of man in the tangible universe with a vigorous raison d'être and dignifies flesh as well as spirit.

An example of the originality of Browning's approach to the truism which Benziger notes is found in one of his most striking metaphors for the human body, the "fine flesh-stuff" of "By the Fire-Side." Browning's diction is

^4Benziger, p. 271.
not without its Empsonian ambiguities, and the connotations of the word "fine" in this metaphor yield a rich and complex texture of meanings to this aspect of Browning's idea of Joy. Through the use of the word "fine" in this image, Browning indicates that although the human body is only a thin barrier between the perfect union of out-souls, it is also the subtle, sensitive, and refined medium of man's earthly life. The word "fine" indicates that the human body is, indeed, superior in quality to any other created thing in the evolutionary scale, and that human love both purifies and clarifies the body's use, a use which is diminished as the spiritual union between out-souls grows and develops.

This image, moreover, partakes of still further connotations of the word "fine," for Browning sees the limitations of the flesh as a kind of probationary penalty imposed upon man's life on earth, but he also maintains that while the "fine flesh-stuff" will have an end in death, the soul will survive into eternity. The image of the "fine flesh-stuff" thus opens out, as it were, into a viable and striking summation of Browning's belief in the probity of human Joy together with his equally firm belief that man is capable of infinite Joy.

Browning continues to explore the idea of Joy in several of the poems of _Ferishtah's Fancies_, a volume
published in 1884. Ferishtah is a "soul-starved" Persian, hungry for a philosophical and psychological framework which will renew his present moral inertia. He chances upon a melon-seller, whom he recognizes to be the Shah's former prime minister. He is shocked by the transformation in the man and wonders if the melon-seller curses God for the twelve years of Joy which he has tasted, since they would seem to make his present status all the more bitter. The melon-seller incredulously listens and then mordantly replies to Ferishtah's question:

"Fool, does thy folly think my foolishness Dwells rather on the fact that God appoints A day of woe to the unworthy one, Than that the unworthy one, by God's award, Tasted joy twelve years long?" (11. 27-31)

No man is "worthy" of Joy, the once prominent melon-seller tells Ferishtah, and he advises the youth to return to school to remedy his ignorance of the basic foundations of human life. Ferishtah does so, but the melon-seller's speech on Joy remains the basis of his wisdom, his "stock-in-trade" whose paradoxical and deceptive simplicity makes "great wits jump."

In "Two Camels," Browning recalls the problems of asceticism which he first explored in Paracelsus and Sordello. The poet's ability to embody concretely the Joy that his consciousness can imagine would seem to dictate that the
poet mortify his human desires in an attempt to save his "peculiar joy," as Browning calls it in Paracelsus, from a possibly debilitating contact with the mundane life of ordinary men. Browning rejects this idea in his earlier poems, and his rejection of it is even more explicit in "Two Camels." Ferishtah tells his disciple that the sage must experience all facets of Joy:

'Put case I never have myself enjoyed,
Known by experience what enjoyment means,
How shall I—share enjoyment? --no, indeed!—
Supply it to my fellows, --ignorant,
As so I should be of the thing they crave.' (11. 66-70)

Like Fra Celestino in The Ring and the Book, like Cleon, and like Paracelsus, Ferishtah questions the ability of any man to know Joy unless he himself has experienced it. He insists that the alienated sage is actually dwelling in an anachronistic world of illusion. His stress upon the absolute necessity of experience in the world of men bears out more incisively than perhaps any other passage in Browning's poetry Robert Langbaum's contention that the poetry of the nineteenth century is a "poetry of experience." In The Poetry of Experience, Langbaum correlates the rise of the dramatic monologue through the Victorians to its prominence in modern poetry with the rise of the experimental spirit. Langbaum contends that the most essential idea of Romanticism
is the doctrine of experience, which he defines as "the doctrine that the imaginative apprehension gained through immediate experience is primary and certain, whereas the analytic reflection that follows is secondary and problematical."\(^5\) Ferishtah's insistence that Joy be "known by experience" is a capsule statement of Langbaum's thesis.

Ferishtah further maintains that the sage must know Joy as he knows his own mind:

'Just as I cannot, till myself convinced, Impart conviction, so, to deal forth joy Adroitly, needs must I know joy myself.' (11. 77-79)

The sage may suppose that a legitimate reason for the rejection of human Joy lies in his desire to improve the Joy-consciousness of his fellow-men:

'Renounce joy for my fellows' sake? That's joy Beyond joy; but renounced for mine, not theirs?' (11. 80-81)

For the sage to renounce Joy in order to increase its power, Ferishtah says, were analogous to the physician's rejection of health in order to heal disease. Asceticism is not a condition for Joy; it is actually a hindrance to creative productivity:

No, Son: the richness hearted in such Joy Is in the knowing what are gifts we give,

Not in a vain endeavor not to know!
Therefore, desire joy and thank God for it! (11. 84-87)

Joy is a part of man's "creatureship," Ferishtah concludes, for just as Job learned the necessity of independent human effort and work, all men must, recalling the words of Paracelsus again, "painfully attain to joy."

In "A Pillar at Sebzevar," Ferishtah reiterates the necessity of what John in "A Death in the Desert" calls man's "pact of creatureship" with God, as well as the reality of human Joy despite its illusory appearance that Browning embodies in *La Saisiaz*. Human love is again made the test of Joy. Ferishtah employs a parable to drive home his point. Suppose, he says, that a child grasps an orange, mistakenly thinking it to be the sum. This pitiable mistake does not dim his Joy in the reality of the orange:

'What if soon he finds
The foolish fruit unworthy grasping? Joy
In shape and color,—that was joy as true—
Worthy in its degree of love—as grasp
Of sun were, which had singed his hand beside.' (11. 32-36)

Ferishtah maintains that man must "enjoy the present gift," trusting to a beneficent and providential ordering of the future. Man cannot achieve the pure trust of the child, Ferishtah argues, because he would attempt to "circumscribe omnipotence." Man's power of love, an analogue of his power
of Joy, is imaged as a tether line linking God and man, a line which gains at "first leap" an understanding of God's providence that the human mind alone can never achieve:

'Frankly accept the creatureship: ask good
To love for: press bold to the tether's end
Allotted to this life's intelligence!' (ll. 136-138)

In "A Bean-Stripe: Also, Apple-Eating," Ferishtah voices the insight of "St. Martin's Summer" that genuine Joy is indeed a sober and inextricable mixture of both pleasure and sorrow:

'Choose a joy!
Bettered it was by sorrow gone before,
And sobered somewhat by the shadowy sense
Of sorrow which came after or might come.
Joy, sorrow, --by precedence, subsequence--
Either on each, make fusion, mix in life.' (ll. 66-71)

Man can see only man's world, Ferishtah says, and that world seems to be swallowed up in pain and sorrow, but God's larger purpose must be trusted:

'God's care be God's! 'T is mine--to boast no joy
Unsobered by such sorrows of my kind
As sully with their shade my life that shines.' (ll. 187-189)

God permits such "black" shades to sully the "whiteness" of human experience, Ferishtah explains, in order to prepare man for the tremors of doubt that inevitably must intrude. Some men would be jealous of Ferishtah's power of Joy; they would judge it an unfair and excessive gift:
'Who is Ferishtah, hitherto exempt
From black experience? Why, if God be just,
Were sundry fellow-mortals singled out
To undergo experience for his sake,
Just that the gift of pain, bestowed on them,
In him might temper to the due degree
Joy's else-excessive largess?' (11. 208-214)

Ferishtah admits that he does not know why he is granted
Joy's largess. He can only maintain that such insolvable
questions point again to "man's impotency, God's omnipotence"
(1. 216).

Browning obviously delights in the exotic Persian
holiday that is mirrored in the colorful imagery of
Ferishtah's Fancies, but readers object to the strident
optimism voiced by Ferishtah but not made meaningful in the
poetic experience itself. Thomas Hardy, for example, com­
plains that Browning evidences a Christian optimism "worthy
of a dissenting grocer." Maisie Ward implicitly replies
to Hardy's charge in her explanation of Browning's purpose
in Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day, an explanation that also
applies to these poems from Ferishtah's Fancies:

Psychology is a modern science. Had it been
developed earlier many of the worst evils of
the more-or-less Christian centuries would
have been avoided. Browning was ahead of his
age when he recognized what his contemporary,
the scientist Pasteur, also saw when he claimed
to have the faith of a Breton peasant--and
hoped one day to have that of a Breton pea­
sant's wife. This does not mean (any more
than does Newman's saying that all men have
a reason, though not all men can give a reason) that he despised the mind's processes. Still less does it mean what Browning in his later years sometimes appeared to say—that love can be a substitute for mind.6

Mrs. Ward contends that Browning sees what his age generally did not see, that the Godhead must be perceived by the response of the total human person, not by "mind" or "emotion" in isolation. This total human response manifests itself in Joy, and Browning's poetic embodiment of the idea of Joy needs no elaborate defense.

Furthermore, the "Epilogue" to Ferishtah's Fancies also dispels any suspicion that Browning achieves his idea of Joy as smoothly and easily as Ferishtah's glib and confident rhetoric would seem to imply. Morse Peckham has pointed out in an introduction to The Ring and the Book that "Browning is far from being the witless optimist most people imagine him. He is an objectivist, as deeply engaged with penetrating illusion as were Baudelaire and Flaubert, but with a tougher mind. He was one of the most subtle and complex of nineteenth-century writers. The meaning of his

dramatic monologues is so structured that every position—
even his own . . . is ironically destroyed."

The irony that Peckham finds at the heart of Browning's poetic method
is abundantly present in the "Epilogue" to this volume,
where the experience of Joy itself is again imaged as a
kind of illusion:

Only, at heart's utmost joy and triumph, terror
Sudden turns the blood to ice: a chill wind
disencharms
All the lateenchantment! What if all be error—
If the halo irised round my head were, Love,
thine arms? (11. 25-28)

This final stanza of the "Epilogue," which follows upon a
vivid description of the good, beauty, and wonder of the
universe, ironically undercuts both the "utmost joy" of
that description and the idea of Joy which is a motif of
the entire volume. Browning, indeed, most painfully at­
tains to Joy.

In the "Parleying With Christopher Smart," Browning
admits that his late poetry is often "mere grey argument"
(1. 200). In several of these later poems, however, there
is a reconciliation of youth and old age that relates to
Browning's idea of Joy and thus merits some attention. In

7Morse Peckham, ed., Romanticism: The Culture of the
"Christopher Smart," Browning delineates one aspect of his poetic theory. As in "Cleon," the poet's first responsibility is said to be the Joy that encompasses the "use of life":

Nature was made to be by Man enjoyed
First; followed duly by enjoyment's fruit,
Instruction—haply leaving joy behind:
And you, the instructor, would you slack pursuit
Of the main prize, as poet help mankind
Just to enjoy, there leave them? Play the fool,
Abjuring a superior privilege? (11. 225-231)

In its contemporary setting, this passage is Browning's adverse comment on the "art for art's sake" movement of the 1880's, but in its more universal application, it is as succinct and searching an examination of the place of Joy in his own poetic theory and of the poetic vocation itself as are Paracelsus and Sordello. Browning again sees Joy as the primary poetic value, and he again denies that the artist's idea of Joy can be made an end in itself, with no thought of the communication of that Joy's meaning to other men.

Browning recalls the ladder image, pervasive in his early poetry, to indicate the necessity of the poet's firm foundation in the reality of the human situation:

The other method's favored in our day!
The end ere the beginning: as you may,
Master the heavens before you study earth,
Make you familiar with the meteor's birth
Ere you descend to scrutinize the rose!
I say, o'erstep no least one of the rows
That lead man from the bottom where he plants
Foot first of all, to life's last ladder-top. (ll. 240-247)

The poet should, Browning says, "learn earth" as the first step up the metaphorical ladder of poetry that leads eventually to the heavens themselves. This ladder imagery of "Christopher Smart" is strikingly similar to that employed by W. B. Yeats for an analogous purpose in "The Circus Animals' Desertion." Yeats concludes this poem, which is a survey of his poetic career, with the following passage:

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart. (ll. 33-40)

The ascent of any spiritual-aesthetic ladder, both Yeats and Browning say, starts in the earth and in man's own complex and contradictory emotional and psychological strategies. J. Hillis Miller sums up Browning's poetic achievement with a reference to the final line of this stanza of Yeats's poem. Miller writes that, of the five writers discussed in The Disappearance of God, "Browning alone seems to have glimpsed the fact that the sad alternations of nihilism and escape beyond the world could be evaded if man would only reject twenty-five hundred years of belief in the dualism of
heaven and earth. If man could do this he might come to see that being and value lie in this world, in what is immediate, tangible, present to man, in earth, sun, sea, in the stars in their courses, and in what Yeats was to call 'the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart:' Browning advises young poets to "study earth," "learn earth," and "scrutinize the rose," as he himself has studied, learned, and scrutinized the innermost conflicts of men and women; only this knowledge enables poetry to encompass Joy, to "master the heavens."

Browning, as Wordsworth does before him and Yeats after him, points out the antithetical aspects of human life and demonstrates that the idea of Joy is an important aspect of the power that overcomes these antinomies. In "Pisgah-Sights, I," written when Browning was sixty-three, the speaker of the poem notes the apparently discordant elements of human life:

Over the ball of it,
Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
Life there, outlying,
Roughness and smoothness,
Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
One reconcilement. (ll. 1-8)

\[8\] Miller, p. 359.
This "one reconcilement" is the only aspect of the Romantic ideal of equipoise that Browning holds tenable. The wisdom of old age and approaching death can see the reconcilement that lies in the wedding of opposites:

All's lend-and-borrow;
Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
Angel weds devil! (ll. 13-16)

The speaker of the poem rejoices in the "rough-smooth" texture of man's "mixed" existence, and his Joy is also mixed, for this earthly Joy, so briefly tasted, must be left behind for the unknown Joy of eternity:

Honey yet gall of it!
There's the life lying,
And I see all of it
Only, I'm dying. (ll. 29-32)

As in the "Epilogue" to Ferishtah's Fancies, the poetic pattern of "Pisgah-Sights, I" is a reconciliation of opposites followed by an ironic conclusion which undercuts that reconciliation.

This pattern also appears in a similar poem of reconciliation written by Yeats in his sixty-seventh year. Yeats begins "Vacillation" with this stanza:

Between extremities
Man runs his course;
A brand, or flaming breath,
Comes to destroy
All those antinomies
Of day and night;
The body calls it death,
The heart remorse,  
But if these be right  
What is joy? (11. 1-10)

With Yeats's question, this exploration of the idea of Joy is brought full circle. Almost one hundred years before Yeats asks "What is joy?" in this poem, Browning had asked the same question in *Sordello*, and he spent a large part of his poetic career delineating the answer:

For what is joy? --to heave  
Up one obstruction more, and common leave  
What was peculiar, by such act destroy  
Itself; a partial death is every joy. (VI, 261-264)

The struggle for Joy in the poetry of Robert Browning ultimately encompasses this "one reconciliation," but since his best poetry is dramatic rather than contemplative or reflective, the concept receives its most intense expression in the inner conflicts of speakers such as Cleon, Pompilia, and Paracelsus as they embody the interplay of the complex components of the idea of Joy. The experience of these speakers demonstrates that central to Robert Browning's concept of Joy is William Blake's proverb, "Excess of joy weeps."

"What is joy?"--the answer to this question is a concern of the major poets of the nineteenth century. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Arnold, and Browning each contributes to the developing notion of the idea of Joy as a unifying
force within a pluralistic culture. The particular mark of Browning's concept of Joy lies in his presentment of kindred Joy, in the inexorable movement of the human out-souls towards the divine out-soul in the "infinite moment" of union. Another important facet of his idea of Joy is manifested in his use of the grotesque as an integral part of his poetic method. Finally, Browning's ability to embody man's "capability for joy" in his poetic characters enables him to extend the metaphysical and psychological abstractions that are associated with the concept of Joy through concrete dramatizations. F. A. Pottle's cautionary remarks quoted earlier should be recalled in this conclusion; Pottle says that it is essential to remember in Wordsworth's poetry that it is the poetic imagery that conveys the emotion of Joy. The same caution is applicable to the idea of Joy in the poetry of Robert Browning. In his best poems, it is the poetic character who conveys the idea of Joy and who implicitly asserts man's capability for Joy.

The idea of Joy touches some of the most important aspects of nineteenth-century English literature. I have attempted to show that it is not, however, a portmanteau emotion, but that the concept of Joy is a serious attempt to provide both an intellectual and spiritual embodiment of
crucial cultural aspirations. Browning's struggle to main­
tain the idea of Joy is an attempt to merge the "innocence"
of the poet's idea of Joy with the inevitably conflicting
"experience" of his position in society. Wordsworth and
Browning continued to explore this paradoxical union in
their poetry, while Coleridge and Arnold attempted to es­
-establish a new concept of culture as a dynamic force in
English life. Since the idea of Joy is so intimately re­
-related to the desire for totality, wholeness, and unity which
characterizes nineteenth-century English literature, perhaps
Browning's concept of Joy should be viewed with these stan­
dards in mind. Robert Langbaum's recent comments on this
aspect of Browning's poetry are sane and judicious.
Langbaum notes that "his best dramatic monologues entitle
Browning to his rank among the two or three best Victorian
poets. But is he also—as he certainly aimed to be—one of
the great poets of English literature?" Langbaum contends
that even Browning's best dramatic monologues "do not add up
to what Browning called 'the pure white light,' the total
vision of life that the greatest poets give us, and that
Browning from the start—from the time of Sordello—intended
to give us." Langbaum thus concludes that Browning "is a
poet of enduring interest—partly because his very faults
show that he was turning analytic thought against itself,
that he understood what had to be done."¹⁹ Whatever the final verdict may be of his total poetic achievement, the idea of Joy is certainly one of Browning's most effective attempts to turn "analytic thought against itself."

Henry Adams charged the nineteenth century with an unceasing dynamism that found expression in no adequate human symbol, and he reluctantly accepts the image of the dynamo as the modern equivalent of the twelfth-century symbol of the Virgin of Chartres. From the time of Matthew Arnold's judgment of "confused multitudinousness," the same charge of struggling, undirected energy has often been leveled against the poetry of Robert Browning. Browning, however, is a part of the nineteenth century, and unifying symbols of experience had given way to the diversity of experience itself. It was impossible for the nineteenth-century consciousness to acquiesce in a single image of cultural experience as powerful as the Virgin; the age was too complex in its development for that. But with the idea of Joy, Browning continues a Romantic tradition that implicitly denies the symbolic import of the dynamo. The idea

⁹ Robert Langbaum, "Browning and the Question of Myth," *PMLA*, LXXXI (December, 1966), 577, 582.
of Joy in Robert Browning, as it is in Wordsworth and in
Yeats, is not so much a poetic symbol as it is the embodi-
ment of the most powerful experience that the poetic vision
can discern and the struggle to channel human energy into
and through the unifying experience of Joy.


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