Browning's Concept of Moment and Eternity in "Abt Vogler"

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The relation between the realm of moment or time and the realm of eternity or infinite is often manifested in Browning's poetry. He is fond of the word infinite, and uses it three times as much as Tennyson.[1] He once wrote to Ruskin that all poetry is the problem of "putting the infinite within the finite"[2] Corson explains the teleological force of the human soul which the poet endeavored to develop: "Browning's poetry is a complexly organized, individualized divine force, destined to gravitate toward the infinite."[3] However, the word—infinite—is frequently used in its loose sense of "very great" or "infinitude of human passion."[4] Most of the time it is applied to God's infinite goodness and love "To the Eternal and Divine."[5]

The true nature of "time" has been much discussed in philosophy. Generally, it means the same characteristic of experience—a characteristic present in the experience of each of us.[6] John M. E. McTaggart catego-

1) Henry Charles Duffin, *Amphibian: A Reconsideration of Browning* (London: Bowes and Bowes Publishers Limited, 1956), p. 293.
2) Quoted in page 10 of *The Infinite Moment.* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), by William O. Raymond.
3) Hiram Corson, *An Introduction to the Study of Robert Browning's Poetry.* (Boston: D. D. Heath and Co., Publishers, 1901), p. 36.
4) Duffin, *op. cit.*, p. 293.
5) *The Ring and the Book*, X, 1. 1747.
6) John M. E. McTaggart, *Philosophical Studies* (London: Edward Arnold and Co., 1934), p. 132.

rizes "eternity" into three distinct senses: (1) to denote unending time; (2) to denote that timelessness which is said to be possessed by all general laws and by all truths, like a mathematical proposition; (3) to denote the timelessness of existences. The third sense is really ambiguous, which suggests the existence of a God or the existence of some impersonal absolute. God or the absolute has generally been conceived as timeless.[7] The meaning of Browning's eternity follows, in most cases, the third sense of the word in McTaggart's definition.

In a letter to F. J. Furnivall, October 11, 1881, Browning expressed his attitude toward the evolutional scheme, manifesting his metaphysical point of view. In this letter he also emphasizes that conceptions of time and space are given to human beings only to think and evaluate. He adds, "... with whom, as I made Luria say, there is an 'everlasting moment of creation,' if one at all,—past, present, and future, one and the same state."[8] All that seems proved in Darwin's scheme was a conception familiar to him from the beginning.[9] What he objected to was the one-sidedness of the evolutionist: "I do not consider that his case as to the changes in organization, brought about by desire and will in the creature, is proved";[10] he believed in God's plan of progress of creatures for which all of us have been striving.

> Last, about my being "strongly against Darwin, rejecting the truths of science and regretting its advance"—you only do as I should hope and expect in disbelieving that. It came, I suppose, of Hohenstiel-Schwangau's expressing the notion which was the popular one at the appearance of Darwin's book—and you might as well charge Shakespeare with holding that there were men whose heads grew beneath their shoulders, because Othello

7) *Ibid.*, p. 135.
8) Thurman L. Hood (ed.), *Letters of Robert Browning* (London: John Murray, 1933), p. 200.
9) *Ibid.*, p. 199.
10) *Ibid.*, p. 200.

told Desdemona that he had seen such. In reality, all that seems proved in Darwin's scheme was a conception familiar to me from the beginning:

see in *Paracelsus* the progressive development from senseless matter to organized, until man's appearance (Part V.). Also in "Cleon," see the order of "life's mechanics,"—and I daresay in many passages of my poetry: for how can one look at Nature as a whole and doubt that, wherever there is a gap, a "link" must be "missing"—through the limited power and opportunity of the looker? But go back and back, as you please, at the back, as Mr. Sludge is made to insist, you find (my faith is as constant) creative intelligence, acting as matter but not resulting from it. Once set the balls rolling, and ball may hit ball and send any number in any direction over the table; but I believe in the cue pushed by a hand. When one is taunted (as I notice is often fancied an easy method with the un-Darwinized)—taunted with thinking successive acts of creation credible, metaphysics have been stopped short at, however physics may fare: time and space being purely conceptions of our own, wholly inapplicable to intelligence of another kind—with whom, as I made Lauria say, there is an "everlasting moment of creation," if one at all,—past, present, and future, one and the same state. This consideration does not affect Darwinism proper in any degree. But I do not consider that his case as to the changes in organization, brought about by desire and will in the creature, is proved. Tortoises never saw their own shells, top or bottom, nor those of their females, and are diversely variegated all over, each species after its own pattern. And the insects; this one is coloured to escape notice, this other to attract it, a third to frighten the foe—all out of one brood of caterpillars hatched in one day. No—I am incredulous—and you, dear patron and friend, are abundantly tired; so, thus much shall serve, scribbled as it has come to pass.[11]

11) *Ibid.*, pp. 199–200.

Browning seized intuitively upon the facts of Evolution, and saw progress through all nature up to man. In man evolution should be applied to the realms of the mind and the soul. Man forever becomes wiser and better. Browning's idea of an "everlasting moment of creation"[12] is very important to solve the paradox of moment and eternity in his poetry.

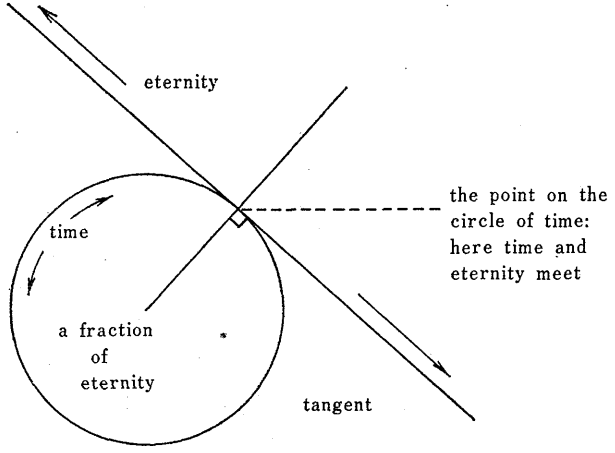
The ordinary division of time into past, present, and future is a man-made idea. The present has been future before and will be past later. This is an essential characteristic of the present. Thus, actually time never stands still; it is always passing. As past, present, or future, time can only be thought abstractly, and thus, is not existentially real to us. "It can only be rightly conceived and experienced dialectically, in tension with the qualitatively different 'eternity.' [13] Kierkegaard emphasizes that both time and eternity are realities to us, but they are qualitatively different in such a way that time has real meaning for us only when eternity strikes upon it.[14] The eternal is the absolute, without distinction of past, present, or future. The temporal is the relative, without meaning in its fleeting succession. If then, eternal truth is to break in upon us in our temporal existence, it can be only when eternity in its infinite qualitative difference strikes down vertically upon the horizontal stream of time. The point of its impact is what Kierkegaard calls "the moment" or "the instant."[15] In one sense the moment is the present instant of time which is the purely abstract exclusion of past and future. But in another sense the moment is a fraction of eternity, the point of the impinging tangent.[16]

The infinite and eternal include and swallow up the finite and temporal. Thus, we recognize the paradox of the infinite in the finite and the eternity in the moment. As Shiv K. Kumar classifies the moment into three

12) In act V of *Luria*, the line appears as follows: "The everlasting minute of creation."
13) H. V. Martin, *Kierkegaard* (London: The Epworth Press, 1950), p. 57.
14) *Ibid.*
15) *Ibid.*
16) *Ibid.*, pp. 57–58. Diagram showing the point of the impignging tangent:

categories—the moment of emotional, aesthetic, and religious experience,[17] Browning manifests the paradox of eternity in moment in many aspects. For instance, "By the Fireside," "Two in the Campagna," and "The Last Ride Together" deal with the moment of the electrical affinity of soul between man and woman. "Childe Roland" concerns ethical and psychological problems of human life. "Abt Vogler" reveals the moment of aesthetic experience with music. These poems are all different cases, but two fundamental concepts affecting equally each poem are (1) the paradox of eternity in moment and (2) the everlasting moment of existence. My purpose in this article is to examine "Abt Vogler" in the light of the theme of paradox of moment and eternity.

"Abt Vogler" is a typical example of Browning's treatment of the moment and eternity. This poem shows that Browning was able to use the avenue of mystic approach to reality afforded by art. From the aesthetic point of view, this poem is a statement of Browning's cherished opinion. It states his conception of the superiority of music to all other forms of art, and in a larger sense it implies that music is but the symbol for all great artistic achievement.



17) Shiv K. Kumar, "The Moment in the Dramatic Monologues of Robert Browning," *British Victorian Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1969), ed. by Shiv K. Kumar, pp. 93–97.

Browning expressed his concept of moment and eternity on the two bases of his concept of truth—the truth or music and religion. The poem is argumentative, lyric, dramatic, religious, metaphysical, contemplative, but predominantly mystical. It is marked dramatically by Browning's having sought to identify his thesis of moment and eternity with the mystical character of the great musician.

The mystic nature in Browning's religious conviction accounts for the fact that Browning refers to the concept of the infinite almost everywhere in his poetry. The word, however, is used in its loose sense. In most instances it applies in the familiar way to the attributes of God—God's infinite goodness, love, power, wisdom, knowledge, justice, and mercy. So eternity generally means heaven as constrasted with earthly life—heaven is to complete the "broken arcs"[18] and eternity to "affirm the conception of an hour"[19] for Abt Vogler. It is only rarely that Browning uses the words infinite and eternal, other than when referring to God, with a proper feeling for their content.

To ascertain the mystical element of Browning's concept of moment and eternity in "Abt Vogler" is not easy, because his mystical vision into the truth of art and religion is effected in a very profoundly complex unity of these two factors. The religious mystical temper of "Abt Vogler" is manifest in the virtual identification of religion and music, or, in a larger sense, of religion and art. Abt Vogler, as he is here represented, like St. John in "A Death in the Desert," attains to truth and beauty only through humbling himself in love before God and thus seeing ever more clearly the light of heaven.

> And the emulous heaven yearned,
> Made effort to reach the earth,
> As the earth had done her best,
> in my passion, to scale the sky:
> Novel splendors burst forth, grew
> familiar and dwelt with mine,.....[20]

18) 1. 72.
19) 1. 76.
20) 11. 27–29.

There is no difficulty in interpreting lines such as these as an experession of the religious attitude of the mystic; for the mystic, above all else, yearns for the dissolution of his own personality into unity with God.[21]

The poem falls into three parts. Stanzas I to V are to give a metaphorical, onomatopoetic impression of organ-music. The final part of the poem is a statement of Browning's belief that the imperfections of this life will be put right in the next. It is in stanzas VI and VII that we notice that the most mystic quality of the poem embodied.

In stanzas I and II he compares the music he has made to a palace—the composer has been extemporizing upon the musical instrument of his invention:

> Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
> Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work,
> Claiming each slave of the sound, at a touch, as when Solomon willed
> Armies of angels that scar, legions of demons that lurk,
> Man, brute, reptile, fly,—alien of end and of aim,
> Adverse, each from the other heaven-high, hell-deep removed,—
> Should rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name,
> And pile him a palace straight, to pleasure the princess he loved!
> Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
> This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!
> Ah, one and all, how they helped, would dispart now and now combine,
> Zealous to hasten the work, heighten their master his praise!
> And one would bury his brow with a blind plunge down to hell,
> Burrow awhile and build, broad on the roots of things,
> Then up again swim into sight, having based me my palace well,
> Founded it, fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs.[22]

21) C. Willard Smith, *Browning's Star-Imagery* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), p. 182.

22) 11. 1–6.

The emphatic amorality of the building is striking. Here, uniquely in Browning, we have the high Romantic doctrine of the artist as creator.

The musician is comparing the music that he makes to magical architecture: he refers to the Mohammedan legends of Solomon. Solomon knew all magic; and all men, animals, angels, and demons obeyed him. God has ninety-nine names by which the faithful may speak of him, but the hundredth name is secret, the name ineffable. He who knows it can do all things by the utterance of it. When Solomon pronounced it, all the spirits of the air and of heaven and of hell would rush to obey him. And if he wanted a palace or a city built, he had only to order the spirits to build it, and they would build it immediately, finishing everything between the rising and the setting of the sun. That is the story which the musician refers to.[23] He has the power of the master-musician over sounds. He remembers how beautiful his music was; he remembers how the different classes of notes combined to make it, just as the different classes of spirits combined to make the palace of Solomon. There the deep notes, the bass chords, sank down thundering like demon-spirits working to make the foundation in the very heart of the earth. And the treble notes seemed to soar up like angels to make the roof of gold, and to tip alll the points of the building with glorious fires of illumination. Truly the palace of sound was built.

Stanzas IV and V are a bold attempt to describe the indescribable, to shadow forth that strange state of clairvoyance when the soul shakes itself free from all external impressions, which Vogler tells us was true of all great composers. The passions of the composer had enabled him to lift earth and all that it could afford up as high as possible, but he still needed the spark from heaven which would transform earth. At the moment when his inspiration seemed to be complete and he became the mere medium for the musical expression, then "earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far."[24] That moment is the moment of revelation when heaven and earth are joined, as in the Incarnation.

23) Lafcadio Hearn, *Pre-Raphaelite and Other Poets* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1922), p. 211.

24) 1. 32.

In this strange fusion of near and far, of heaven and earth, presences hover—spirits of those long dead or of those yet to be, lured by the power of music to return to life, or to begin it. Figures are dimly descried in the fervour and passion of music, even as of old in the glare and glow of the fiery furnace. This union coincides with the intergration of the poet himself—"for I was made perfect too"—[25] of which it is both cause and result. It is the moment out of time and space, two conditions needed for the appreciation of a static art like painting; but here they have been abolished. The moment is the springing of eternity in time, and yet beyond it, because it transcends it. The moment gave meaning to all of the music that Vogler had composed before, and so to all of the life that had gone before. As for the future, the structure of the music looks ahead to that, and sees part of the perfection that will then be. As for the present, it is redeemed, and the artist is redeemed in the process, because he has glimpsed a vision of the perfection of heaven. He has not the certainty of Lazarus who lives wholly in the light of the other world, but he has seen enough to transform his attitude to reality in this world. In the moment of attainment, the musician can contemplate with extraordinary brilliance the thing that he has wrought. He has emptied his soul into his music.

And in the sixth and seventh stanzas he compares the achievement to the expression of the soul in another medium. If Vogler had painted, the process would not have been so "wonder-worth."[26] If he had written down the emotions which he had experienced, then that would have taken too much time. Browning saw the difficulties of expressing in the constrictions of the written line the simultaneous effect of the illuminative moment. The music of improvisation allowed one to hear the art, and to have the pattern revealed almost in a flash. In painting the original inspiration was really further from one's grasp than in spontaneous music because it was worked on by the craftsmanship which remembered the inspiration without continually experiencing it. In literature the lines themselves have to be read in a time-and-space-sequence, and the impact

25) 1. 40.
26) 1. 45.

of the spontaneous effect is lost simply by the time that passes in the reading of the work of art.

The artist does not create, according to the true meaning of the word, by making something out of nothing: his faculty merely consists in his imaginative power to shape anew materials which already exist. Instead, then, of mind getting knowledge from art's ministry, art would be but a frail flower, soon to wither and die, were it not for mind's ministry. But if we turn to Abt Vogler we shall find him expressing a somewhat different opinion. He is almost a fanatic in his enthusiasm for his own art. Where other arts are bound by laws, his art is the result of divine inspiration. It is easy to understand how a genius filled with apprehension of his passing ability to produce new forms should lose sight of the fact that he is but redistributing old material, and should fancy himself in very truth a creator. And, after all, is he so far wrong? Sound, it is true, exists everywhere in the world, and only after centuries of patient experiment have those sounds been chosen which best suit the purpose of the artist; yet why the harmony of these sounds should give delight or why they seem to express thoughts and passions too deep for language is a mystery before which we can only "bow the head,"[27] and in so far as the composer gives expression to his thought by combining the sounds and even chords which mind's ministry has made familiar to him he is a creator touched by "the finger of God."[28]

Vogler says that the art of the painter and the poet is "art in obedience to laws."[29] His own art is spontaneous creation where intuition is given full regin. His act is perfectly free too, limited only by the restriction of his instrument or his visionary inspiration. Inprovisation is totally free from preconceived ideas of artistic form. It is an affair which concerns only the artist and the source of all truth and beauty; it is man and God becoming one and the same personality.

27) 1. 56.
28) 1. 49. Helen A. Clarke, "Musical Symbolism in Browning," *Poet Lore*, III, No. 5 (1891), pp. 265–266.
29) 1. 47.

But God has a few of us whom he whispers in the ear;
The rest may reason and welcome; 't is we musicians know.[30]

Here again there are important analogies with the free, spontaneous, and unlimited act of God in Incarnation. Vogler is aware of the implications of his thoughts and art as he calls inspiration "the finger of God." This inspiration of the finger of God, or the Spirit of God, created the worlds, and still creates through the artist who can use "three sounds" to set forth the ideal perfection that he has seen in "a star."[31]

C. W. Smith shows how Browning has expressed his idea of the process of creation. The artist begins with a conception of structure of music in the metaphor of the temple, and proceeds to marshall the "keys" of his imagination to build it. When the foundations have been laid and substantial outlines of his structure have been established, the artist becomes preoccupied with the injection of life and beauty into a form as yet inert.

Up, the pinnacled glory reached, and the pride of my soul was in sight.
In sight? Not half! for it seemed, it was certain, to match man's birth,
Nature in turn conceived, obeying an impulse as I;
And the emulous heaven yearned down, made effort to reach the earth,
As the earth had done her best in my passion, to scale the sky:
Novel splendours burst forth, grew familiar and dwelt with mine,
Not a point nor peak but found and fixed its wandering star;
Meteor-moons, balls of blaze: and they did not pale nor pine,
For earth had attained to heaven, there was no more near nor far.[32]

30) 11. 87–88.
31) 1. 52.
32) 11. 24–32.

This is the element of creation that is called "inspiration." It is the result, according to Browning, of the artist's effort to reach heaven, an "emulous heaven" which yearns down to "reach the earth"; so that no peak of the artist's aspiration but finds and transfixes "its wandering star."[33] Finally, comes realization—the achievement of total form at its best, a form that is responsive to the laws of God, rather than to the laws of man: to universal law, rather than to the conventions of art; the achievement of the soul, as distinct from the achievement of mind.[34]

> But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
> Existent behind all laws that made them and, lo, they are!
> And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
> That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star.
> Consider it well: each tone of our scale in itself is naught;
> It is everywhere in the world-loud, soft, and all is said:
> Give it to me to use! I mix it with two in my thought:
> And, there! Ye have heard and seen: Consider and bow the head![35]

Until now Vogler has been extemporizing upon his instrument, and meditating, almost rhapsodizing, upon the art of music. Then stanza VIII provides the bridge as the ultimate direction of his thoughts comes to him. The musician stops playing, and the palace of his art vanishes; the vision of the ideal is gone. Perfection is gone. It cannot constantly be experienced but must be replaced.

The palace of music is compared with the construction of Solomon's palace. Vogler wishes that his creation could linger in existence like the creation of Solomon, but his artifact is created simply to fade and die, only to be replaced by another, perhaps inferior, perhaps more beautiful by far. The musical extemporization, then, is analogous to life: it is

33) 1. 30.
34) Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
35) 11. 49–56.

short, fading, and quickly comes to death, remaining in the memory of those who can still recall it. But the music also tells of the meaning of life, as it can be lifted into a mirror of the eternal life of heaven. Vogler's art tells of his aspirations as he reached for the music of heaven, but it also tells of his limitations. It is complete as it springs in a moment of intuitive insight from the composer and as soon as it is realized, it also perishes. The extemporizing does not have permanence but the brevity of its mere temporal existence is a glimpse of eternity.

In stanza IX Vogler turns to address "the ineffiable Name"[36] directly as the ground of art—the Inspirer of the palace which Vogler had made, and of life—the Creator of our bodies, and the heavenly dwelling, "houses not made with hands,"[37] for our souls. Vogler has seen the ontological ground of the being of art in the being of God:

> Doubt that thy power can fill the heart that thy power expands?
> There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before;
> The evil is null, is naught, is silence implying sound;
> What was good shall be good, with, for evil, so much good more;
> On earth the broken arcs; in the heaven a perfect round.[38]

This has been the end of all of Browning's thought upon art and the aesthetic process.

The palace of sounds has vanished away like a mirage. The builder cannot reproduce it because the great composition is not merely the work of men; it is an inspiration from God, and the mystery of such inspired composition is manifested in music as it is manifested in no other art. For the harmonies, the combinations of tones, are mysteries, and must remain mysterious even for the muscician himself. Who can explain

36) 1. 65.
37) 1. 66.
38) 11. 68–72.

them?" "But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can."[39] But for the same reason that they are mysteries and cannot be understood because they relate to the infinite, they are eternal. That is the consolation. The musician need not regret that the music composed in a moment of divine inspiration cannot be remembered; he need not regret that it has been forgotten. Forgotten by the man who made it; forgotten by the people who heard it; forgotten therefore by all mankind. Nevertheless, it is eternal, because the God that inspired it never forgets anything.

> All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;
> Not its semblance, but itself; no beauty, nor good, nor power
> Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives for the melodist
> When eternity affirms the conception of an hour.[40]

The phrase "when eternity affirms the conception of an hour" gives us the key to the philosophy of the rest of the poem.

The muscian with starting tears regrets that the outpourings of his soul in improvisation may not tarry, but quickly he sees in the ephemeralness of music a symbol of human aspirations which, in their incompleteness, are but an evidence that "all that has been dreamed of good shall exist."[41] It is characteristic of the poet who had been moving in this direction in the monologues after *Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day* that he should come to a metaphysical and religious soultion. Power is seen to be the expression of the controlled will of God, and in the analogous acts of the artist in using the power of expression which he has been given. Even evil, says Browning (in a typical statement), is useful for good—"silence implying sound."[42] Earth is the broken arc of heaven, broken by the evil and ignorance and imperfection, but a true arc, nevertheless. What is imperfect and incomplete here is perfect and whole there: the eternal love of God has already been fulfilled by the Incarnation; the good

39) 1. 49.
40) 11. 73–76.
41) 1. 73.
42) 1. 70.

will be shown as it is in its reality; and the momentary conception of the composer will be shown to be the earnest of eternity. Failure and imperfection here will more clearly show the perfection and completion of heaven in "the fulness of the days."[43]

The last stanza of the poem has moved back from the mountains of imaginative thought to the common life in the world among men. The musician strikes the common chord. He has not reached out within his own limitations like Andrea del Sarto, nor was he content to live in the world of the vision like Lazarus. He came back to fulfill the true poetic function that Browning had set up in his *Essay on Shelley* to connect the two worlds of reality and explained in *Sordello* to make people see this connection. Volger found the "C Major of this life,"[44] the center of the keyboard, the primary center by which the accuracy of all the other notes is to be judged. So it is with the Incarnation, which stands in the center of time like the Middle C. It is also the connection between the two worlds of reality, and it so combines them in the person of Christ that they are really one. It is the task of theologians to explain this connection; it is the task of artists to illuminate the connection by examining man's highest creative activity. That is how Browning in his mystic approach is fitting his poems on art and religion together.[45]

"Abt Vogler," examined here thus far in this study in the light of the theme of the paradox of moment and eternity, shows Browning's basic doctrines and philosophy of life. It is based on his concepts of love as divine revelation, of evil as necessity, of progress, and of life after death.

The speaker in this dramatic poem is caught in a state of tension in which he finds himself between time and eternity. At the point where the moment—a fraction of eternity—encounters eternity—the timeless existence—and is transformed into the "everlasting moment,"[46] the speaker perceives a fresh meaning in life; he is transformed into a new existence; he realizes his peculiar relation to his environment.

43) 1. 82.
44) 1. 96.
45) Whitla, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
46) *Luria*, V.

Browning finds in the mysterious union and transfusion of divine being which takes place in love, as Hegel finds in the union of opposites, the clue to the nature of reality, the very core of the heart of life. God's love, poured through the human soul, provides the nearest approach to a solution of the conflict which Browning's metaphysics permits. For Browning, infinity of God is ever at hand.

Browning uses the paradoxical presentation of love as partaking of the infinity of divine love. He blames the "finite hearts" which are not inspired by the exalted moment related to eternity. For Browning, love is always associated with religious sanctity. To fall in love is to experience a revelation. Even a frustrated love will fulfill its spiritual purpose. It will have provided at least a moment of exalted feeling. Important is the instantaneous feeling in experience of love. He selects the luminous moments in which the lover realizes his true identity in relationship to his beloved. Eternity congeals itself in that instant, and conversely the moment acquires the vitality of eternity. "Two in the Campagna" is an example of frustrated love. "By the Fireside" and "The Last Ride Together" are the successful instances.

His ideal of conduct for man casts away finite conditions of life and gives man an immortal release. Evil in this world is at bottom a form of good, and all finite existence is a passing mode of absolute being. Although Childe Roland has been struggling with limited conditions he is inspired by his instant vision of the Tower and gains eternal peace.

Browning's theory of art also recognizes the exalted moment as a point in perception when the object reveals itself in its entirety from the the inside: it is seen and felt rather than remembered. The artist's vision, hitherto partial, casual and fragmentary, achieves its totality and all "the broken arcs" melt into "a perfect round,"; all multiplicity is unified. "Abt Vogler" reveals Browning's concept of moment and eternity in profound mystical vision in the truth of the complex unity of art and religion. In this poem, the conception of life after death contends in Browning's mind, and the idea of progress is deeply ingrained in him. It is a state of emancipation from earthly limit when the moment is made eternity. Although there are moments for every man when his apprehensiveness is

wrought by circumstance to its highest quality, the inspired moment of spontaneous music gives Vogler the revelation of God that is ultimately good and ultimately real.

Underlying Browning's concept of moment and eternity, is his important doctrine of progress. Everything in nature signifies growth. Nothing stands still. Progression is as inevitable as life. Advance must be made in consecutive degrees. It moulds the present from the past and tends to shape the future. From a religious standpoint, the idea of progress is a gradual expanding toward the infinite. It is the spiritual growth by which Browning was inspired.

It is the paradox of the highest moment in eternity that gives man a chance to grow spiritually. Browning's belief, according to Kumar, is that meaningful existence is not merely quantitative, but qualitative in essence; it recognizes the paradox of infinity in the finite, and eternal Being in temporal Becoming.[47] The profoundest thing that Browning has to say is that the infinite has to be achieved in and through the finite.

47) Kumar, *op. cit.*, p. 93.