

A STUDY OF DRAMATURGICAL ELEMENTS IN THREE
OF ROBERT BROWNING'S CLOSET DRAMAS

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1948

Submitted to the faculty of the Graduate School of
the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
August, 1959

FEB 29 1960

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PREFACE

A class in Victorian Poetry was my introduction to Robert Browning. His lyric power intensified by dramatic flashes, as well as the mental and physical vigor which Browning reflected in his poetry, produced an enthusiastic response in me which his contemporaries, memorable as they are, did not. This dynamic approach left a lasting impression upon me.

Browning's successful works which I studied served to arouse my curiosity regarding his endeavors which had not met with success. His closet dramas became a logical focus for my attention. They interested me first because I wished to know whether they reflected as much of this man's contagious vigor as his other works. From this initial interest evolved a deeper interest in Browning's approach to and handling of his dramatic technique as applied to his plays for the theatre. The result of this intensified interest in ascertaining the scope of Browning's dramatic and lyric power evidenced in his dramas has been the following investigation.

This investigation could not have materialized were it not for the enthusiasm and encouragement of my major advisor, Dr. Agnes Berrigan. It is to her and to my second reader, Dr. Clinton C. Keeler, that I wish to express my appreciation. I should like to acknowledge special indebtedness to Miss Vivia Locke, of the Speech Department, whose assistance and advice in matters specifically dramatic have been invaluable. I also wish to express my appreciation to my parents for their interest, and, particularly, I wish to say that without the constant help and inspiration of my husband my thesis could never have become a reality.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Robert Browning early in his literary career wrote seven plays which, because of their lack of success on the stage, have been classed as closet dramas. The implication in this title is that, since they were not successful theatrically, they must be relegated to private reading.

In the case of Tennyson, there is little to make one question his failure in the dramatic form, a form alien to his genius. But Browning's power with dramatic monologue, even the dramatic intensity of his lyric poetry, justifies an inquiry into his drama; and the possibility that earlier critics had been wrong could be considered in view of new techniques of acting and production and particularly in the application of dramatic principles which embraced the static drama of Maeterlinck and the new and strange drama of Chekhov. That critics have adamantly held to the unfavorable views consequent on the failure of these plays as dramatic productions has caused them to be dismissed with little attention.

The selection of plays has been based on an attempt to furnish a representative sequence. This would seem to be a fair and accurate investigation. Therefore, Browning's earliest attempt at drama, Strafford, followed by Colombe's Birthday and A Blot in the 'Scutcheon, both of which were written later, will be used. The two former are five act plays, the latter a drama of three acts.

To subject three of the Browning closet dramas to an analysis based upon what is generally accepted dramatic criteria--criteria that include the newer dramatic techniques--is to be the purpose of this study. This means of determining what are good form, structure, and actability in a play, what is dramatically effective in it, what it is that imparts excellence to a drama, what makes the work successful theatre in the final analysis should reveal much about Browning's dramatic power or lack of it. An analysis of the dramaturgical elements found in the Browning plays should provide a fresh approach toward an understanding of and perhaps a renewed interest in them.

Ten dramaturgical principles, the presence of which, all or in part, are necessary to infuse successful theatre into a play, shall be the basis of this investigation. These generally accepted criteria are found to be directly stated either in whole or in part in such modern dramatic texts as Brander Matthews' A Book About the Theater; John E. Dietrich's Play Direction; John Gassner's Producing the Play; Stark Young's The Theatre; S. Marion Tucker's Modern Plays. The elements shall be applied to each play in the same order in which they occur in this preliminary discussion. These dramaturgical essentials are the protagonist, theme, exposition, point of attack, foreshadowing, crisis, climax, major dramatic question, prize, and resolution.

The initial point of dramaturgical importance is the protagonist. The protagonist must first be one whose decisions direct the action of the play. Directing the action is of extreme importance, and it reflects the writer's ability to formulate character. This formulation of the character of the protagonist is representative of his ability to create characters. Therefore, if the protagonist is created skillfully enough,

then the decisions and their logical developments would conveniently be perceived by the audience without difficulty in a direct line through the play. With this same clear line in mind, the writer should successfully motivate the protagonist by reasons which must be made perfectly clear to the audience; and, as the play progresses, this should be done either through development of his own character, as indicated by the effects he produces upon others in the play and their reactions in relation to him, or solely by his actions, or by a combination of both. The protagonist, like all of the dramatis personae, has a definite appointment in the dramatic action with reference to the whole, and upon the successful handling of this character, rests much of the fate of the play as theatre.

The theme, which is the second dramaturgical requirement has in regard to plays a special technical meaning. In a play the theme may simply be a story, the unfolding of the plot, although most plays, in addition to plot structure propound a definite impression of crystallized statement of the idea in the play. And this implicit thought can be summed up in some pregnant abstract statement. This idea of the play in the abstract is called the theme. That the theme or main idea of a play presents itself differently to different persons should not be overlooked. But a theme is found in the play which embodies more than just the story and the representation of character. "However important and interesting its story and however natural and convincing its characters"¹ that play which reaches beyond these

¹S. Marion Tucker, ed., Modern Plays, (New York, 1932), p. 37.

essential components imparts to the audience its universal essence or theme. Although any major and minor abstractions of theme must, of necessity, be satisfactorily conveyed to the audience by the playwright through the handling of the director, the initial and all important concern of both should be that the plot, or story, if the drama embraces one, must be presented to the audience with all possible clarity.

That there should be no misconception entertained that the sole importance of theme is regarded as an abstraction or essence of any particular play, a very obvious and extremely important fact should not be ignored. The dramatic theme must provide, not just the statement of an abstract idea, but a raison d'etre to the actor. A successful dramatic vehicle should have this implicit thought strongly enough conveyed to support the inherent reasons for each actor doing what he does. This thematic idea should color and permeate the atmosphere of the production sufficiently well to indicate that there is a definite reason and response, whether tinted, shaded, or fully illuminated, whether presented with the utmost subtilty or with obviousness, which reflect the direct relation of every actor to this basic thought.

This major theme should come about as the result of the story; this is a dramatic necessity. The more complicated dramas may embrace a subsidiary theme which may or may not be related to the major theme. The strong use of leitmotiv contributes greatly to the dramatic quality and worth of the play as a whole. And again it should be stated that whether the major idea of the dramatic vehicle is the concern of the examiner or whether the motif of the secondary plot is to be analyzed, both must offer immutable grounds to support the motivation of the characters involved.

Exposition provides the third point of the dramaturgical investigation. The dramatic means of telling a story through speech and action must convey at every step the dramatist's intention to his audience. This must be done with the utmost clarity. In addition to this, it is also essential in many plays that a certain mood or mood-setting be established, that certain events which bear directly upon the action and which have happened before the opening of the play be explained, or that the persons involved in the play and their interrelationships preceding the rising of the curtain be clarified. The means that the dramatist has of conveying this essential information is through exposition.

There is need for exposition even if the story begins to unfold with the rising of the curtain; but if this is not the case, then the dramatist may avail himself of a number of expository devices which are at his disposal. It may be given in the most evident way through direct statements; it may be included subtly; or it may take the form of dramatic action. "Ibsen's Ghosts, of course is an extreme case, but it is a superlative example of how a playwright, by dramatizing his exposition, can make it as interesting as action."²

The exposition may be given as introductory material at the beginning of the play. It may be introduced from time to time as clarity warrants. Conversational devices may be employed among servants, or two friends may meet after a long separation. According to his dexterity in handling it, the dramatist may make his exposition seem to come about naturally, or it may appear forced. It may be conveyed, in

²Ibid., p. 30.

part, through the décor of the set or through the atmosphere evoked by the setting. If the dramatist is to have effective exposition, then he must transmit it to his audience in the way best suited to his own limitations and to the limitations that he has imposed upon his play. If he does not succeed in treating the exposition either satisfactorily or adequately, the entire vehicle can misfire to become little more than a complete failure.

Immediately following the necessary exposition falls the point of attack. This is the exact point at which the action and direction in which the plot is to move come into sharp focus. The amount of initial exposition, or building up to the situation or to the character which is to dominate the play determines the location of the point of attack. The nature of the plot establishes the need, if any, for preparing the audience for the point of attack. Some plots initiate the point of attack immediately with no necessary preliminaries; other plays need varying degrees of preparation. It is the handling of the point of attack itself that makes its dramaturgical worth evident to the auditor.

Another effective dramaturgical device is foreshadowing. The application of this point approximates the methods employed by the dramatist in the use of exposition. This hinting or indication of what is to occur in the progression of the play may be found in the very beginning of the drama. It may be included in the exposition in a subtle way. It may be stated directly, as such, in the dialogue. It may be only inferred in the dialogue or be indicated through action.

Aside from foreshadowing's giving the whole play away too early, there are few limits placed upon the dramatist's use of it. Again clarity is all important; and in establishing rapport with the audience

this means of sowing the seed of suggestion of what is to occur as the play subsequently unfolds is good theatre. Thus the interest of the audience is whetted and is not allowed to lag if bits of information are inserted to preserve an established level of anticipation. However, there is a fine balance to be maintained, and the dramatist must be ever aware that too much foreshadowing can lessen the intended effect of a crisis or a climax.

The foregoing points: the protagonist, the theme, the exposition, point of attack, foreshadowing, have laid the groundwork for the remaining dramaturgical points which follow. In the logical development of the play the crisis should be the next requirement for discussion. It has been maintained "that the essence of drama is not conflict but crisis."³ As a play unfolds, it presents a crisis through action or through the lines spoken by the character involved, or it maintains a focal situation, a crisis. These constitute a turning point in the action which in some way determines the end of the play.

This is not to imply that a play may contain only one crisis, for it may have several. And each crisis reached in the development of the play serves to elevate that action, the general feeling of anticipation, or excitement, to a higher level. With each succeeding elevation the audience receives a more dramatic building up or preparation for the climax which follows. Often in a play neither the characters nor the audience is aware that a climax has been reached, yet the spectator's interest is sharpened, and the anticipation is heightened.

The ways in which the crisis manifests itself vary with each play.

³Ibid., p. 33.

It may be evidenced in thought, which would be conveyed through action, in dialogue, or in action alone; or it may be constituted in a situation. And according to the direction or to the individual reaction to the play, there may be disagreements as to the exact location of a crisis. "The answer to them often resides in one's idea of the nature of the theme of the play, or of the characters, or of the issues involved in the action."⁴

The climax dramaturgically follows the crisis. They are not to be confused although they may occur simultaneously in some dramas. The climax occurs at that point in the play when the highest emotional tension is registered by the audience. This, too, might become a point of argument if the emotional pitch of the play were maintained at a fairly high level throughout. However, the climax is much less elusive than the crisis, and its determination should rarely present any difficulty.

The major dramatic question, which is, of course, the basic problem which is posed for solution at the beginning of the play, will be found to be of great dramaturgical importance. Whatever the subject of the drama is revealed to be, the dramatic question may embrace anything which the playwright feels has enough inherent dramatic potential for a play. Its effective treatment could be determined by the amount of dramatic response which the crisis and climax could bestir in the audience. For the climax would reveal the solution of the dramatic question.

The inclusion of a prize among the ten requirements under discussion

⁴Ibid., p. 34.

adds greatly to the overall dramaturgical effectiveness of the play. The prize may be represented with as much diversity as there are plots themselves. The prize, or reward, proffered in a play adds an intrinsic dramatic quality to the play as a whole. Whether it be merely the solution to the principal situation represented or merely a solution to a subsidiary motif--the winning of the heroine, the death of the villain, the victory in battle, or the proving of any point--it adds to the overall effectiveness of the play. Further dramatic potential comes through if these aforementioned stock situations were to be an obstacle which would interfere with the gaining of the upper hand in a situation, or if an antagonist were to present himself as a determined means of preventing the winning of the prize. The problem of the prize could find its resolution constituted in the climax or immediately preceding it.

The final dramaturgical point is the resolution of the play. All action following the climax is considered part of the resolution, and it is in this portion of the play that "the entire work of the stage should find its justification and confirmation"⁵ and should contain "only the necessary consequences of the action and the characters."⁶ Obviously the entire action of the play has pointed toward the end; consequently, a dénouement should be treated with this in mind. At this point the entire solution of the plot would be effected. The resolution would of necessity be a logical outgrowth of the climax since the resolution is but the falling action which brings about the conclusion of the drama after the high point or climax occurs. The length of the resolution

⁵Gustav Freytag, Technique of the Drama, (Chicago, 1908), p. 139.

⁶Ibid., p. 139.

would naturally be determined by a number of aspects. The type of play represented should afford an indication of the dénouement that an audience would expect. If a tragedy were to be the vehicle, perhaps a more detailed resolution would be desired. Other types of plays would require a different treatment. Therefore, the treatment of the resolution and its effectiveness can only be left to the discretion of the dramatist. And the ultimate test of its dramaturgical effectiveness lies in the reaction of the audience.

With the establishment of the ten dramaturgical elements augmented with such explanatory material as should contribute to a full understanding of the meaning of each point as it is applied, the pattern to which the Browning dramas will be subjected for examination will be discussed subsequently.

Each play is to be treated completely, as a separate entity, before the succeeding one is examined. The procedure will be initiated with a summary or explication of the plot augmented with selections of dialogue. These selections serve a dual purpose, in that, along with advancing the plot, they will also substantiate the various dramaturgical points: protagonist, theme, exposition, point of attack, foreshadowing, crisis, climax, major dramatic question, prize, and resolution. Following the summary, the ten points will be applied, with the necessary and appropriate evidence from the plays to substantiate firmly the application of each dramaturgical device as it is examined.

This means of approach, with the summary preceding the dramaturgical investigation, would be a necessity to anyone reading this analysis who is not conversant with the plays; and to those already familiar with the three dramas, the foregoing procedure would serve to facilitate an examination of the techniques applied here.

CHAPTER II

STAFFORD, COLOMBE'S BIRTHDAY AND

A BLOT IN THE 'SCUTCHEON

Strafford, Browning's first attempt at drama, was written in 1837, almost ten years in advance of A Blot in the 'Scutcheon and Colombe's Birthday.

The play is an ambitious undertaking for a first drama. It is based upon historical events, which were in their time of explosive political significance. In creating the character of Strafford, Browning, however, was exceptionally well prepared, for during this time he was actually involved in writing, or in helping to write, the "Life of Strafford" which his friend John Forster was to include in Lives of Eminent British Statesmen.

Because of the historical facts which support the play, it is difficult to set the drama aside from them. It is comparable to selecting one speech from any drama, lifting it from its context, and expecting it to make complete sense, as well as to convey the complete idea of the play, as it stands unsupported. Therefore, at the outset the modern audience or reader of Strafford will find the lack of a thorough understanding of the background of the dramatic events a decided deterrent in following the action. Some familiarity with the latter events of King Charles First's reign would be a necessity as well as a relief in appreciating what is transpiring on the stage. For almost

every line has a dramatic meaning and an underlying political counterpart as well. These occur with such rapidity that some briefing upon this rapid-fire attack is necessary.

Lines such as these from Act I of the Browning text must need some clarification; otherwise a complete appreciation of the play is impossible. Strafford is referred to in the following lines:

Vane. To frame, we know it well, the choicest clause
In the Petition of Right: he framed such clause
One month before he took at the King's hand
His Northern Presidency, which that Bill
Denounced.¹

That Strafford had been a political ally of Vane, the above speaker, and a personal friend of some of the others gathered in this scene has already been implied in the text, but the full importance of the foregoing speech needs explanation. Thomas Wentworth, the Earl of Strafford, did not fall into this hated position by accident either historically, to accommodate the political enemies of his day, or to accommodate Browning dramatically. Historically he became prominent after the murder of the Duke of Buckingham, young Charles' prime minister. There were several men, Digges, Savile, Wentworth who were considered as replacements.

But Wentworth was the man of all others most worth winning. In the debates upon the Petition of Right he had taken a line marked by certain restraints. Behind the fierce invective of the Parliamentarian there had been noticed a certain willingness not to exclude the other side of the argument. His abilities were obviously of the first order, and so were his ambitions. His sombre force might mar or make the system the King now sought to establish.

To Wentworth therefore the King turned. Indeed even before the death of Buckingham this champion of Parliament had made distinct overtures all couched in dignified and reasonable guise. The securing of Wentworth had not become essential to the Personal Rule...In December

¹Horace E. Scudder, ed., The Cambridge Poets Edition, Student's Edition, The Complete Poetic and Dramatic Words of Robert Browning (New York, 1895), p. 52.

1628 he became Lord President of the Council of the North and a member of the Privy Council. From this moment he not only abandoned all the ideas of which he had been the ablest exponent, but all the friends who had fought at his side. He sailed on in power and favor while Eliot, his rival but for long his comrade, was condemned for contempt of the King's Government and languished to his death in the Tower. The very force of Wentworth's practical mind led him to a theme which was the exact contrary of all he had previously espoused....The words of the opposition to the Government had hardly died away from his lips when, at the invitation of that government, he joined it, although no change had been introduced into its policy. This was the reason why a hatred centered upon Wentworth different from that which even incompetence attracted to other ministers. He was 'the Satan of the Apostasy,' 'the lost Archangel,' 'the suborned traitor to the cause of Parliament.' No administrative achievements, no address in business, no eloquence, no magnitude of personality, could atone to his former friends for his desertion. And they had eleven years to think about it all.²

Without more knowledge of this situation the intense hatred displayed by the lords gathered in this opening scene could not be fully understood. There is a need for a filling in of events prior to the beginning of the play, which takes place in 1640, not in 1628 when Strafford first became Councillor of the North. The impetus behind the motivation of these men to do away with Strafford needs more clarification than the play itself gives.

With these men, of whom Pym is the leader, a principle is involved in dealing with Strafford. From this view point events have progressed beyond personal affronts to which reference has been made when Strafford assumed his position in the Northern Council. These men, his cast-off friends and associates, have been festering in silence. They have had no outlet for their grievances until now. For the first time in eleven years of Personal Rule the king has called a Parliament. He is desperately in need of money because he has embroiled himself in a religious situation with Scotland from which there is no way out. Ultimately

²Winston S. Churchill, The New World, A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, (New York, 1956), pp. 192-193.

there would be war, and Charles could not afford a war unless he were to call Parliament to vote the necessary funds.

That the numerous references to Ireland and Strafford's relationship there be understood, that the presence of Scotsmen and Presbyterians at the Parliament be explained, that the need for a Parliament at all and the unexpected reaction of its being called be understood, it is necessary to look beyond Browning's lines to see that

In the complicated pattern of Western Europe the Scots were not only the ardent partisans of Protestantism, but the friends of France against the Austro-Spanish combination. They viewed the neutral and isolationist foreign policy of King Charles as unduly favoring the Catholic interest. They now sought to revive in an intimate form their traditional association with France. By the end of 1639 Charles saw himself confronted with an independent State and Government in the North, which, though it paid formal homage to him as King, was resolved to pursue its own policy both at home and abroad. It thus challenged not only the King's prerogative, but the integrity of his dominions. He felt bound to fight. But how?...would that be possible without a Parliament? Wentworth was now summoned from Ireland to strengthen the Council. His repute at Court stood high. He had restored not only order but the appearance of loyalty throughout Ireland. Irish sympathies lay upon the Catholic side. Ruling as an enlightened despot, the Lord Deputy had raised and was paying and training an Irish army of eight thousand men. He believed himself capable of enforcing upon Scotland, and later upon England, the system of autocratic rule which had brought him success in the sister island...Wentworth saw clearly enough that the royal revenues were not sufficient to support the cost of the campaign. He concluded therefore that Parliament must be summoned. In his overconfidence he thought that the commons would prove manageable. He was wrong.³

After almost eleven years the membership had changed, and approximately only one-fourth of the former members reappeared. Eliot was now dead in the tower; Wentworth had become Earl of Strafford and was elected to the position of the King's First Minister. But one man of the former group remained; this was Pym, the competent avenger.

In the play as in history Strafford meets his match in Pym. Pym is the warhead for the others whose opposition to everything Strafford has

³Ibid., pp. 207-208.

done and is attempting to do is the principal complaint set forth in the Commons. It is through Pym's astuteness that Strafford's activities are misinterpreted and his articles of impeachment are drawn up. In less than an hour the powerful minister found himself at the "Bar" awaiting directions from his peers. His sword was taken, and he was taken into custody by "Black Rod."

The swiftness of Strafford's change of fortune was engendered by the king who stupidly, in Strafford's absence, dissolved the first Parliament at Laud's recommendation because of its refusal to vote more than half of the twelve subsidies demanded for the support of the army. This initial blow to Strafford was only minor when it is compared to the outcome of the second Parliament. Charles, upon Strafford's advice, recalled the Parliament in order to vote enough money to pay the discontented and disorganized army which, in being routed by the Scots, had allowed the Scots to cross the border into England. This second Parliament had nothing but hatred for Strafford, whom it blamed unjustly for dissolving the previous, or Short Parliament, just as its activities were underway.

Pym triggered the impeachment action, for he feared that Strafford would act first in introducing some convincing proofs of the correspondence carried on by Pym and others with the invading Scots. This was treason according to the King's Writ, and Pym acted first lest this formidable information be used against him. Pym's duplicity to his country is not actually brought out in the play although it is implied in Strafford's speech to Lady Carlisle in Scene II of Act III.

For eighteen days the trial continues, and each day Strafford counters eloquently the charges brought against him. The audience views

two of these days briefly--the initial day when Strafford is forced in Act III to surrender his sword, and in Act IV on the final day when it appears that Strafford's parries have been successful in extricating him from an exceedingly dangerous position. This final position which Strafford's enemies felt certain would seal his conviction is also dealt with in the play. Secretary of the Privy Council, Sir Henry Vane, found that his son had purloined a note which the elder Vane had preserved from the May 5, 1640, discussion in the King's Council. This bit of bad faith on the part of the younger Vane was to cost him his life in later years. Those sentiments expressed in the note were attributed to Strafford.

Everything is to be done as power will admit, and that you are to do. They refused, you are acquitted towards God and man. You have an army in Ireland you may employ here to reduce this kingdom. Confident as anything under Heaven, Scotland shall not hold out five months.⁴

When the Commons were advised of this it was declared that this convicted Strafford of advising the use of an Irish Army to subdue England. The words in their context seemed to mean that Scotland was intended, and Scotland at the time of their utterance was in rebellion against the King. Vane the elder, Secretary of Council, in cross-examination could not, or would not, say whether the words 'this kingdom' meant England or Scotland. The other members of the Council who were examined declared that they had no recollection of the words; that the debate regarded the means of reducing Scotland, not England; and that they had never heard the slightest hint of employing the Irish Army anywhere but in Scotland...Strafford's answer covered all issues. 'What will be the end,' he said, 'if words which are spoken in the King's privy council, half understood or misunderstood by its members, are to be turned into crime? No one will any longer have the courage to speak out his opinion plainly to the king.' The lawyers also declared themselves on his side. There was no doubt that he had won his case.⁵

Browning in recounting this episode approaches it differently. The audience hears of it through Hollis, who, as he relates the information

⁴Ibid., p. 217.

⁵Ibid., pp. 217-218.

to Charles, makes it most apparent that this vascillating, weak king has again failed in his administration when he could have so easily spoken out from his curtained booth in Parliament in defense of this faithful minister. His lack of forceful character serves admirably to illuminate the strength of character and purpose which Strafford displays in the play.

Charles. And they dare
Consummate calmly this great wrong! No
hope?

This ineffaceable wrong! No pity then?

Hollis. No plague in store for perfidy?--
Farewell!

You call me, sir--/To Lady CARLISLE?/ You,
lady, bade me come

To save the Earl : I came, thank God for it,
To learn how far such perfidy can go!

You, sir, concert with me on saving him
Who have just ruined Strafford!

Charles. I? -- and how?

Hollis. Eighteen days long he throws, one after
one,

Pym's charges back: a blind moth-eaten law!
--He'll break from it at last: and whom to
thank?

The mouse that gnawed the lion's net for him
Got a good friend, -- but he, the other mouse,
That looked on while the lion freed himself--
Fared he so well, does any fable say?

Charles. What can you mean?

Hollis. Pym never could have proved
Strafford's design of bringing up the troops
To force this kingdom of obedience: Vane --
Your servant, not our friend, has proved it.

Charles. Vane?

Hollis. This day. Did Vane deliver up or no
Those notes which, furnished by his son to Pym,
Seal Strafford's fate?

Hollis. Ha? Strafford cannot turn
As you, sir, sit there--bid you forth, demand
If every hateful act were not set down
In his commission?--whether you contrived
Or no, that all the violence should seem
His work, the gentle ways--your own,--his
part,

To counteract the King's kind impulses--
While ... but you know what he could say!

And then

He might produce --mark, sir! -- a certain
charge

To set the King's express command aside,
If need were, and be blameless. He might
add...

Charles. Enough!

Hollis. --Who bade him break the Parlia-
ment,

Find some pretence for setting up sword-law!

Queen. Retire!⁶

Just as the Parliament and Pym failed on this count to ensnare Strafford so had the king again failed to raise his voice in Strafford's defense. But the Commons would succeed one way or another, and by dispensing with the trial, they could declare Strafford guilty by Act of Parliament. The Bill of Attainder was drawn up, not in actuality by Pym or Hampden; but immediately after it was launched, their weight and influence, as well as that of the angry people of the city, were behind it. The Lords listened to Strafford's closing speech and ignored the Bill which was passed in the House of Commons on April 21 by 204 votes to 59. The names of the unfortunate fifty-nine were claimed traitors defending a traitor. Strafford was lost thus politically, historically, and dramatically, as well.

Although Browning has rearranged the remaining incident for dramatic effect, historically it is known that the king attempted to gain control of the tower and the prison. But Sir William Balfour, the Governor repulsed the forces, and also rejected an enormous bribe tendered him by Strafford. An armed mob then threatened to impeach the queen if the king were to interfere.

Charles was not so concerned now, from a political position, over the loss of Strafford, but whether royal authority would perish with him.

⁶Scudder, pp. 65-66.

The king received, however, a letter from Strafford, written before the House of Lords cast its vote, urging Charles not to be held by any promises to him which might endanger the monarchy or the peace of the realm. This was an unlocked for release for the king, but he was to remember to the last moment of his life that Strafford's death was his doing when he signed the Bill of Attainder the next day. Regretting his action, he sent his young son, the Prince of Wales, to entreat the House of Lords to refute the death sentence to life imprisonment. This was denied as well as a few days of grace in which Strafford might settle his affairs.

It is this political fabric which Browning took from the tapestry of English history that is to be examined. How malleable this material becomes at the pen of a new dramatist and how competently he has arranged it according to the ten points necessary for dramaturgical excellence shall be examined.

Strafford is an ideal selection for the protagonist of a tragedy. In accordance with the demands of the first dramaturgical requirement, Browning has given him nobility of character and unquestioningly high purpose and integrity of action, and in addition Strafford directs the action of the drama. He has given Strafford a tragic flaw. If the point were stretched somewhat, it could possibly be seen that Strafford has two tragic flaws.

The first would be the overuse of power because of his unlimited access to it. This use of power is more implied than treated openly in the play, for Strafford's decisions appear to be refuted, or to changed completely, according to the whims of the king, as often as they are accepted. Thus the amount of power at his command appears uncertain to

an audience. The tragic flaw which ultimately leads to Strafford's downfall in the play is his completely naive love and implicit trust in the king. This includes his willingness to overlook and excuse the deplorable treatment he receives at Charles' hand. This steadfastness and unquestioning devotion is an admirable quality to possess, but in Strafford it is carried too far for credibility. It seems inconceivable that a man of Strafford's political background and training and apparent perspicacity could be so utterly blind in his association with King Charles.

It can only be assumed that Strafford, as Browning has created him, believes that every human being has as an intrinsic part of his character the infinite loyalty that he himself has, and this is an unbelievable error in judgment for a statesman to make.

Repeatedly Strafford is faced with the king's lack of faith in him. In Act II, Scene II, the minister is faced with Charles' changing the plans which he, Strafford, has so carefully laid out.

Strafford. ... I said, to please you both
I'd lead an Irish army to the West,
While in the South an English...but you look
As though you had not told me fifty times
'T was a brave plan! My army is all raised,
I am prepared to join it ...

Charles. Hear me, Strafford!

Strafford...... When, for some little thing, my
whole design
Is set aside--(Where is the wretched paper?)
I am to lead--(ay, here it is)--to lead
The English army: why? Northumberland,
That I appointed, chooses to be sick--
Is frightened: and, meanwhile, who answers for
The Irish Parliament? or army, either?
Is this my plan?

Charles. So disrespectful, sir?

Strafford. My liege, do not believe it! I am yours,
Yours ever: 't is too late to think about:
To the death, yours. Elsewhere, this untoward
step

Shall pass for mine; the world shall think it
mine.

But here! But here! I am so seldom here,
Seldom with you, my King! I, soon to rush
Along upon a giant in the dark!

Charles. My Strafford!

Strafford. /Examines papers awhile/ 'Seize
the passes of the Tyne!'

But, sir, you see--see all I say is true?
My plan was sure to prosper, so, no cause
To ask the Parliament for help; whereas
We need them frightfully.

Charles. Need the Parliament?

Strafford. Now, for God's sake, sir, not one error
more!

We can afford no error; we draw, now,
Upon our last resource: the Parliament
Must help us!

Charles. I've undone you, Strafford!⁷

As if this were not sufficient to cause Strafford to move more cautiously, he then learns from the king that, because of Vane's interference, the Parliament has failed to vote not a single one of the twelve subsidies which are needed to raise money for the army. Furthermore the king, seeing this, dissolved the body. In the face of this obvious mistake, the king still cannot seem to realize what a grave error he has committed; worse yet, Strafford is incapable of conceiving that the king cannot be trusted. In the following passage also from Act II, Scene II, Strafford actually seems to see Charles as he really is, but this realization is only momentary, and Strafford resumes his unquestioning role.

Strafford. And this while I am here! with you!
And there are hosts such, hosts like Vane! I go,
And, I once gone, they'll close around you, sir,
When the least pique, pettiest mistrust, is sure
To ruin me--and you along with me!
Do you see that? And you along with me!
--Sir, you'll not ever listen to these men,

⁷Ibid., p. 57.

And I away, fighting your battle? Sir,
 If they--if She--/the queen/ charge me, no matter how--
 Say you, 'At any time when he returns
 His head is mine!' Don't stop me there! You
 know

My head is yours, but never stop me there!

Charles. Too shameful, Strafford! You advised
 the war,

And ...

Strafford. I! I! that was never spoken with
 Till it was entered on. That loathe the war!
 That say it is the maddest, wickedest...
 Do you know, sir, I think within my heart,
 That you would say I did advise the war;
 And if, through your own weakness, or, what's
 worse.

These Scots, with God to help them, drive me
 back,

You will not step between the raging People
 And me, to say ...

I knew it! from the first
 I knew it. Never was so cold a heart!
 Remember that I said it--that I never
 Believed you for a moment!

---And, you loved me?
 You thought your perfidy prodoundly hid
 Because I could not share the whisperings
 With Vane, with Savile? What, the face was
 masked?

I had the heart to see, sir! Face of flesh,
 But heart of stone--of smooth cold frightful
 stone!⁸

The audience can only suppose that Strafford has forgotten his misgivings concerning the king the moment that he has uttered them. There is no explanation for Strafford's behavior. And this weakness in his character does not make for even mediocre theatre. It is insulting to an audience to be forced to accept such actions from a man of such stature. For he goes to take charge of the army as the king has ordered, and in the following act Strafford's defeat in Scotland is announced, and the impeachment proceedings begin. If Strafford were to have seriously believed the accusations he directed at the king, this would

⁸Ibid., p. 58.

have been the propitious moment for his withdrawing completely to the safety of York and not returning. But he comes back to Whitehall at the king's summons for council. And his decision to do this directs the final action of the play.

Strafford's decisions determine the entire framework of the play. The impression created is one in which Strafford stands in the center of this framework of his own making and watches as he is walled in with materials which he himself has supplied. The realization comes slowly to the audience that unless he immediately selects another course, there can be no way of escape. Nor does he want one. He prefers the fate he has built for himself. Again a great strain is put upon the patience of the audience and the reader as they are forced to watch Strafford bring about his own downfall through such amazingly poor judgment and equally poor dramatic technique.

The remaining personae of the drama are shown in varying degrees of importance and in varying relationships to Strafford. Each serves as a different mirror against which Strafford is reflected. Or it might be said that Strafford is intended to be the master mirror against which his associates are reflected in their relative degrees of effective characterization.

There is a hint with no satisfactory basis for evidence

That Pym and Strafford were once intimate friends. In carrying on Pym's feeling of admiration for Charles' minister to the days of the Short or even of The Long Parliament, the dramatist has filled his play with scenes which are more hopelessly impossible than anything else in it, but they all conduce to his main object, the creation of the impression about Strafford which he wished to convey.⁹

⁹George Willis Cooke, Guide Book to the Poetic Works of Robert Browning, (New York, 1891), p. 409.

As Pym is reflected in the drama, indeed it is difficult to visualize a man of his convictions who would at the last possible moment come to Strafford to beg his forgiveness. "Pym is intended to be especially strong. He is made a blusterer. He was a gentleman, but in this last scene he is hateful."¹⁰ This meeting of two such strong opponents is out of character for Pym, and a weakness is revealed in the man which the audience has not suspected. It is so unlikely and introduced far too late in the play that it is not easy to accept, and an unreality is imparted to his character as a result.

That Strafford, as Browning has drawn him, can be forgiving toward Pym is no surprise since his tragic flaw appears to embrace, as well as his blind loyalty to King Charles, a failure to see, in proper perspective, anyone who may have wronged him. And

when Pym and Strafford forgive each other and speak of meeting hereafter, good sense is violated, and the natural dignity of the scene, and the characters of the men. Strafford is weaker here, if that were possible, than he is in the rest of the drama. Nothing can be more unlike the man.¹¹

Again it may be said nothing can be less satisfying and less effective theatre than this scene between Pym and Strafford. "It must be remembered, however, that the aim of the dramatist was to place Strafford before the eyes of men, not to produce an exact representation of the Long Parliament,"¹² and in order to place Strafford in this position Browning has included Lady Carlisle as a means to this end. Historically she did exist as the daughter of the ninth Earl of Northumberland. Dramatically Browning

¹⁰ Stopford A. Brooke, The Poetry of Robert Browning, (New York, 1902), p. 228.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 228.

¹² Cooke, p. 410.

invented her. He needs her to show her admiration of Strafford not the admiration Strafford has for her, and he takes care to show that she was not Strafford's mistress as rumor indicated. "The impression of Strafford's greatness is brought more completely home to the spectator or reader, because of the effect which it produces upon one who has given her heart without return."¹³

Being a sounding board for Strafford would be sufficient to justify her presence in the drama particularly since she is apparently the only friend that Strafford has. And whether it may or may not have been intentional on Browning's part, their conversations provide a needed relief from the continual stress of rigid attentiveness to which the audience must subject itself if the full measure of the play is to be taken in. In addition to the aforementioned reason for Lady Carlisle's presence in the *dramatis personae*, it can be said that she does produce a hopeful but shortlived suspense in planning an escape for Strafford.

Yet the combination of these components does not produce as a whole the effective character which Lady Carlisle might have been. She is so obscure when she speaks to Strafford that not until the final scene of Act IV can the audience be certain where her loyalty lies. Initially when she appears, her manner could as easily be construed to be that of an informer as it could be interpreted to be the cautious action of a close friend. And as she moves from the king and queen to Strafford and back again with disarming ease, she can scarcely refrain from arousing suspicion in the mind of the spectator as to the position of her loyalty. As a woman in love her restraint is unbelievably astounding.

¹³Ibid., p. 409.

If she were to have declared her feelings more openly earlier in the play, her role would be considerably strengthened. And if her position in relation to Strafford were to be stated more definitely, it would be a great help in clarifying, at least, this related portion of the drama for the audience.

Charles, in his relationship to Strafford, is by comparison "Always a selfish liar, but he was not a coward, and a coward he becomes in this play."¹⁴ He is abetted in all of his endeavors by the queen, who is the basest of all with whom Strafford must deal. The principle purpose which this royal couple serves most admirably in the drama is that of providing an even more solid contrast between themselves and Strafford. Browning has succeeded well in making the dramatic contrast between Strafford and these two who completely lack any principle. Their perfidy and meanness make Strafford's nobility all the more evident. Yet while Strafford is intuitive enough to see the queen as she is and readily confesses to Lady Carlisle this observation that her majesty cannot be trusted, he continues throughout the drama to exhibit his tragic flaw in each meeting with the king.

The noble qualities which Strafford possesses and which have been discussed for themselves singularly, as well as for the manner in which they touch each of these people, ultimately remain as virtues suitable for the ideal protagonist. His motives are almost irreproachable; his love for his king and for England extends beyond even his concern for his own preservation; and he possesses ideal integrity. Surely a successful protagonist should possess such qualities as these. But is is

¹⁴Brooke, p. 228.

difficult to believe that an audience could accept a man so astute in political affairs, one whose shrewd advice has kept the crown on a frugal budget and not dependent upon parliamentary grants, one whose diplomacy has enabled him to unite Ireland successfully while maintaining a trained standing army, and yet who can be so utterly obtuse and unaware that his destruction has become politically expedient. Such inconsistency displayed in the protagonist could only be a constant irritation to the audience. His blind devotion to Charles is almost maudlin, and it is difficult to believe that an audience would not be impatient with Strafford for maintaining this steadfastness. In Strafford his admirable qualities are grossly outweighed by his tragic flaw, and the imbalance in this proportion does not make for excellence in drama, neither does this make the dramaturgical treatment of the protagonist acceptable.

The second dramaturgical requirement is theme, and the theme of Strafford is one of political crises which is the outgrowth of long suppressed and smoldering differences that must at last erupt and continue to do so until they have finally spent themselves. As in many similar themes, there is a scapegoat upon whom every blame is heaped whether real or imaginary, whether deserved or undeserved. But there must be one, and Strafford, the protagonist, is that one about whom this age worn story of political rivalries swirls and eddies. As always these grievances must be expiated, and they finally dissipate themselves in removing the man who, at the moment, is most representative of the ills of the time.

The theme is an excellent one for any drama. There is a kind of exciting universality in the fomenting of a political drama if it is well handled. Browning does not, however, handle the theme with the competence that he should have in this attempt to represent

an austere crisis in England's history. The first scene puts the great quarrel forward as the ground on which the drama is to be wrought. An attempt is made to represent the various elements of the popular story in the characters of Pym, Hampden, the younger Vane and others, and especially in the relations between Pym and Strafford, who are set over, one against the other, with some literary power.¹⁵

But Browning's lacking in the sense of theatre undermines what advantage he has gained in this "literary" treatment, for he causes this very "literary" achievement to obscure, for the most part, any dramatic spark which he might have infused. Browning's dramatic techniques seems to have left him completely in this instance. It is apparently not the weapon which he decided to use in subduing such a slice of history into responding to his bidding in producing a dramatic vehicle. It seems instead that the one weapon--his dramatic power--which could have brought out the elements of theatre was never used and that Browning was overpowered and overawed by the vast extent of historical information.

It is unfortunate that too much history was to get in the way of the development of the theme, for Browning had the components with which to put forward a successful play if he were not to have lost sight of the fact that he must be writing primarily a stage representation. This has resulted in a complete loss of the dramaturgical effectiveness of this second requirement.

In his exposition, which is the third dramaturgical requirement, other than the including of too many historical references without sufficient explanation, Browning excels in one respect and fails completely in another. In spite of being forced to limp along with attention which must be divided between keeping abreast of the dialogue and struggling with these unfamiliar facts of the past, the audience is given a more than adequate preparation for what is to come.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 227.

In this respect Browning has shown himself capable of infusing, for the moment, the dramatic aspects of exposition into the fabric of his play. Act I of Strafford has a most effective beginning in its first scene. Pym is mentioned after the first five lines, but Strafford, or Wentworth, is only referred to and not mentioned by name until some twenty-five lines have been spoken. This dramatic method of attack immediately holds the attention of an audience. Both Strafford's and Pym's positions, as well as those of Hampden, Hollis, the younger Vane, Ruyard, Fiennes and the others present, are made quite clear by this method of exposition. This scene is rather lengthy, but it is also very satisfying in that the ground work for the remaining action is well laid. Browning has captured the flavor of the times and has induced this rampant hatred masterfully into the dialogue. It should be very easy for the spectator to become a part of the changed atmosphere, and it would be all too easy to be prepared to hate Strafford before he is given a chance to speak for himself.

The power which Pym wields over this assembled group is tremendous, as can be seen from the respect his name evokes. His appearance is built up to the proper pitch of anticipation. There can be no doubt of the stature nor the tempering of Strafford's adversary when he first speaks. And in this initial speech Browning produces poetic imagery which in these brief lines conveys the feeling regarding Strafford which the entire scene has deemed to convey.

Pym. Wentworth's come: nor sickness, care,
The ravaged body nor the ruined soul,
More than the winds and waves that beat his
ship,
Could keep him from the King. He has not
reached

Whitehall: they've hurried up a Council there
to lose no time and find him work enough.¹⁶

In scene II of the first Act the exposition continues. In this scene Strafford is first viewed by the audience after all of the foregoing preparation by Pym and the rest. Here he is seen with Lady Carlisle, and through their conversation more historical information is put before the audience, and with it, Strafford reveals his ignorance of how precarious his position has already become.

After Lady Carlisle takes her leave of him, he says:

Wentworth. Forsake the People! I did not forsake
The People: they shall know it, when the King
Will trust me!--who trusts all beside at once,
While I have not spoke Vane and Savile fair,
And am not trusted: have but saved the throne:
Have not picked up the Queen's glove prettily,
And am not trusted. But he'll see me now.
Weston is dead: the Queen's half English now--
More English: one decisive word will brush
These insects from...the step I know so well!
The King! But now, to tell him...no-to
ask
What's in me he distrusts:--or, best begin
By proving that this frightful Scots affair
Is just what I foretold. So much to say,
And the flesh fails, now, and the time is come,
And one false step no way to be repaired.
You were avenged, Pym, could you look on me.¹⁷

The exposition is also effective in establishing the important point which occurs at the end of Scene II when the king has made Wentworth the Earl of Strafford. In the closing conversation which occurs between Charles and the queen, the duplicity of these two is established, and the audience is then fully prepared to see them in the unflattering light which the dramatist casts upon them.

¹⁶Scudder, p. 51.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 53.

Queen. Is it over then?
 Why he looks yellower than ever! Well,
 At least we shall not hear eternally
 Of service-services: he's paid you at least....
 How sure he is of a long term of favor!
 He'll see the next, and the next after that,
 No end to Parliaments!.....

Charles. Well, it is done.
 He talks it smoothly, doubtless. If, indeed,
 The Commons here...

Queen. Here! You will summon them
 Here? Would I were in France again to see
 A King!.....

Charles. But listen, sweet!

Queen. Let Wentworth listen - you confide
 in him!

Charles. I do not, love, — I do not so confide!
 The Parliament shall never trouble us!
 ...Nay, hear me! I have schemes, such
 schemes: we'll buy
 The leaders off: without that, Wentworth's
 Counsel
 Had ne'er prevailed on me. Perhaps I call it
 To have excuse for breaking it forever,
 And whose will then the blame be? See you
 not?¹⁸

The fault with Browning's exposition is the complete deluge of information which the audience is required to assimilate the moment it is uttered. For many of the lines throughout the play require the immediate perception of the audience if the ideas which they are intended to convey are to permit the action to move forward. Browning gives his spectator no time to ponder a line, for another replaces it which requires complete attention. Browning shows the audience no mercy, and there is no let up in his rapid-fire dialogue; consequently, the exposition suffers, and the entire play suffers dramaturgically as a result of this. This is bad theatre which results from the lack of organization of historical material. Browning expects the impossible of his audience and almost the impossible of his reader.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 55.

His reader has an advantage in that a passage may be reread, as many times as clarity and understanding warrant, but for the audience this is impossible. There is never an instant when the play can be enjoyed purely for its value as entertainment. It would be impossible for an audience to sit back and enjoy the production only as a spectacle on the stage. A moment's distraction would cause the spectator to become hopelessly lost in the involved dialogue.

No dramatist who expects a successful reception should inflict so rigid a demand upon his audience. Only disinterest and ultimate failure can be the result of such a lack of concern for those whose approval must determine the success of any dramatic vehicle. Therefore, no positive statement could be made in favor of such lack of dramaturgical treatment for this requirement.

In arriving at a point of attack which is the third dramaturgical requirement, Browning treats the king's relationship with Strafford in the second scene in Act I. Strafford who has just arrived, questions Lady Carlisle privately as to the king's attitude toward him. These questions should serve to make the audience aware that the situation which gives rise to them and to the answers they demand will be of dramatic significance. He learns from Lady Carlisle that Savile and Holland, even the elder Vane, are all ones who supply the queen with information. She reassures Strafford that there is no actual fault for them to find with him.

Lady Carlisle. Oh, there's no charge, no precise
charge
Only they sneer, make light of--one may say,
Nibble at what you do.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p. 53.

Hampden. And one name shall be dearer than all
 names,
 When children, yet unborn, are taught that
 name
 After their fathers',--taught what matchless
 man...
Pym...Saved England? What if Went-
 worth's should be still
 That name?
Rudyard and others. We have just said it, Pym!
 His death
 Saves her! We said it--there's no way be-
 side!....
Vane. No villanous striking-down!
Rudyard. No, a calm vengeance: let the whole
 land rise
 And shout for it....²¹

Again in Act II, Scene II in a conversation with Strafford, Lady Carlisle indicates a foreshadowing of events in her speech.

<u>Lady Carlisle</u> .	<u>Strafford</u> ,
------------------------	--------------------

The wind that saps these walls can undermine
 Your camp in Scotland, too. Whence creeps
 the wind?
 Have you no eyes except for Pym? Look here!
 A breed of silken creatures lurk and thrive
 In your contempt. You'll vanquish Pym? Old
 Vane
 Can vanquish you. And Vane you think to fly?
 Rush on the Scots! Do nobly! Vane's slight
 sneer
 Shall test success, adjust the praise, suggest
 The faint result: Vane's sneer shall reach you
 there.
 --You do not listen!²²

The last line of this poetic warning is more prophetic than all of her previous lines which are fraught with concern for Strafford's welfare. The very fact that he does not listen and refuses to heed the subsequent warning which Lady Carlisle attempts to inject into his thinking contributes to the suspense of the play. This is effective theatre and commendable use of dramatic irony.

²¹Ibid., p. 51.

²²Ibid., p. 59.

From the first scene it is indicated strongly that nothing pleasant or favorable is in store for the Earl of Strafford. And, as the audience awaits the development of these forewarnings, it will be certain to enjoy the suspense and the sense of foreboding engendered by them. This makes for good drama--if the audience is able to catch these inuendoes. Unfortunately they are hidden in the dialogue, and there is no time to ferret them out. Although, as previously stated, attentiveness is a prime necessity in the complete enjoyment of any dramatic vehicle, much of the fine use of foreshadowing is so obscure as to cancel out the initial stimulating anticipation which it has evoked in the audience.

The dramaturgical necessity of crisis develops in Scene III. Previously the audience has learned in Act III Scene I that Strafford has been defeated by the Scots, and in Scene II the queen learns from Lady Carlisle that the House of Lords has met to impeach Strafford. It appears for the moment, however, that Strafford is safely out of the reach of his enemies, at York. But the king has sent for him, and loyally he returns to Whitehall. Strafford then talks with Lady Carlisle alone regarding the papers he has with him. There is no explanation of how he came into possession of them, which is surprising in view of their obvious importance. This lack of explanation of something of such obvious importance is a definite weakness in the structure of the crisis.

<u>Lady Carlisle.</u>	Strafford--Strafford
What daring act is this you hint?	
<u>Strafford.</u>	No, no!
'T is here, not daring if you knew? All here!	
	<u>/Drawing papers from his breast.</u>
Full proof; see, ample proof--does the queen know	
I have such damning proof? Bedord and Essex.	
Brook, Warwick, Savile did you notice Savile? The simper that I spoilt? , Saye, Mandeville--Sold to the Scots, body and soul, by Pym!	

Lady Carlisle. Great heaven!
Strafford. From Savile and his lords, to Pym
 And his losels, crushed!--Pym shall not ward
 the blow....
 I go
 Straight to the House of Lords to claim these knaves.²³

In spite of her entreaties to remain, he leaves for the House of Lords and in so doing brings about the crisis of the play. Strafford has no opportunity to make use of his lethal papers, because Pym intuitively has acted first. As Strafford stands in the ante chamber, recovering from the shock of his being threatened with impeachment and being called a traitor by Pym, it is demanded that he relinquish his sword to the Commons. He considers fighting; and realizing the futility of such a course, he says

The King! I troubled him, stood in the way
 of his negotiations, was the one
 Great obstacle to peace, the Enemy
 Of Scotland: and he sent for me, from York,
 My safety guaranteed--having prepared
 A Parliament--I see! And at Whitehall
 The Queen was whispering with Vane--I see
 The Trap! /Tearing off the George.
 I tread a gewgaw underfoot,
 And cast a memory from me. One stroke, now!
/His own Adherents disarm him. Renewed cries
of 'STRAFFORD!'
 England! I see thy arm in this and yield.
 Pray you now--Pym awaits me--pray you
 now!
/STRAFFORD reaches the doors: they open wide. HAMP-
DEN and a crowd discovered, and, at the bar, PYM
standing apart. As STRAFFORD kneels, the scene
shuts.²⁴

This scene could be effective theatre with emphasis on the dialogue and with particular emphasis upon the small amount of physical action which attends the scene. This treatment alone would more effectively

²³Ibid., p. 63.

²⁴Ibid., p. 65.

convey to the audience the desired result of heightened anticipation of what is to follow in the climax than countless lines of dialogue preceding this bit of action. This display of action best satisfies the dramaturgical demands of crisis, but it does not receive sufficient build up. The motives and intentions are far too obscure. Again the audience is forced to grope blindly through the maze of superfluous words. The crisis is reached, but the only sense of achievement which may be enjoyed by the spectator is that the vague impression of what is happening is still within his grasp. No handling of crisis could be farther from dramaturgical significance than the treatment employed here.

The crisis is passed, and the action sweeps Strafford toward the climax. Perhaps attention should be called to the reference of Strafford's being swept along by the action of the play; for, in a drama as static as this one is, it should be noted that the only existing action is that within the characters themselves. This is to say that the action which does occur, with few exceptions, takes place within the minds of the dramatis personae and is revealed through verbal reaction to one another, rather than through physical action. The climax is achieved solely through this interplay of character. The entire play sustains itself on words alone, and it is through the written word, the signing of his name to a document, which is one of the few decisive physical actions, that the king brings about the climax.

In Act IV, Scene III, King Charles is confronted by Pym, who tells him that the trial has failed and that the two Estates concede Strafford's death on the grounds set forth in the impeachment which he presents to the king.

Pym leaves the reluctant king no recourse but to sign the Bill of Attainder by clearly and eloquently manipulating his speech so that the king is frightened into signing.

Pym. After this trial, alone, as man to man--
I might say something, warn you, pray you,
save--

Mark me, King Charles, save--you!
But God must do it. Yet I warn you, sir--
(With Strafford's faded eyes yet full on me)
As you would have no deeper question moved
--'How long the Many must endure the One,'
Assure me, sir, if England give assent
To Strafford's death, you will not interfere!
Or--

Charles. God forsakes me. I am in a net
And cannot move. Let all be as you say!²⁵

When Lady Carlisle enters at this point, she readily sees that some sort of turning point has been reached.

Lady Carlisle. This Bill! Your lip
Whitens--you could not read one line to me
Your voice would falter so!

Pym. No recreant yet!
The great word sent from England to my soul,
And I arose. The end is very near.

Lady Carlisle. I am to save him! All have
shrunk beside;
'T is only I am left. Heaven will make strong
The hand now as the heart. Then let both die!²⁶

When Strafford's last hope for freedom at the king's hands is gone, Lady Carlisle gives a momentary hope to the audience that there may be a way out for Strafford at the last possible moment.

Again in his treatment of climax, Browning has, as with the treatment of crisis, obscured with his never ending stiff and unnatural lines much of the drama which is inherent in the situation. That Strafford has finally been shown to have been bested and out maneuvered by Pym is an

²⁵Ibid., p. 69.

²⁶Ibid., p. 70.

acceptable selection for a climax, but the selection does not determine the dramaturgical worth of the element of crisis. It is the treatment, the dramatic handling, the dexterity with which the playwright manipulates the selection which effects dramaturgical success for his climax. Browning has been unable to do this. Only Lady Carlisle's inference that she may save him enables the climax to maintain its level of excitement to a somewhat more elevated plane than that instigated by the crisis.

The major dramatic question treated in Strafford is the question of whether or not Strafford will be able to maintain his trusted position with the king. Previous to the time when the play takes place, Strafford has been all-powerful; it has been he more than the king who has directed the decisions affecting the monarchy. Suddenly after his years of unquestionably faithful service, he finds this service, and his very veracity questioned. Browning has presented this situation, which is the heart of the drama, with more consummate dramatic craftsmanship than he has any of the other ten dramaturgical criteria. It may be true that he has sentimentalized the situation as has been noted by his contemporary critics, but in doing so he has, perhaps, succeeded in humanizing his play and bringing to it the one universal touch which it needs to gain at least a foothold in establishing dramatic support with its audience.

Strafford has been superhuman, and heretofore, his power has been in outguessing his political enemies and in outmaneuvering them by sidestepping the necessity to call a parliament. Now his position is no longer above feeling the shaking of the very throne. Strafford, obviously, has brought this change of fortune upon his own head by advising the king to call a parliament. In so doing he has revealed his vulnerability and overtly his tragic flaw. An audience cannot be won on this

kind of power alone; but by endowing Strafford with the very qualities which weaken him as a man and weaken the play as a drama, Browning has supplied a bond of empathy for the audience by which it can identify itself with Strafford and his problem. His new position has been precarious throughout the play. On all sides he is surrounded by those who are avowed enemies, by those, like the queen, whose loyalties are questionable, and by the undeniable duplicity of the king. And he has one true friend, a woman, and perhaps at least a sympathetic admirer, in Hollis.

This is a dramatic situation into which Browning has brought his protagonist. This existing situation has no little dramatic potential as a major dramatic question; yet when such ramifications as Strafford's mistakes in judgment, which are numerous, his loyalty to the king which reaches disgusting proportions, and his refusal to escape from the tower which is a complete enigma, are considered, the dramaturgical effectiveness of this requirement is greatly reduced. Although these failings in Strafford's character do not make for desired theatre, it is impossible not to admire his losing struggle for acceptance; and if this struggle is accepted by the spectator, then the major dramatic question has been undertaken in principle, with some recognizable dramatic success.

If the dramaturgical requirement of a prize be included in the play, this must be done by stretching the underlying aspects of the major dramatic question to the limit. The prize in this drama could only be the hope of Strafford to regain his former secure political position and his former position of total confidence which he has enjoyed with the king. The miscarriage of this plan is brought about by Pym and by the

entire Parliament. Strafford is thwarted, too, by the king himself. There is never an opportunity presented to recreate matters as they once were. Too many obstacles beyond the control of any of the dramatic personae have combined forces; there is no means of surmounting them to regain the prize.

Since recognition of the prize requires no greater concentration on the part of the audience to apprehend this dramaturgical criterion than must be expected in recognizing the presence of the nine other elements, then the treatment of the prize may be considered of perhaps more value as theatre than those requirements, such as, the protagonist, theme, the major dramatic question, the crisis and the climax, which are of more actual importance dramaturgically than this ninth requirement.

Browning has made suspense and even some physical action a part of Act V, which is the dénouement of the play. This final dramaturgical requirement of resolution provides an interestingly constructed conclusion. Strafford is not just shown in a farewell scene from which he is taken to the block. More falling action than this occurs, and it is a dramatic asset to the play as a whole, although there are major weaknesses present.

Lady Carlisle's plan to provide a means of escape consumes the first scene. In this scene with Hollis she still refuses to allow Strafford to learn of her love for him.

Hollis. My gentle friend,
He should know all and love you, but 't is vain!
Lady Carlisle. Love? no---too late now! Let
him love the King!
'T is the King's scheme! I have your word,
remember!
We'll keep the old delusion up.²⁷

²⁷Ibid., p. 70.

One of the previously mentioned weaknesses appears in this passage. It is mystifying, indeed, that Lady Carlisle can still persist in giving credit to the king for an escape plan when the monarch has already signed the death warrant. There is no fathoming her line of reasoning, or Browning's, unless the idea to be conveyed is that Lady Carlisle feels that Strafford will refuse any help other than that offered by the king although it seems illogical that one shred of Strafford's faith in the Charles would remain at this point so thoroughly has it been shaken. If this be Browning's intention, however, it is acceptable; and perhaps more strongly acceptable than the reversed situation involving Lady Carlisle in Scene II. For when Strafford is allowed to know that help comes from one who has faithfully loved him, a more human aspect permeates the drama at this point. Strafford's fate remains the same, but he will surely die a happier man in knowing that he has been loved so deeply. But tragically speaking, a change of this sort may here produce a greater weakness than the former approach, for allowing the realization of such a strong emotion to occur at this time is not so tragically noble as the restraint of it. It would be difficult, perhaps impossible, to ascertain which view would produce in the audience a more effective katharsis. Further consideration merely leads to an impasse, for the play remains as Browning intended it to be.

The escape plan does provide some dramatic suspense as to whether it will be a success. And Strafford remains true to character when he rejects this plan in spite of all the entreaties.

Inserted between Scene I when Lady Carlisle discusses the escape with Hollis and the final action of Scene II is a delightfully gentle scene in the tower with Strafford and his children. They sing together

a "lilt" which Browning wrote as a crooning measure. It is filled with poetic imagery and a far deeper meaning than the children realize, for as they sing they are unconsciously likening their father to the boat which sails away in the moonlight and leaves nothing behind it but a memory.

Young William gives the following translation of the Italian:

William. The boat's in the broad moonlight
all this while--
Verso la sera
Di Primavera!

And the boat shoots from underneath the moon
Into the shadowy distance; only still
you hear the dipping oar--

Verso la sera,

And faint, and fainter, and then all's quite gone,
Music and light and all, like a lost star.²⁸

The children remain unaware of the grave situation in which their father has been placed; and when Hollis arrives to advise Strafford that the king has signed his death warrant, Strafford sends the children to another room so that they are spared the shock of Hollis' message. The words of the song which symbolize Strafford's political life, drift across the conversation between Hollis and the prime minister, being made the more effective through the dramatically ironic twist of the sweet childish voices singing, what to them is but an innocent song. This small scene is handled with deftness. Strafford does not allow the children to dwell upon the serious aspects of his imprisonment. Browning avoids the heart breaking leave taking which would ensue if the children were to know of the king's order. There is included just

²⁸Ibid., p. 70.

the proper amount of delicacy and affection in this scene to set it apart from the entire play and to make it the one memorable episode.

Nowhere in the entire drama does Browning's dramatic technique come through more clearly than in this brief scene. He allows the audience to view Strafford for the man he is, and this speaks in a more eloquent manner for the statesman than the many involved passages which all but obscure the admirable purposes and qualities which he possesses.

The final scene embraces the entire cast. Lady Carlisle and Hollis are already present with the king; and when their efforts to instigate Strafford's escape from the tower fail, Pym and his supporters enter. Browning cannot accord Strafford the privilege of facing death with some privacy. He, and the audience with him, must be subjected, to the final curtain, to the presence of these men who have brought him here. Although this procedure was undoubtedly commonplace and followed with much regularity in the past, Browning only succeeds in weakening, dramatically, the conclusion, which of necessity requires all of the insight possible from the dramatist in order to bring to the audience an ending which should be the dramatic crystallization of clarity and satisfaction. But in including the entire personae, with the exception of the queen, Browning has inflicted a final distraction upon the spectator when all attention should be focused upon Pym and Strafford, and not divided with them among a milling group of no consequence.

And finally, as though he cannot bring himself to drop the curtain at the dramaturgically propitious moment, Browning must prolong the dialogue between Strafford and Pym until they weaken themselves further with each succeeding line as each forgives the other for his respective wrongs. To inflict such equivocation upon both men when in principle,

as well as in effective theatre, neither could conceivably have brought himself to go this far, Browning's concluding action deprives Pym of the stature he has attained in the drama, and leaves Strafford not a shred of dignity.

Strafford failed as a play even though the foremost actors of the day William C. Macready and Helen Faucit strove to make it a success. Its inherent weaknesses which have received no little stress far overshadow and outweigh Browning's commendable efforts to infuse drama into a vehicle which possesses more literary qualities than the dramatic requisites which are demanded by successful theatre.

It has been stressed at length that although Strafford, the man, was historically an ideal selection as the subject for a play, the established characteristics of Strafford the dramatic hero--his ennobling qualities against his tragic flaw balance each other too closely, thus producing a protagonist who is little more than mediocre; or to put it more kindly, one who lacks the overall effectiveness which a leading role should have. Neither his decisions nor their logical development are attacked with the clarity which is demanded of a protagonist. Nor are the reasons which motivate Strafford made clear enough throughout the development of the drama for the audience to apprehend them through a clearly defined line of motivation. No protagonist such as Strafford can contribute dramaturgical success to a dramatic vehicle.

Also unsuccessful dramaturgically, the theme of the drama does not have a clearly defined path by which it can be unerringly traced from the opening to the closing curtain. The consequences of politics and history demand clarity necessary for the very understanding of the play.

The exposition of the piece serves as a buttress for the entire

framework of Strafford. And just as flying buttress defines gothic architecture to the observer so does the exposition define most admirably the political architecture of the times as it is highlighted by the stained glass effects of seventeenth century history. This third requirement makes for dramaturgical effectiveness as long as the spectator is able to separate it from the nonessential details which often over-crowd and obscure the necessary explanations for furthering the plot. A definite strain is placed upon the audience by Browning's literary verbosity, yet, in a sense, it serves to augment his expository material, thereby preserving much of its dramatic value.

The point of attack, in relation to the beginning and end of the play is satisfactory enough although it too is obscured in this welter of dialogue. Its dramaturgical weakness lies in the fact that it is not initiated with any dramatic force. If it were handled in a more forceful manner, it would receive the attention and emphasis which it deserves.

The major dramatic question which is posed in Strafford's endeavor to regain his former favor with the monarchy is really quite sympathetically and admirably handled. However, this point like the foreshadowing is all an integral part of the dialogue; the major question is felt as much as stated. Each is effective when it is fully appreciated. But no time or moment of respite is provided for the audience to ferret out the meaningful lines from those which are not.

Both the crisis and the climax should attain some effectiveness in a stage presentation. Browning has led up to both with just enough dramatic power to transmit to the audience the charged atmosphere of

tension created by Strafford's surrendering his sword and in the king's agonized signing of the Bill of Attainder.

Although the handling of both of these dramaturgical requirements is not outstanding for it fails to reveal the dramatic genius which Browning reflects in the crucial points of such dramatic monologues as My Last Duchess and Andrea Del Sarto, it does atone in some measure for the lack of dramaturgy reflected in the development of the protagonist, theme, the point of attack, as well as the foreshadowing and the major dramatic question. The actuality of a prize is somewhat questionable; therefore, its weight in the composition of the whole is nebulous. But for the scene with Strafford's children, the resolution of the drama displays more weaknesses than positive qualities. The suspense furnished by the escape plot, and the momentary achievement of dramatic effect in the realization of love between Strafford and Lady Carlisle, when the tragic nobility he refuses her entreaties to go, reflect a final attempt at theatre.

Hollis. Oh, Strafford,
 She saves you! All her deed! this lady's deed!
 And is the boat in readiness....
Strafford. You love me, child? Ah, Strafford
 can be loved
 As well as Vane. I could escape then?
Lady Carlisle. Haste!
 Advance the torches, Bryan!
Strafford. I will die.
 They call me proud: but England has no right,
 When she encountered me--her strength to
 mine--
 To find the chosen foe a craven. Girl,
 I fought her to the utterance, I fell,
 I am hers now, and I will die. Beside,
 The lookers-on! Eliot is all about
 This place, with his most uncomplaining brow.
Lady Carlisle. Strafford!
Strafford. I think if you could know how much
 I love you, you would be repaid, my friend!

Lady Carlisle. Then for my sake!
Strafford. Even for your sweet sake
 I stay.²⁹

But these noble words and the suspense which, with some dramatic technique, leads up to their utterance are blotted out in the final dialogue between Pym and Strafford.

In positive favor of Strafford the exposition, the major dramatic question, the crisis and the climax contribute with some degree of success, as does the children's scene in the resolution, to the dramatic demands of the play. The remaining six elements do not contribute in any outstanding way to the drama. No amount of bolstering of these requirements could produce a successful dramatic representation. With the many blurred descriptive passages incorporated into the dialogue in such overwhelming number, Strafford's intrinsic worth and qualifications would be forever smothered, and its implicit weaknesses could never be amended to produce actable drama.

Even to actor William Macready for whom the play was written, it became clear that nothing could save the play but the acting. And on April 28, 1837, he states in his diary the difference in the methods used by Browning compared to the treatment by Shakespeare of a similar subject for stage purposes.

'In all the historical plays of Shakespeare,' he observes, 'the great poet has only introduced such events as act on the individuals concerned, and of which they are themselves a part; the persons are all in direct relation to each other, and the facts are present to the audience. But in Browning's play we have a long scene of passion--upon what? A plan destroyed, by whom or for what we know not, and a parliament dissolved, which merely seems to inconvenience Strafford in his arrangements.'³⁰

²⁹Ibid., p. 73.

³⁰Thomas R. Lounsbury, The Early Literary Career of Robert Browning, (New York, 1911), p. 50.

There could not be a more striking means of emphasizing the difference between two literary works than the comparison afforded by the large amount of reference material devoted to Strafford in contrast with the negligible information available concerning Colombe's Birthday. This is not in any way to detract from the latter play, and the heaviness attending the former serves to promulgate the comparative success of this light drama which makes no pretense of being a tragedy. And its charm ameliorates much of Browning's over-ambitious treatment of such a simple theme.

Colombe's Birthday was dedicated in March, 1844, to Barry Cornwall, who was to take the part of Valence; and again Helen Faucit undertook a role in this Browning play, much to the pleasure of the critics. The play enjoyed a successful run of two weeks and was even performed in the United States.

Although the time is the 1600's, and the setting concerns two historical cities, there are no true historical facts upon which Browning based his drama. It is merely a product of his own creativity. Therefore, no lengthy preparatory material is necessary here, as it was in Strafford, since there is no definite relationship with the past. All discussion must arise from the play itself.

The play concerns Colombe who learns on her birthday that she is not the rightful heir to the Duchy of Juliers, which she has ruled for exactly one year. Valence, who is a representative from the neighboring city of Cleves, which is also under Colombe's jurisdiction, arrives during the first act to request an audience with the duchess so that he may advise her of the poverty stricken condition of his city. The courtiers, who are present, reveal the arrival of a letter from Prince

Berthold. It advises them that he is arriving at noon to claim the duchy for himself. Their natural cupidity then comes to the forefront. Each of them, Gaucelme, Clugnet, Maufroy and Guibert, pity Colombe's position, but they are even more intrigued with the thought of advancing their loyalties to the prince. No one of them will accept the responsibility of delivering the unpleasant news to the duchess. Each passes the responsibility to the other.

Maufroy: Guibert's
right,

I hope to climb a little in the world,--
I'd push my fortunes,--but, no more than
he,

Could tell her on this happy day of days,
That, save the nosegay in her hand, perhaps,
There's nothing left to call her own. Sir

Clugnet,
You famish for promotion; what say you?

....

Gaucelme: 't is no trifle turns me sick
Of court-hypocrisy at years like mine,
But this goes near it. Where's there news at
all?

Who'll have the face, for instance, to affirm
He never heard, e'en while we crowned the
girl,

That Juliers' tenure was by Salic law;

....

Guibert. Snatching the paper from him. By
your leave!

Your zeal transports you! 'T will not serve
the Prince

So much as you expect, this course you'd take.
If she leaves quietly her palace,--well;
But if she died upon its threshold,--no:
He'd have the trouble of removing her.
Come, gentles, we're all--what the devil
knows!

You, Gaucelme, won't lose character, beside--
You broke your father's heart superiorly
To gather his succession--never blush!

....

....Call the Prince our

Duke!

There she's no Duchess, she's no anything
More than a young maid with the bluest eyes:

And now, sirs, we'll not break this young
 maid's heart
 Cooly as Gaucelme could and would! No
 haste!
 His talent's full-blown, ours but in the bud:³¹

After filling the better part of eight columns of dialogue with observations such as these, Browning introduces Valence. His forthrightness immediately impresses the assembled courtiers. And they conclude after the following speech that he should be the one to deliver Prince Bethold's message to Colombe.

Gaucelme: /To VALENCE/ My worthy sir, one
 question: You've come straight
 From Cleves, you tell us: heard you any talk
 At Cleves about our lady?
Valence. Much.
Gaucelme. And what?
Valence. Her wish was to redress all wrongs she
 knew.
Gaucelme. That you believed?
Valence. You see me, sir!
Gaucelme. Nor stopped
 Upon the road from Cleves to Juliers here,
 For any ... rumors you might find afloat?
Valence. I had my townsmen's wrongs to busy
 me.
Gaucelme. This is the lady's birthday, do you
 know?
 Her day of pleasure?
Valence. ...That the great, I know,
 For pleasure born, should still be on the watch
 To exclude pleasure when a duty offers:
 Even as, for duty born, the lowly too
 May ever snatch a pleasure if in reach:
 Both will have plenty of their birthright, sir!
Gaucelme. /Aside to GUIBERT/ Sir Guibert,
 here's your man! No scruples now____
 You'll never find his like! Time presses hard
 I've seen your drift and Adolph's too, this while.
 But you can't keep the hour of audience back
 Much longer, and at noon the Prince arrives.
/Pointing to VALENCE./ Entrust him with it____
 fool no chance away!³²

³¹Scudder, pp. 231-232.

³²Ibid., p. 234.

This suggestion is agreeable to Valence who is willing to lay the paper at the duchess' feet in order that he may be admitted to the audience chamber where Colombe is to be receiving.

In Act II Colombe and Sabyne, her maid, are introduced as they are awaiting the hour for the audiences. In this brief scene Colombe indicates that she is already aware of Prince Berthold's claims. Evidently this information has been imparted to her by Sabyne who loves Adolph, the servant who delivered Berthold's letter to the courtiers.

The courtiers and Valence then enter. As Colombe moves about greeting her subjects, Valence becomes moved by her beauty, which is just as he remembers it from her visit to Cleves the year before. He finds that he has difficulty in keeping his mind on Cleve's desperate straits. However, when it is his turn to be presented to Colombe, he is able to give her a very graphic account of the deplorable situation existing there even the year before when she visited Cleves. He becomes so eloquent that he barely remembers the paper which he was to give to her. After reading Berthold's letter, Colombe resolves to give up her claim saying:

Duchess. . . . all is best for all!
/After a pause./ Prince Berthold, who art
 Juliers' Duke it seems
 The King's choice, and the Emperor's, and the
 Pope's
 Be mine too! Take this People! Tell not me
 Of rescripts, precedents, authorities,
 But take them, from a heart that yearns to
 give!
 Find out their love,--I could not; find their
 fear,--
 I would not; find their like,--I never shall,
 Among the flowers! /Taking off her coronet.
 Colombe of Ravenstein
 Thanks God she is no longer Duchess here! ³³

³³Ibid., p. 237.

Valence not until this moment has realized what shocking information he has delivered to this lady whom he admires so greatly. Valence then attempts to strike Guibert for perpetrating this blow to the duchess through him. This brings forth an explanation to Colombe from the others for Valence's part in the situation. When this is settled, Valence then entreats Colombe to reconsider her decision to give up her crown so readily. He reassures her that she could counter the prince's claims by using the loyal men of Cleves even though the loyalty of her own court is questionable. Convinced of this unexpected support, Colombe says:

Duchess. /After a pause./ You come from Cleves:
How many are at Cleves of such a mind?

Valence. /From his paper./ 'We, all the manu-
facturers of Cleves--'

Duchess. Or stay, sir--lest I seem too cov-
etous--

Are you my subject? such as you describe,
Am I to you, though to no other man?

Valence. /From his paper./--'Valence, ordained
your Advocate at Cleves'--

Duchess. /Replacing the coronet./ Then I re-
main Cleves' Duchess! Take you note,
While Cleves but yields one subject of this stamp,
I stand her lady till she waves me off!
For her sake, all the Prince claims I withhold;
Laugh at each menace; and, his power defy-
ing,
Return his missive with its due contempt!³⁴

With new confidence, Colombe relieves all of her unctuous courtiers of their titles and offices of Marshall, Chancellor, and Chamberlain and confers all upon Valence, the one man whom she feels that she can trust. She retires, thus, leaving the courtiers suspended and undecided whether or not they should give their loyalty to Berthold. It is then announced that Prince Berthold has arrived.

³⁴Ibid., p. 238.

In Act III, Berthold talks with his retainer. Melchoir is his sole companion since the prince has quartered his entourage at Aix and has come on to Juliers alone. Berthold is a man of undeviating purpose and entertains no illusions about himself as he says to Melchior:

Our little burgh, now, Juliers--'t is indeed
 One link, however, insignificant,
 Of the great chain by which I reach my hope,
 --A link I must secure; but otherwise,
 You'd wonder I esteem it worth my grasp.
 Just see what life is with its shifts and turns!
 It happens now--this very nook--to be
 A place that once...Not a long while since,
 neither--
 When I lived an ambiguous hanger-on
 Of foreign courts, and bore my claim about,
 Discarded by one kinsman, and the other
 A poor priest merely,--then, I say, this place
 Shone my ambition's object; to be Duke--
 Seemed then, what to be Emperor seems now.
 My rights were far from judged as plain and
 sure
 In those days as of late, I promise you:
 And 't was my day-dream, Lady Colombe here
 Might e'en compound the matter, pity me,
 Be struck, say, with my chivalry and grace
 (I was a boy!)--bestow her hand at length,
 And make me Duke, in her right if not mine.
 Here am I, Duke confessed, at Juliers now.
 Hearken: if ever I be Emperor,
 Remind me what I felt and said today!³⁵

Neither does Berthold entertain any illusions regarding Colombe's spurned retainers, who coming upon the prince and Melchior then attempt to impress him by taking first his side of the question and then Colombe's. He is too astute for them, and they only succeed in appearing at their worst by comparison. When Valence and Colombe enter, Berthold then learns from them that Valence is Colombe's only representative. Berthold presents his claims to Valence that Colombe may peruse them and return them with her decision that evening.

³⁵Ibid., p. 239.

In Act IV the courtiers meet again, and in their meddling way endeavor to plan a means by which everyone may be satisfied. They have assumed that Valence and Colombe are in love. They are half correct when Valence's side is analyzed. However, he is content with worshipping the lady at a distance. They reason that if Colombe and Valence were to marry Berthold's claim to the duchy would be left free, for she would be marrying beneath her and, therefore, nullifying her claim to Juliers. They depart in search of the prince in order to advise him of their plan. As they retire Valence enters, and having thoroughly perused Prince Berthold's papers, he says:

Valence. So must it be! I have examined these
 With scarce a palpitating heart--so calm,
 Keeping her image almost wholly off,
 Setting upon myself determined watch,
 Repelling to the uttermost his claims:
 And the result is--all men would pronounce,
 And not I, only, the result to be--
 Berthold is heir; she has no shade of right
 To the distinction which divided us,
 But, suffered to rule first, I know not why,
 Her rule connived at by those Kings and Popes,
 To serve some devil's-purpose,--now 't is
 gained,
 Whate'er it was, the rule expires as well.³⁶

When Berthold enters, Valence advises him that the request is granted, but Berthold has now another offer to tender--one of marriage. He "offers to marry Colombe, not because he loves her, but as a good piece of policy."³⁷ It is almost impossible for Valence to apprehend this new development, for he has loved Colombe himself with no hope of winning her. Yet the thought that someone else might have her is inconceivable. To make matters even worse, he must present Berthold's

³⁶Ibid., p. 243.

³⁷Brooke, p. 235.

suit to his duchess. She is not disposed to accept the offer. And she is not at all inclined to do so when she learns that the prince does not love her. But while Valence eloquently explains to her the differences between true love and Berthold's political desire to marry her, Colombe misunderstands. Not realizing it is Valence's own love for her that forces him to speak as he does, she thinks that he loves another.

Duchess....

But why is it not love, sir? Answer me!

Valence. Because not one of Berthold's words
and looks

Had gone with love's presentment of a flower
To the beloved: because bold confidence,
Open superiority, free pride--
Love owns not, yet were all that Berthold
owned:

Because where reason, even, finds no flaw,
Unerringly a lover's instinct may.

Duchess. You reason, then, and doubt?

Valence. I love, and know.

Duchess. You love? How strange! I never
cast a thought

On that! Just see our selfishness! You seemed
So much my own....I had no ground--and
yet,

I never dreamed another might divide
My power with you, much less exceed it.³⁸

Even when Valence pursues the subject and tries to reassure her, she does not believe him and only attributes his fervent declarations to loyalty. After she dismisses him so that she may prepare an answer to Berthold's suit, Colombe expresses a desire to see Berthold again.

In Act V when Berthold and Colombe meet in the hall for her decision she learns for herself that he is not marrying her for love, that he has no interest in her personally.

The meddling courtiers repeat their discovery regarding Colombe's forfeiting the duchy to the heir next in line if she were to marry

³⁸ Scudder, p. 245.

beneath her. Berthold sends for Valence; and Berthold, through Melchior, advises Valence that if he were to request Colombe's hand, Berthold would not only withdraw his suit, but Colombe would also be forced to accept Valence's suit. Valence, however, turns the offer aside in order to permit Colombe to make a choice. Colombe, through Berthold's generosity, since it is her birthday, affords Valence a request for anything he might wish, and Valence requests that Prince Berthold redress the wrongs of Cleves. The Prince agrees. Then Colombe orders Valence to read what answer she has registered on her paper:

Valence reads it.
I take him--give up Juliers and the world.
This is my Birthday.³⁹

Berthold congratulates the two lovers. He is satisfied with gaining his duchy, and Colombe satisfied in "refusing the splendid alliance, leaves the court a private person, with love and her lover. This slight thing is spun out into five acts by Browning's metaphysics of love and friendship."⁴⁰ And it is to this representation that the dramaturgical criticism shall be applied.

The protagonist is, of course, Colombe, since it is her decisions, that so determine the action of the play. However, in examining this initial dramaturgical requirement it seems that Valence should also be mentioned, for his council and personal feelings exert a profound influence on Colombe and ultimately affect the conclusion of the drama. As the heroine and central character of the play, she appears at first to be a rather weak protagonist. Perhaps this impression arises from the fact that she is a gentle and genuinely kind woman. The French meaning

³⁹Ibid., p. 250.

⁴⁰Brooke, p. 235.

of her name is pigeon, or dove. It can only be assumed that Browning chose her name because it suited precisely the characteristics with which he endowed her. Her treatment of her lady-in-waiting serves amply to reveal with dramatic feeling her true personality, and in dealing with this subordinate, Colombe accords her the same gentle consideration which she shows to Prince Berthold.

Duchess. Stay, Sabyne; let me hasten to make
sure

Of one true thanker: here with you begins
My audience, claim you first its privilege!
It is my birth's event they celebrate:
You need not wish me more such happy days,
But--ask some favor! Have you none to ask?
Has Adolph none, then? this was far from least
Of much I waited for impatiently,
Assure yourself! It seemed so natural
Your gift, beside this bunch of river-bells,
Should be the power and leave of doing good
To you, and greater pleasure to myself.
You ask my leave today to marry Adolf?
The rest is my concern.⁴¹

She has remained completely unsullied and humble during her year of rule. And when she first reads Berthold's claim, her gentle nature arises to meet the situation, and she deals with it in the only way that she is able. Her first concern is for her subjects, not for herself:

The Duchess reads hastily; then turning to the Court-
tiers--

What have I done to you? Your deed or mine
Was it, this crowning me? I gave myself
No more a title to your homage, no,
Than church-flowers, born this season, wrote
the words
In the saint's-book that sanctified them first.
For such a flower, you plucked me; well, you
erred--
Well, 't was a weed; remove the eye-sore
quick!⁴²

⁴¹Scudder, p. 235.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 236-237.

If Colombe were to have been left to make her own decision, she would have accepted Berthold's letter, for to oppose his claims would have been completely unthought of. Her coronet would have been removed by her own hand in Act II as has been mentioned, and that action would have terminated the situation. But with Valence present and with his sincere and convincing stand in her behalf, she reconsiders and resolves to retain her position. A passive nature such as she reveals must have direction, and she is fortunate that, from the outset, Valence is motivated by honorable intentions. When in the audience chamber after witnessing Colombe's acceptance of the prince's claims, Valence realizes that he has been used shamefully by the courtiers, and he wishes to atone for this and makes his feelings in the matter unquestionable clear to the duchess:

Valence. Advancing to GUIBERT.⁷ Sir Guibert,
 knight they call you--this of mine
 Is the first step I ever set at court.
 You dared make me your instrument, I find;
 For that, so sure as you and I are men,
 We reckon to the utmost presently:

--I am degraded--you let me address!
 Out of her presence, all is plain enough
 What I shall do--but in her presence, too,
 Surely there's something proper to be done.⁴³

Even in accepting the apology which Valence tenders and awarding Valence the position of advisor to her, there is really very little Colombe could do to contest Prince Berthold's claims to her duchy. In actuality her position would be most precarious if a stand were to be made with only two small cities for support against such formidable strength as Prince Berthold evinces. And although the ultimate decision

⁴³Ibid., p. 237.

for a course of action remains solely hers, Colombe remains content to let events take their own course.

Berthold affords a great contrast in comparison with Colombe and Valence. The latter two are idealists of introspective nature. Berthold is an opportunist and a man of action. His speech is vigorous, and with each speech the audience is made fully aware that he has not spent his life, heretofore, in vague daydreams. Yet each of the three is possessed of admirable integrity. And each reflects it in his own manner. The dramatic treatment of these three makes for a really effective bit of theatre.

Colombe has already been shown in her unselfish relationship with her subjects. She has also made it evident that she is able to carry out the strength of her convictions, for she does not hesitate an instant in relieving her courtiers of their badge's of office when she realizes that their loyalties are questionable. As another facet of her character, Browning has endowed the duchess with an objective concern for others which reaches its highest level in the amicable relationship she maintains with Berthold, but at the same time she shows that she is not completely gullible and humorless as the audience might be inclined to believe. In the few lines that follow, Colombe speaks with an archness flavored with facetious overtones that lends, for a moment, a flattering spark of vigor and cleverness to this otherwise placid personality. In referring to Berthold's suit, Valence and the duchess speak:

<u>Valence.</u>	Duke--
Emperor to be: he proffers you his hand.	
<u>Duchess.</u>	Generous and princely!
<u>Valence.</u>	He is all of this.
<u>Duchess.</u>	Thanks, Berthold, for my father's
sake. No hand	
Degrades me! ⁴⁴	

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 245.

And finally, as if Browning were loathe to stop piling virtues upon her, he imbues her with a complete honesty which enables her to reproach herself to Valence. This occurs in the conversation previously treated in which she feels that she has taken advantage of her advisor's love for his unknown lady through the demands she has made upon him.

Valence has also been shown to possess great personal honesty, as well as a wholly unselfish love for Colombe. When Berthold offers his suit to Colombe through Valence, the minister presents the offer to her in an admirable and impersonal manner despite the dread of Colombe's acceptance which is indicated in the following speech:

Valence. [After a pause.] The heavens and
Earth stay just as they were; my heart
Beats as it beat; the truth remains the truth.
What falls away, then if not faith in her?
Was it my faith, that she could estimate
Love's value, and, such faith still guiding me,
Dare I now test her? Or grew faith so strong
Solely because no power of test was mine?⁴⁵

With the same fairness shown the other two Browning has not slighted Berthold but has given the prince an opportunity to reveal his faults and his virtues. Berthold is capable of following only one course of action, that which only the dictates of his own particular conscience will permit, just as Valence and Colombe pursue another course. Berthold entertains no false conceptions of himself; and according to his conversation with Melchoir in Act III, he can remember quite well that his desires were simple in the beginning as compared with the aspirations for which he has developed a taste more recently. His conversation with Valence in Act IV is so candid as to be brusque during the discussion of his marriage proposal to Colombe.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 244.

Berthold: I offer her my hand.

Valence. Your hand?

Berthold. A Duke's, yourself say; and, at no
far time,

Something here whispers me--an Emperor's.
The lady's mind is noble: which induced:
This seizure of occasion: ere my claims
Were-settled, let us amicably say!

Valence. Your hand!

....

I am to say, you love her?

Berthold. Say that too!

Love has no great concernment, thinks the
world,

With a Duke's marriage....

....

Say I have been arrested suddenly
In my ambition's, its rocky course,
By this sweet flower: I fain would gather it
And then proceed; so say and speedily

....

Enough, sir: you possess my mind, I think.

This is my claim, the others being withdrawn,
And to this be it that, i' the Hall to-night,

Your lady's answer comes; till, when, farewell!
He retires⁴⁶

Some defence of Berthold's abrupt manner should be proffered, for he is, after all, speaking with a subordinate, an emissary of sorts, over whom he has the advantage of all things material. One in this more elevated position does not really owe an explanation for his actions or decisions to anyone, perhaps, and most assuredly not to anyone because of a casual association. However he is honest. He admits that a marriage to Colombe is not a love match and never could be, for he is interested only in an alliance, politically expedient, which will conveniently afford a beautiful and intelligent wife. His frankness is surpassed only by his fairness in admitting these very convictions to her.

Duchess. You love me, then?

Berthold. Your lineage I revere,
Honor your virtue, in your truth believe,
Do homage to your intellect, and bow

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 244.

Before your peerless beauty.

Duchess. But, for love,---

Berthold. A further love I do not understand.
Our best course is to say these hideous truths,
And see them, once said, grow endurable:

Duchess. You cannot love, then?

Berthold. --Charlemagne, perhaps!
Are you not over-curious in love-lore?⁴⁷

And when Colombe refuses his proposal and chooses Valence with only his love to offer her, Berthold accepts the decision without rancor, saying:

Berthold. After a pause. Lady, well rewarded!

Sir, as well deserved!

I could not imitate--I hardly envy--
I do admire you. All is for the best.
Too costly a flower were this, I see it now,
To pluck and set upon my barren helm
To wither--any garish plume will do.⁴⁸

Thus, as a protagonist, supported by Valence and Berthold, Colombe is both charming and admirable. In any other situation more serious than this one in which she is involved, her limitations would be her undoing. Her world has had limited scope, and thus her own scope of character is limited as are those of Valence and Berthold. These limitations are those which Browning imposes upon all of his characters. This is not a play of action, but an interplay of character. And in giving a clear view of her character, as well as those of Valence, Berthold, and all of the retainers, Browning just does succeed in making his point. However, even though they are sufficiently developed, these characters sustain a play of this comparatively short length with difficulty.

The very ease with which the investigation of the first requirement unfolds itself is a valid indication of the effectiveness with

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 248.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 250.

which Colombe, as the protagonist, as well as Valence and Berthold, has been created. The motivation of the two men may be seen with unmitigated clarity throughout the drama. Colombe's line of motivation is not so clear, but this may be, in part, explained by her passive and malleable nature. This facet of her character is evident enough to permit an audience to appreciate her for the gentle person she is shown to be without the imposition of the frantic straining necessary in Strafford lest an important point be overlooked. The spectator is actually accorded some enjoyment and relaxation in experiencing this drama.

This does not, however, erase a certain awareness in the spectator that as a protagonist Colombe has not been permitted by the playwright to realize the specifications set forth in establishing the necessary requirements for a wholly successful protagonist.

There are no subsidiary plots working in counterpoint with the central theme of the piece. This second dramaturgical requirement is actually a restatement of the cliché, virtue is rewarded. Before the reward can take place, the validity of Colombe's claims to the Duchy of Juliers and Cleves against those of Prince Berthold must be decided. The theme is dramaturgically weak, not because virtue rewarded is trite, for even today it can be refreshing to know this can still happen. Perhaps if there were actually a subplot, rather than just the petty intriguing carried on by the members of the court, the flimsiness of the theme could be given some dramatic body. Yet, it seems difficult to imagine any type of secondary action, other than, perhaps, a plot launching an intrigue in which an attempt is made to attain the duchy for a third part. Action of this type would probably fit smoothly into the central theme. Viewing the theme as it is, however, the audience

would feel the lack of a meaningful reason for its existence. This lack would undoubtedly weaken its value as theatre.

There is little left to be explained or anticipated concerning the general action of the drama after the first forty or fifty lines are exchanged among the seven courtiers. This third dramaturgical requirement of exposition has been shown to reveal the arrival of a letter for Prince Berthold stating his claim to the duchy over which Colombe has ruled for exactly one year. It is obvious then, that her birthday anniversary will be affected by the letter. Although the exposition is initiated at the moment that the play is launched, it seems to require an unnecessary number of lines with which to inform the audience of what it may expect, and the remainder of the first act, excluding the arrival of Valence and the explanation of his presence, is comprised of many more unnecessary lines. A group of unimportant characters, however, such as the members of the duchess' retinue, are ideal instruments through which the exposition may work to advise the audience of what it may expect.

In this particular play this group of court officials is delineated as to character with as much care as Browning has devoted to his three principal characters. The effort on the part of the dramatist is wasted, for none of these players serves any important purpose. The only real purpose they do serve is to carry out the exposition of the drama. It seems a regrettable waste of valuable energy to develop such minor characters as these to no avail whatsoever.

In a play, such as this, the plot may be assumed to be unfamiliar to the audience in general; therefore, some exposition must be necessary. But too much lengthy and tedious exposition among too many unnecessary, unimportant characters is a definite fault in the dramatic structure of

the play. The exposition in the first act is extended to such length that it could be said to overlap into a foreshadowing of the outcome. This is a serious dramaturgical flaw, and in its being carried this far, the exposition deprives the audience, to a large degree, of what little suspense is present: and at the same time it is left somewhat impatiently waiting for the development of this partially revealed line of action. This is effective use of exposition, but it is thoroughly overshadowed overuse of the requirement.

The cadence of the play, as has been previously stated, is rather slow at the beginning, hence the dramaturgical point of attack is approached much too haltingly. Once the point of attack is reached the action still continues to drag until the close of Act I. In an analysis of the play in its entirety the point of attack will be found to occur at the moment Valence is selected to present the letter to Colombe. However, to an audience viewing the play for the first time, there may still be some doubt as to when the precise moment is reached which will indicate to the spectator that events are finally underway and moving in a definite direction toward the final curtain, so obscured are the meaningful lines among the superfluous phrases. Granted that almost without exception a play will move along much more rapidly in actual performance than it should for even the most imaginative and wholly receptive reader, this introductory passage is much too slow for audience and reader alike in building up to the point of attack. And this is a definite flaw in the dramaturgical structure of the play.

There is a foreshadowing of events running throughout the play. The initial use of this fifth dramaturgical device is the indication of Valence's importance in the drama as found in Act I. Here he is seeking

an audience as a representative of the city of Cleves with the duchess whom he has admired since he first saw her a year ago. He obtains the audience under circumstances different from those which he had anticipated because of the cowardly attitudes of Colombe's ministers. The dialogue concerning this situation has been included in the foregoing resumé of the drama. The favorable attention and consideration showered upon Valence at such an early point in the play indicates that his presence will be a matter of consequence as the action progresses. This is an effective use of this requirement.

In Act IV the courtiers prove that their perceptive abilities enable them to foretell the outcome of the play for the audience. They are already convinced that Colombe loves her new minister. This heightens the interest of the audience, and this is good treatment as theatre.

Maufroy. Now, then, that we may speak--
how spring this mine?
Gaucelme. Is Guibert ready for its match? He
cools!
Not so friend Valence with the Duchess there!
'Stay Valence! Are not you my better
self?'
And her cheek mantled---
Guibert. Well, she loves him, sir:
And more,---since you will have it I grow
cool.---
She's right: he's worth it.
Gaucelme. For his deeds to-day?
Say so!⁴⁹

Again the presence of foreshadowing in the scene in Act IV is evidenced to the audience in the divergent views on love held by Berthold and Valence. The comparison between the two opinions could hardly fail to be of significance; for in view of the sensitive woman Colombe has been established to be, her heart could hardly be expected to be won by

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 242-243.

a man to whom love and intangible sentiments mean nothing. It is not difficult to perceive that Valence and Colombe have expressed a similar philosophy regarding this emotion, which actually seems to pervade the play and to suggest that the foreshadowing of love is the keynote of the entire drama. Thus there is positive evidence of the strong dramaturgical employment of foreshadowing.

The crisis is constituted with Berthold's arrival to advance his claim. The anticipation of this dramaturgical point is attained by the events treated in Act II. This is brought about gradually first through Colombe's original acceptance of the claims stated in Berthold's letter, then of her rejecting them with Valence's support. This latter step is shown to be brave, perhaps, but foolish; and finally it is seen to be futile when the authenticity of Berthold's claims is made known to Valence. And he acts in Colombe's behalf in acceding to the prince's claims. As it can be seen from the following dialogue, the crisis which is culminated in the marriage proposal is a blow to Valence.

Berthold....You have not been instructed, sure,
To forestall my request?

Valence. 'T is granted, sir!
My heart instructs me. I have scrutinized
Your claims....

Berthold. Ah---claims, you mean, at first pre-
ferred?

I come, before the hour appointed me,
To pray you let those claims at present rest,
In favor of a new and stronger one.

Valence. You shall not need a stronger: on the
part

O' the lady, all you offer I accept
Since one clear right suffices; yours is clear.
Propose!

Berthold. I offer her my hand.

Valence. Your hand?⁵⁰

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 244.

The remaining lines concerning this situation have been previously discussed in relation to the overall development of the action. The foregoing selection is sufficient, however, to convey the impact that this new proposal makes. All that the audience and Valence have been led to expect has been the settlement of the fate of the duchy. The settlement of Colombe's fate is another matter. And this proposal is presented with skillful dramatic force as Browning arranges that Valence be the one to receive the proposal first. This is a splendid dramatic opportunity to set forth the diversity of character displayed in these two men, and Browning makes the most of it. Each desires Colombe; and, because of the line of thinking and limitations which have been imposed upon each, neither would ever be capable of apprehending the reasons of the other. In this way the man of action and the man of thought, although not developed to any great scope, are effectively highlighted one against the other. As the result of this use of theatre, the crisis fulfills the dramaturgical requirements established for it.

The climax occurs toward the end of Act V with Colombe's refusal to marry Berthold and her request to marry Valence. For Colombe to have chosen Berthold would have been a complete reversal of her entire nature. Hence, the climax could furnish little excitement or surprise to the spectator. Yet this final scene is handled with charm, and the realization that this man who has so wisely and lovingly served her without hope of reward, provides reward enough for the relinquishing of one duchy, and perhaps the throne of an empress. And it provides, as well, an adequate qualification for the seventh dramaturgical element.

That the major dramatic question is solved in the climax is obviously the ideal treatment for this point. The question of whether Valence will

win Colombe is not a weighty one on the scale of great drama, but it is of sufficient importance to sustain a play of the light fabric which constitutes Colombe's Birthday. The play, as a whole, is not a weighty matter even though the dramatic question is, of necessity, important to the characters involved, and it is properly handled in finding itself resolved along with the problem posed by the climax. Colombe rejects Berthold, and Valence's problem is solved. In providing these tightly knit and interrelated events, Browning has effected good theatre and has, at the same time, fulfilled the dramaturgical demands of the major dramatic question, both, of which, provide a more than satisfying twist to the drama.

The fact that a prize exists is a dramaturgical point in the favor of the play. It is almost synonymous with the major dramatic question. Colombe is the prize which Valence desires but which he has little hope of winning because of the fact that she is a duchess. As the ruler of his own city of Cleves, as well as Juliers, she is therefore of nobler birth and higher station than he; and although she admires his council and judgement, she seems oblivious of his love for her. During their conversation in Act IV she remains convinced that Valence is referring to someone else when he says:

<u>Valence</u> .	She I love
Suspects not such a love in me.	
<u>Duchess</u> .	You jest.
<u>Valence</u> .	The lady is above me and away.
Not only the brave form, and the bright mind,	
And the great heart, combine to press me low--	
But all the world calls rank divides us. ⁵¹	

This element becomes even more dramatically effective in producing sustained interest when finally an antagonist in the person of Berthold

⁵¹Ibid., p. 246.

appears and offers to marry her thus assuring her of wealth and even higher position. And in Act V while speaking with Melchior, Valence almost loses what small amount of hope he has of winning the duchess.

Melchior. ...You have heard
His offer to your lady?
Valence. Yes.
Melchior. --Conceive
Her joy thereat?
Valence. I cannot.
Melchior. No one can.
All draws to a conclusion, therefore.
Valence /Aside. So!
No after-judgement--no first thought revised--
Her first and last decision! --me, she leaves,
Takes him; a simple heart is flung aside,
The ermine o'er a heartless breast embraced.
Oh Heaven, this mockery has been played too
oft!⁵²

This appears to make his cause more hopeless than ever. But almost immediately his hopes are sent soaring when Melchior, who having worked with Berthold on the suggestion of the courtiers that Colombe will be forced to forfeit any claim to her throne if she marries beneath her, assures him that there is hope.

Melchior. Well, on this point, what but an absurd
rumor
Arises--these, its source--its subject, you!
Your faith and loyalty misconstruing,
They say, your service claims the lady's hand!
Of course, nor Prince nor lady can respond:
Yet something must be said; for, were it true
You made such claim, the Prince would.--
Valence. Well, sir,--would?
Melchior.--Not only probably withdraw his suit,
But, very like, the lady might be forced
Accept your own.⁵³

The climax then gives Valence the prize he seeks and sweeps aside Berthold's offer of marriage, as well as the dissimilarity of background which he considers an insurmountable difference. The inclusion of the

⁵²Ibid., p. 249.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 249-250.

prize strengthens the work dramatically, for it adds an element of suspense which continues until the climax is reached. At which point there is no longer any doubt as to whether the prize may be attained. That these two dramaturgical requirements are solved simultaneously provides added dramatic force to the anticipation which the audience has experienced in creditable handling by the dramatist.

The resolution occurs in the play immediately after the climax. In this final dramaturgical point there is so little falling action or dénouement that the treatment of the closing lines still remains too closely allied with the climax. Perhaps in such a simple plot as is represented in Colombe's Birthday a lengthy resolution would greatly detract from the desired effect of the ending. Certainly in this drama there are enough superfluous introductory lines prior to the point of attack to compensate for the omission of an elaborate dénouement. The resolution of the play is the most satisfactory and certainly the most pleasing kind for the viewer or reader. The entire vehicle is of such light weight that this resulting resolution is not sufficiently meaningful. Although there has been no promise or indication on Browning's part that the drama is intended to serve some meaningful purpose, the audience might well be justified in wishing that he might have applied his talents toward enlarging the play as a whole. Yet there are pleasing aspects in accepting the drama as it is.

Colombe's Birthday is the only one of Browning's closet dramas which ends happily. For the resolution to be otherwise, a weakening of the play would result; for somehow, although a somewhat serious question has been posed for resolution, the audience could hardly be expected to think of the play's terminating in a true tragic ending.

There is a lyrical quality permeating the play which evokes in the spectator the feeling that this chance meeting must be fulfilled happily. No other solution seems dramaturgically or logically acceptable. The treatment of this final requirement should receive no little praise for the handling it has received.

The play "has been represented in America as well as in England, and its skillful characterisation of Valence, Colombe, and Berthold has won deserved praise;"⁵⁴ and well they should. For the protagonist, her minister, and her cousin reflect the artistry with which Browning is capable of drawing the characters of many of his dramatic monologues, as well as those in The Ring and the Book. But as the leading character in this drama, Colombe only in part qualifies dramaturgically as the protagonist. Her characterization, however convincing and praiseworthy it may be, does not go far enough. Her lack of determination and inability to make decisions not only weaken her as the ruler of a duchy, but also and more importantly, weaken her qualifications as a protagonist. Her mildness and benovolent nature do not wholly compensate for her inability to direct the line of action throughout the play without assistance. As a result the initial dramaturgical requirement is not set forth with the necessary qualifications for total success. Only partial credit may be given for this attempt, but this should not be undervalued.

The theme although singular is suitable for this piece, and in view of its simplicity it is better for not embracing any subsidiary ideas. In spite of this it did not hold the stage. To summarize a contemporary,

⁵⁴Brooke, p. 235.

the subject is too thin.... There is but little action, or pressure of the characters into one another. The intriguing courtiers are dull, and their talk is not knit together. The only thing alive in them is their universal meanness. That meanness, it is true, enhances the magnanimity of Valence and Berthold, but its dead level in so many commonplace persons lowers the dramatic interest of the piece.⁵⁵

The way in which the exposition is handled in the play makes it the least satisfactory of any of the ten dramaturgical points represented. It devotes much more space to setting the stage and preparing the audience for what is to follow than it has any conceivable right to do. Consequently, the poor beginning thrusts a handicap upon Colombe's Birthday which it and its audience must struggle to overcome if the positive treatment of the other aspects of the play may be appreciated.

Little remains to be stated regarding the point of attack, the crisis, the climax, the major dramatic question, the prize and the resolution. Like the theme, they suffice only for the demands made upon them although each has been shown, with the exception of the resolution, to contain effective selections of dialogue through which the character motivations have received excellent dramatic treatment, and each can be appreciated for the lesser dramatic contributions made to the whole.

The foreshadowing is somewhat over-emphasized throughout the play. Browning should have employed some means of curtailing too much preparation for what is to follow. If the foreshadowing were to have been restricted to inclusion in only Acts I and II, more suspense would have remained to tempt the audience. This would assuredly support a greater span of interest in the play as a whole.

The point of attack suffers greatly because of its being imbedded in the exposition. The painfully slow process by which it is approached

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 235-236.

leaves its contribution as a dramaturgical element somewhat negligible as is the treatment of the foreshadowing. The exposition remains the most unfortunately treated of the ten elements.

The single element which can be elevated to the position of intrinsic value as a dramatic contribution is that of the protagonist--in fairness Colombe cannot be mentioned without also placing Valence and Berthold beside her, and in spite of the weaknesses of the protagonist the characterization of the three is of lasting merit.

In view of the basic dramaturgical weaknesses, the effect of Colombe's Birthday on a modern audience, even with skillful acting, would not be much more successful than that of its first performance.

Perhaps the ultimate reason for its failure can best be stated by one of Browning's contemporary critics. Stopford Brooke says of Colombe's Birthday that

Its real action takes place in the hearts of Valence and Colombe, not in the world of human life; and what takes place in their hearts is at times so quaintly metaphysical, so curiously apart from the simplicities of human love....that it makes the play unfit for public representation but all the more interesting for private reading.⁵⁶

Mr. Brooke's statement become even more clearly understood when he adds

but even in the quiet of our room, we ask why Browning put his subject into a form which did not fit it; why he overloaded the story of two souls with a host of characters who have no vital relation to it, and having none, are extremely wearisome? It might have been far more successfully done in the form of In A Balcony, which Browning himself does not class as a drama.⁵⁷

Browning has filled the three acts of A Blot in the Scutcheon with a surprising amount of intrigue and physical action. Written in 1843,

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 236.

⁵⁷Ibid.

this play brought about a falling-out between Browning and actor William Macready at whose request the work was written. The circumstances which brought about the severance of their relationship and the eventual failure of the play, in spite of its successful opening, have been so entangled in fact and fabrication that the exact details may never really be known. It is doubtful whether Macready did open in the play as Lord Tresham, as was originally intended; but it is known that Helen Faucit did play the role of Mildred Tresham with great success. The knowledge that misunderstandings regarding the production did occur serves to provide an interesting backdrop for the play as it is presented for investigation.

During the 1700's, the time in which the play takes place, all of the action centers either in Lord Tresham's mansion or in the park surrounding it. In the first scene a number of Lord Tresham's retainers are crowding around the windows of a lodge from which they can observe the arrival of young Henry, Earl Mertoun, who has come to ask for the hand of Mildred, sister of Thorold, Earl Tresham. The running comments of the retainers on the appearance of Mertoun and his company as they arrive, and then of Lord Tresham, set the scene well for the feudal life found on such estates as this, a setting which makes credible an action which would be improbable at a later period. Its prevailing atmosphere is that of the waning feudal system.

In Scene II of the first act Lord Tresham entertains Henry Mertoun in the presence of the former's cousin Guendolen and his brother, Austin Tresham, who is Lady Guendolen's betrothed. Mildred Tresham the young lady whose hand is being sought is not present during this interview which evolves smoothly and to the advantage of Earl Mertoun. The young

Austin and Lady Guendolen remain inobtrusive during this conversation. She, particularly, is shown to be a keen observer with an exact sense of timing and sense of humor. She calls Austin's attention to Mertoun's discomfort; and the young suitor's flushed face during the conversation is observed by Austin.

Guendolen. /Apart to AUSTIN/ Why, this is
 loving, Austin!
Austin. He's so young!
Guendolen. Young? Old enough, I think, to half
 surmise
 He never had obtained an entrance here,
 Were all this fear and trembling needed.
Austin. Hush!
 He reddens.
Guendolen. Mark him, Austin; that's true love!
 Ours must begin again.⁶⁰

After Mertoun takes his leave of the three, knowing that he will be informed by messengers of Mildred's disposition, Guendolen retires to Mildred's chamber where Scene III takes place. With much dry humor, Guendolen relates the ready acceptance which Henry Mertoun has received from Lord Tresham. Mildred is shown to be gentle and withdrawn in comparison with the more observant and outspoken Guendolen.

The audience is soon made aware at this point that Mildred has no inclination to talk. She reminds Guendolen that it is midnight and proceeds to suggest tactfully that she would like to be alone. Her cousin is oblivious of Mildred's anxiety to have her gone, so engrossed is she in commenting upon Thorold Tresham's great pride in his impeccable family tree that she is unaware of the obvious suggestions for her leaving.

It is immediately apparent to the spectator that a very important element in the play is revealing itself, for after placing a lamp in the

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 218.

window in front of a certain purple pane of glass, Mildred begins to speak of Mertoun. The window opens immediately and Mertoun enters. At least some of his hesitancy and embarrassment in talking with Thorold Tresham is explained as is Mildred's eagerness to be rid of Guendolen. This is a peculiar development in the play. True, it adds an element of surprise, but in addition to this it should plant, for the following reasons, a question in the mind of the audience as to why from either a dramatic or a literary standpoint this lover should conceivably be Mertoun, who is acceptable in every respect.

To begin at the beginning, the plot itself of this play, dealing, as it does, with modern feelings and conventions, is something more than incredible. It outrages all conceptions of the probable, not to say the possible. Events that are represented as occurring have undoubtedly occurred and perhaps often; but they have never occurred under the conditions given here. There is absolute incongruity between the characters of the persons portrayed and their acts. This comes out clearly the moment we detach ourselves from the play considered as literature, and contemplate it as a picture of human life. Take the very initial conception. Mildred, Lord Tresham's sister, a young and beautiful girl, has been concerned in a criminal intrigue with the young earl of Mertoun. They are intending to condone their guilt by marriage. At the very outset we have two persons depicted as possessed of the loftiest character and animated by the noblest feelings, furthermore desperately in love with each other, acting in a way that could never have happened in real life, had they been such as they are represented to be. There has been and there is nothing to prevent their union. They both belong to the same station in life. No difference exists between their families. There is no disparity of age. The alliance is not only a natural one, but suitable from every point of view besides that of mutual love. There is no reason why the hero should not from the outset have wooed the heroine in the way of honorable marriage as he is represented as doing at the time the play opens.⁶¹

Browning must have had only one conceivable reason for combining such incongruity of character with action, and this was the simple fact that the rest of the play could not have been written with the intended ending if this situation were not created. For the present, at least,

⁶¹Lounsbury, pp. 132-133.

the audience can excuse this unlikely occurrence because it does create an insatiable anticipation of what will develop as a result of these clandestine meetings.

Before the scene comes to a close the lovers still must encounter difficulty in bringing the acceptance of the proposal to a seemingly simple fruition. Mildred confesses that she cannot bring herself to face her brother with her acceptance. Her loss of innocence and maidenly virtue which have evidently never troubled her previously are of the utmost concern when at last an honorable solution to the affair is within her grasp.

Mildred. ...I'll not affect a grace
That's gone from me--gone once, and gone
forever!

Mertoun. Mildred, my honor is your own. I'll
share
Disgrace I cannot suffer by myself
A word informs your brother I retract
This morning's offer; time will yet bring forth
Some better way of saving both of us.

Mildred. I'll meet their faces, Henry!

Mertoun. When? to-morrow!
Get done with it!

Mildred. Oh, Henry, not to-morrow!
Next day! I never shall prepare my words
And looks and gestures sooner.--How you
must
Despise me!

Mertoun. Mildred, break it if you choose,
A heart the love of you uplifted--still
Uplifts, through this protracted agony,
To heaven!⁶²

Henry is able to allay her worried recriminations and to placate her uncertainties with some of the most appealing protestations of love and devotion found anywhere in Browning's poetry. He says:

⁶²Scudder, p. 221.

Tresham's warrener and most trusted retainer. To his master the servant reveals, in the privacy of the library, that he has observed at least twenty times a man in a slouched hat and long foreign cloak climb the great yew tree and wait for the signal of the changing of a lamp from the red pane to the blue. When this happens, he then enters Mildred's casement by means of a line thrown from the tree.

Thorold Tresham is understandably shocked and disbelieving even after hearing such damning evidence. When Tresham wonders who might desire to wrong his sister, Gerard hastens to reveal the heartbreaking quandry to which he has been subjected. His speech creates an authenticity and reality in this scene that is not found to any greater extent elsewhere in the play. The account of this faithful man touches a universal chord in the audience and sweeps aside momentarily the incongruities and impossibilities inherent in the drama because he is an ordinary man motivated by and torn by intense loyalty. This, if it were skillfully handled should be a very dramatic scene on the stage.

Gerard. Oh, my lord, only once--let me this
 once
 Speak what is on my mind! Since first I noted
 All this, I've groaned as if a fiery net
 Plucked me this way and that--fire if I turned
 To her, fire if I turned to you, and fire
 If down I flung myself and strove to die.
 The lady could not have been seven years old
 When I was trusted to conduct her safe
 Through the deer-herd to stroke the snow-white
 fawn
 I brought to eat bread from her tiny hand
 Within a month. She ever had a smile
 To greet me with--she...if it could undo
 What's done, to lop each limb from off this
 trunk...
 All that is foolish talk, not fit for you--
 I mean, I could not speak and bring her hurt
 For Heaven's compelling. But when I was
 fixed
 To hold my peace, each morsel of your food

Eaten beneath your roof, my birth-place too,
 Choked me. I wish I had grown mad in doubts
 What it behoved me do. This morn it seemed
 Either I must confess to you, or die:
 Now it is done, I seem the vilest worm
 That crawls, to have betrayed my lady!

...
Tresham. Gerard,--I will not say
 No word, no breath of this!
Gerard. Thanks, thanks, my lord! (Goes.⁶⁴)

Tresham's entire world is shaken to its foundation, and he sinks into a chair in an endeavor to collect his thoughts and to decide upon a course of action. Here Guendolen finds him, and through her perceptiveness she knows something is amiss although Thorold attempts to convince her otherwise. She is intuitive enough to realize that nothing but that which would concern family honor could so shake his composure although he attempts a jest.

Guendolen. ..Thorold,
 What is all this? You are not well!
Tresham. Who, I?
 You laugh at me.
Guendolen. Has what I'm fain to hope,
 Arrived then? Does that huge tome show some
 blot
 In the Earl's 'scutcheon come no longer back
 Than Arthur's time?⁶⁵

He demands so abruptly that she send Mildred to him that she again remarks that only some blot on the "scutcheon" could bring him to such unexpected actions. As Guendolen leaves to bring Mildred, Tresham advises her to wait with Austin in the adjoining gallery.

When Mildred appears, her brother cannot bring himself to state the difficulty. He can only speak of his deep, unselfish love for her, which is the finest of tributes to her. At last he knows that he must ask her

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 222-223.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 223.

does, as though she were trying to cover her first guilt by perpetrating a worse betrayal of honor, she brings Tresham's wrath upon her.

This, and no wonder seems the last and crowning dishonor to Tresham, and he curses, as if she were a harlot, the sister whom he passionately loves.

This is a horrible situation which Browning had no right to make. The natural thing would be for Mildred to disclose that her lover and Lord Mertoun, whom she was to marry, were one and the same. There is no adequate reason, considering the desperate gravity of the situation, for her silence; it ought to be accounted for and it is not, nor could it be.⁶⁷

These all "are circumstances which shock probability and common human nature."⁶⁸ Tresham continues his scathing attack until Mildred faints. He rushes out leaving Guendolen and Austin whom he had called in to witness the scene, standing dumbfounded near Mildred.

Austin is ready to follow his brother. Guendolen has other plans for him, and with vehemence she points out to him that they should not forsake someone whom they have loved and admired and that they should rise to her defence just as he, Austin, defends the king's cause regardless of whether others think it right or wrong. Mildred revives, and they comfort her and assure her of their willingness to be of assistance. Guendolen sends Austin to wait in the gallery and then, being alone with Mildred, attempts to learn the lover's name. Through her own sagacity after brief questioning she realizes that Mertoun is the one and that he will return that night.

Guendolen. You love him still, then?
Mildred. My sole prop
 Against the guilt that crushes me! I say,
 Each night ere I lie down, 'I was so young--
 I had no mother, and I loved him so!
 And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
 Trust him my soul in sleep.

⁶⁷Brooke, p. 234.

⁶⁸Ibid.

Guendolen. How could you let us
E'en talk to you about Lord Mertoun then?
Mildred. There is a cloud around me.
Guendolen. But you said
You would receive his suit in spite of this?
Mildred. I say there is a cloud...
Guendolen. No cloud to me!
Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same!
...And if the Earl

returns
Tonight?
Mildred. Ah, Heaven he's lost!⁶⁹

This discovery ends Act II, and Act III discloses Lord Tresham entering through the trees under Mildred's window. He does not really know why he has come until he hears a bell tolling midnight. From his wanderings through his estate in his effort to think clearly, he finally arrives at this spot a few minutes ahead of Mertoun. From a hiding place among the trees Tresham sees the man in the cape and slouched hat just as he was described by Gerard. As the man prepares to ascend the tree, Tresham restrains him. Mertoun recognizes the voice of Lord Tresham and knows that it will be only a matter of moments until his identity becomes known to the older man. When Mertoun does throw off his disguise, Tresham refuses to allow the young earl to give any explanation only commanding him to draw.

Mertoun still begs a hearing, and Tresham refuses. When he can avoid the duel no longer, Mertoun says:

Mertoun. 'Twixt him and me and Mildred.
Heaven be judge!
Can I avoid this? Have your will, my lord!⁷⁰

With only a few sword passes Tresham mortally wounds his sister's lover. He is immediately overcome with remorse for this deed which he

⁶⁹Scudder, p. 226.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 227.

has committed in haste. The young earl begs his forgiveness; and Tresham forgives him, asking that he too may be forgiven. As young Mertoun lies dying and recalling his love for Mildred, the bitter realization of the extent of this deed finally comes over Tresham as he listens to Henry Mertoun.

Mertoun. Ah, Tresham, that a sword-stroke and
a drop
Of blood or two, should bring all this about!
Why, 't was my very fear of you, my love
Of you--(what passion like a boy's for one
Like you?)--that ruined me! I dreamed of
you--
You, all accomplished, courted everywhere,
The scholar and the gentleman. I burned
To knit myself to you: but I was young,
And your surpassing reputation kept me
So far aloof!...

...
As he endeavors to raise himself his eyes catches the
lamp.

Ah, Mildred! What will Mildred do?
Tresham, her life is bound up in the life
That's bleeding fast away!

...
And she sits there
Waiting for me! Now say you this to her--
You, not another--say I saw him die
As he breathed this, 'I love her'--you don't
know
What those three small words mean! Say, lov-
ing her
Lowers me down the bloody slope to death
With memories.... I speak to her, not you,
Who had no pity, will have no remorse,
Perchance intend her.... Die along with me,
Dear Mildred! 't is so easy, and you'll 'scape
So much unkindness!...⁷¹

Before young Mertoun dies, Guendolen, Austin, and Gerard enter. As they attempt to support him, he dies in their arms begging that they not take him from the sight of Mildred's window. When Guendolen offers to go to Mildred with the news, Tresham reminds her of his promise to

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 227-228.

Henry Mertoun. He insists upon carrying out this final request despite Guendolen's insistence that Mildred will die if he presumes to do so. At the earl's request they remove Mertoun's body to Tresham's own chamber, and he goes to Mildred.

Tresham finds Mildred in her chamber where she has awaited Mertoun's arrival with apathy. Her brother through his strange behavior conveys to her the certainty that Henry Mertoun will never arrive.

Tresham. . . . I may with a wrung heart
Even reprove you, Mildred; I did more:
Will you forgive me?

°°°
Forgive me, Mildred!--are you si-
lent, Sweet?

Mildred. /Starting up./ Why does not Henry
Mertoun come to-night?
Are you, too, silent?

Dashing his mantle aside, and pointing to his scab-
bard, which is empty.

Ah, this speaks for you!
You've murdered Henry Mertoun! Now pro-
ceed!
What is it I must pardon? This and all?
Well, I do pardon you--I think I do.
Thorold, how very wretched you must be!
Tresham. He bade me tell you....

°°°
Mildred. Oh, true! There's naught for me to
pardon! True!
You loose my soul of all its cares at once.
Death makes me sure of him forever! You
Tell me his last words? He shall tell me them.⁷²

The realization that Guendolen was correct in predicting Mildred's death is evident now to Thorold. Mildred is exceptionally clairvoyant as she speaks with her brother. Her ability to repeat to him in almost precise detail that horrible accident which has just transpired below her window while she sat there unaware of it all is extremely uncanny. She restates her forgiveness and dies with her arms around Tresham's neck.

⁷²Ibid., p. 229.

as an entity in herself from the other personages with whom she is closely associated. For it is through these, Thorold, Henry, Guendolen--even Austin, and Gerard--that Mildred is made known to the audience as much as through her own actions.

In his protagonist Browning has created a woman filled with incredible inconsistencies. Mildred is shown to be a gentle, nobly-bred young girl. She is revealed by all who are close to her as unbelievably virtuous and the epitome of young womanhood. One by one the major personae in the play establish the character line in Mildred before she ever makes her entrance on the stage. Consequently, the audience is made to feel no doubt at all in the faith and respect which all accord Mildred and even less doubt in the fact that Mildred is even more than deserving if possible of all of the affectionate and deep feeling regarding her.

The sincere and devoted relationship Mildred has shared with her brother is revealed in Thorold's initial conversation with Henry Mertoun.

Tresham. ...She has never known
 A mother's care; I stand for father too
 Her beauty is not strange to you, it seems--
 You cannot know the good and tender heart,
 Its girl's trust and its woman's constancy,
 How pure yet passionate, how calm yet kind,
 How grave yet joyous, how reserved yet free
 As light where friends are--how imbued with lore
 The world most prizes, yet the simplest, yet
 The... one might know I talked of Mildred
 --thus
 We brothers talk!⁷⁴

Thus Mildred's qualities are summed up for the audience. She is shown to possess purity and goodness, passion and constancy, reserve and joyousness. In spite of having no mother, under her brother's guidance she has been imbued with these qualities.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 218.

Thorold Tresham is the one forceful character in the drama. And sustained always by pride from the first scene to the last, he should be able to create a very dynamic effect with the foregoing speech. In many respects Tresham is effectively cast as the typical English feudal lord. His utmost concern is that his sister, like his lineage, afford him the utmost pride, for he believes her to be as flawless as the family escutcheon.

Mildred's virtues have also captivated her young suitor, so much so that when they are coupled with the great Tresham family background, Henry Mertoun is almost incapable of speaking so fearful is he that his suit may be rejected, and then all would be lost. This feeling which Mildred has apparently engendered in Henry is such that he becomes almost inarticulate as his meeting with Lord Tresham progresses.

Tresham. ...Mildred's hand is hers to give
Or to refuse.

Mertoun. But you, you grant my suit?
I have your word, if hers?

Tresham. My best of words
If hers encourage you. I trust it will.
Have you seen Lady Mildred, by the way?

Mertoun. I... I... our demesnes re-
member, touch;
I have been used to wander carelessly
After my stricken game: ...

 ...I have come upon
The lady's wondrous beauty unaware,⁷⁵
And--and then.... I have seen her.⁷⁵

So thoroughly has Browning established Mildred as a young woman incapable of any dishonorable act that when the audience is suddenly confronted with her secret meeting with Henry Mertoun, this knowledge is extremely difficult to assimilate because there has been so little indication that this complication is to occur.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 218.

The dramatic handling of the dialogue preceding this scene would be a prime necessity if the audience were to receive the inkling that these two have not only met before but are intimately acquainted. The lack of preparation which the audience receives for Mildred's digression weakens her effectiveness as a protagonist. Once the audience is made aware that Mildred and Henry Mertoun have been lovers for some time, it can then view in an entirely different light Henry's manner of speech when he seeks her hand from Tresham.

At the moment in Scene II when Henry haltingly mentions that he has seen the lady and knows that she is beautiful, the spectator would be naturally inclined to accept the faltering words at their face value as they fall from the lips of this uncomfortable young suitor. However, the play moves on at a rather rapid pace. There is no opportunity for the audience to think over the impressions or interpretations which should be given dramatic stress if the underlying idea is to be effectively presented. The reader may catch this, but the spectator is much more likely to view Henry's halting speech in Scene II as a normal reaction to being exposed to the great Lord Tresham for the first time and that his fumbling words are a product of his youth and inexperience. If the audience had a moment to ruminate, it would be evident after the close of Scene III in Mildred's bed chamber that Henry may be youthful, but he is neither faltering nor inexperienced in finding expression for his true feelings.

When this revelation strikes the audience, it then becomes apparent that Henry's uneasiness during his interview with Thorold Tresham would be much more logically explained because of the weight of his association with Mildred upon his conscience. The audience also becomes aware that

if his suit were refused, much more would be at stake than just the refusal of the hand of a young lady whom under ordinary conditions he would have probably not yet met.

These various levels of interpretation in Henry's speech would be excellent theatre and could add a masterful touch to the drama if the audience could have sufficient preparation and time to appreciate them. However there is neither.

A similar situation arises in the following scene. In Scene IV prior to Henry's entry into Mildred's chamber, she talks with Guendolen. Here again is a bit of foreshadowing which produces a discordant effect upon the audience's view of the protagonist. It is only a brief interchange of statements between Mildred and Guendolen, but Browning has supposedly included it as a hint of what is to come. Again it is so slight that the intended implication may easily be overlooked by an audience viewing the drama for the first time, although the reader might easily be able to grasp the deeper meaning when Guendolen says:

Guendolen. Good night and rest to you!
I said how gracefully his mantle lay
Beneath the rings of his light hair?
Mildred. Brown hair.
Guendolen. Brown? why it is brown: how could
you know that?
Mildred. How? did not you--Oh, Austin 't was
declared
His hair was light, not brown--...⁷⁶

The audience still has no tangible knowledge of Mildred's familiarity with Henry Mertoun, in fact not the slightest indication of such a situation. The above conversation contains a hint, if the audience is expecting one, but otherwise at surface value it may be interpreted as an excited young lady's reaction to a proposal, for she has had a chance meeting

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 220.

with young Mertoun in the forest as he has previously told her brother. Still she covers her confusion with a falsehood in saying that Austin has described the color of young Mertoun's hair to her. It is true that there is no logical explanation for this other than what does follow. There is obviously a connection between Mildred's speech and what follows after Guendolen's withdrawal. But the audience has not had enough preparation to appreciate fully the meaning of all of these innuendoes. These innuendoes are potentially good theatre, but they do not receive sufficient dramatic significance to balance their weight in the play. Therefore, when young Mertoun sings at Mildred's window and then enters in his disguise, the audience should feel somewhat cheated that the pieces were all present, but somehow there was no opportunity for fitting them together while all attention was given to the play.

Quite suddenly then Mildred and Henry assume entirely alien proportions. Both are suddenly everything they have not been heretofore. True, this provides a change in pace and an element of surprise which is theatrically good; it provides an entirely different view of the protagonist, for which the audience has had no valid hint, which is theatrically bad. There has been no logical progression of action or even hints to indicate that the protagonist would ever have it in her nature to digress from the character which has been established for her. This change brings a shock to those who have known Mildred, and it is the greater because not one of them has been given any reason to suspect her of being anything less than they have always known her to be. This does serve to make the present situation more dramatic because of the contrast produced. Strangely enough Browning gives Mildred no substantial reason for slipping into the ill-advised liason with Henry

Mertoun. The young lady actually has no tragic flaw other than a generally conveyed mildness which might easily be construed as weakness of character. The only excuse or reason that can be offered for Mildred's actions is that she has no mother, a fact which Tresham first points out to Henry Mertoun at their initial meeting.

Tresham. What's to say
May be said briefly. She has never known⁷⁷
A mother's care; I stand for father too.

The second reference to Mildred's motherless state occurs in Act I Scene III she says:

Mildred. He's gone. Oh, I'll believe him every word!
I was so young, I love him so, I had
No mother, God forgot me, and I fell.⁷⁸

In Act II after Thorold confronts his sister with the information that he has received from Gerard, she restates this same phrase.

Mildred. I--I was so young!
Beside, I loved him, Thorold--and I had
No mother; God forgot me; so, I fell.⁷⁹

In the preceding scene after Austin has left the two young women together, Guendolen attempts to learn from Mildred her lover's name. Although Mildred will not confide in her, Guendolen is very soon aware that Mertoun and the nightly visitor are one and the same man. Mildred restates once more to Guendolen's question:

Guendolen. You love him still, then?
Mildred. My sole prop
Against the guilt that crushes me! I say,
Each night ere I lie down, 'I was so young--
I had no mother, and I loved him so!'
And then God seems indulgent, and I dare
Trust him my soul in sleep.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 218.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 222.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 225.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 226.

Browning evidently intended that these references to Mildred's motherless state serve to make her a more pitiable character. Although in the atmosphere in which she has been reared, with the stress there obviously has been made by her brother upon family honor and tradition and upon honorable living, in general, it seems that were she to have had a mother's loving influence it could not have induced a more moral influence upon her than the atmosphere of her brother's household.

Wrong and ill chosen though Mildred's course of action may be, it still does not successfully detract from the intrinsic charm and almost childlike innocence with which Browning has imbued her. She seems to be living in a dream world rather than the world of reality. And it is through this unreality which her spirit seems to cast over the entire drama that the play gains the most of its effectiveness. The feudal atmosphere and the utter incongruity of the chain of events are sustained mainly and the impossible is made acceptable by the pervasive sweetness of love. Through Browning's poetry it becomes almost tangible.

It is not the purpose here to judge the morality of the situation, but rather the inconsistencies and incongruities which Browning has perpetrated upon his audience. Obviously, if the personae were not to have followed the improbable course which Browning has set out for them, the play would have had a much different ending. Therefore, in order to reach the tragic climax the protagonist, and the entire personae, must behave in a completely illogical manner.

If Mildred were to have displayed even a small amount of the courage it must have required to carry on such a love affair within the walls of her brother's estate, her lover would have been spared.

When Thorold Tresham confronts her with the damning facts of the nightly visits to her chamber, she makes no attempt to deny her guilt, yet she absolutely refuses to reveal the name of her lover. At the same time she expresses her willingness to receive the Earl as her affianced bridegroom. Naturally her brother is horrified at the apparant intention to afflict an atrocious wrong upon an unsuspecting suitor, to commit an act which would bring dishonor upon him who suffered it and dishonor of a graver kind upon those who had carried it into execution. One can understand Mildred's refusal to reveal her lover's name, if she had made up her mind to expiate her sin by leading henceforth a life of solitary contrition. But this she has not the slightest thought of doing. So long therefore as she purposes to persist in her determination to marry the man who has offered himself, why not reveal the actual facts of the situation? Why not make it known that the applicant for her hand and the nightly visitor to her chamber are one and the same person? It is not merely a natural course for her to pursue, in the circumstances it is the only one; and she resolutely refuses to pursue it.⁸¹

Mildred not only refuses to reveal Henry Mertoun's identity, she also fails to undertake any action which could prevent his returning for his last nightly visit. This final visit in itself seems absurd in that the lovers are assured of a sanctioned marriage, yet they unthinkingly jeopardize their position by planning a last meeting. Mildred does nothing to prevent it. It is obvious to the meanest intelligence that this last visit will be suicidal since her brother has not been informed of these meetings. There is no indication whatsoever that preventing such an impending catastrophe ever enters the mind of Mildred. Neither does the result of this last meeting seem to occur to Guendolen.

Guendolen who has repeatedly been shown to possess soundness of judgement shows a consistent lack of all of her, heretofore, perceptive and intuitive powers. She has through her own clear wit realized that Mertoun and the lover are the same person, yet she appears to be completely lacking the resourcefulness with which to devise a means of warning

⁸¹Lounsbury, pp. 141-142.

Henry Mertoun not to visit Mildred's chamber again. Thorold has gone off in order to regain control of his emotions and thoughts, but Austin, her lover, would be at her disposal. However, nothing is done to prevent the disaster which is certain to come.

Even the young earl should have been endowed with better judgement than he apparently has, for taking such continued risks should have sharpened his senses to the foolishness of stretching his good fortune to the limit.

Basically the fault lies with Mildred, for as the central figure in this tragic situation she does not possess the strength of character nor a sufficiently realistic grasp of the reality of the situation to avert the meeting between her lover and her brother which she should know would result. Therefore, by being the completely feminine, utterly helpless product of a feudal society, she is incapable of giving her lover the help he needs.

Her brother, whose position is perhaps more understandable in the beginning when he is led to believe that his sister is willing to marry the earl in spite of having had a lover, does no credit to his common sense nor to his escutcheon when, because of his immutable pride, he insists upon a duel with a man who refuses to draw against him. Again Tresham's rashness might be understandable before he has had time to contemplate the aspects of the situation, but the feudal code under which he lives should demand that he hear the word of a titled opponent before striking him dead. However, his pride will not allow him to accord young Mertoun this privilege. As a result, the young man dies in the light from the lamp whose change of signal could have averted his death.

In this, at times fascinating, yet peculiarly devised plot the protagonist, as well as the other personages included in the drama, is forced to follow several lines of behavior which do not total success. There are moments when each rises above himself and shines with dramatic surety above the absurd situations. But not one of the personae is a successful creation as a character. Mildred Tresham does, as has been previously mentioned, bring a believable feudal atmosphere to the drama, and from this climate arises the sustaining effectiveness of the play as a whole, but only in this single instance does she as a protagonist fulfill any meaningful requirement with reference to the position which she should demand as the central figure in the drama.

Dramaturgically, the second requirement to be examined is the theme found in A Blot in the 'Scutcheon. Two conflicting ideas emerge as the crystallized theme of the drama. Unreserved, unreasoning pride and wrath begin the drama, and love and sorrow of exquisite tenderness bring about its end. Of the ten dramaturgical elements by which it must be judged The Blot in the 'Scutcheon becomes most successful and meaningful in the handling of theme.

There are no subsidiary motifs included in the drama, and these central ideas completely permeate the atmosphere of the play. Pride in his lineage, pride in his family, pride in himself without the need of a secondary idea are all-important to Thorold Tresham. They are as well tended as any garden, and the fruit of his labors is his untarnished escutcheon. Yet beneath this feudal lord's thick veneer of pride lie the finely grained textures of love and kindness. There is a fierce kind of pride even in the love he has for his sister, brother, and cousin. It is a genuine emotion, but it must be sparked by the loving nature of

his sister. His servants admire him enough to die for him, and Gerard trusts his master so completely that he risks everything to relate the fatal tale of Mildred and Henry Mertoun.

With her characteristic perspicacity Guendolen sums up Thorold's vanities and virtues for Mildred, but like a warning knell in the background his all-consuming pride tolls the initial theme of the drama and the destruction which is the result of it.

Guendolen. Thorold(a secret) is too proud by
half.---

Nay, hear me out--with us he's even gentler
Than we are with our birds. Of this great
House
The least retainer that e'er caught his glance
Would die for him, real dying--no mere talk:
And in the world, the court, if men would cite
The perfect spirit of honor, Thorold's name
Rises of its clear nature to their lips.
But he should take men's homage, trust in it,
And care no more about what drew it down.

He's proud, confess; so proud with
brooding o'er
The light of his interminable line,
An ancestry with men all paladins,
And women all...⁸²

Although the love of Mildred and Henry is not sanctioned by the terms of morality nor propriety, it rises above the disaster created by Thorold's pride to pervade the entire drama with its sadly sweet theme. Morally there could be no solution but for the lovers to die. This Browning effects and in so doing he effects a reconciliation first between Thorold and young Mertoun as he lies dying by Tresham's sword, and Mildred, who loves so strongly that she is able to forgive her brother for slaying her lover before she too dies. Beyond this he effects a reconciliation between the diverse themes of the drama so that with the

⁸²Scudder, p. 219.

final curtain the theme of love comes to its full flowering and can thus support the final motivation of the characters involved.

The universal love of God is evoked to further strengthen this final inherent evidence of the healing powers of love when the young Earl as he dies says:

<u>Mertoun.</u>	...Die, Mildred!
Leave	
Their honorable world to them! For God	
We're good enough, though the world casts us	
out. ⁸³	

The exposition which comprises the third dramaturgical point is handled in an essentially simple and quite satisfactory manner. This drama with its plot unfolding rapidly in three acts requires the minimum amount of exposition. The other two plays treated are constructed in such a manner that a thorough understanding of their respective plots necessitates much more exposition than is needed or included here. Browning has been most conservative in its use. In spite of the flaws and inconsistencies present in its plot the drama is very lightly constructed. This makes for far better theatre on the whole than is evidenced in the Strafford or Colombe's Birthday. With events occurring with such rapidity so as to give the impression of their happening all at once, there is less need for exposition.

The first scene, which actually is extremely brief, furnishes the necessary preparation as well as the mood setting. Particularly since this play is a period piece, this stress on setting is all important. Browning has here treated this combination of exposition and setting more than adequately and in a manner which should be most satisfying to the audience.

⁸³Ibid., p. 228.

Within the first twenty or twenty-five lines of dialogue of Scene I the conversation among Gerard and six of Lord Tresham's retainers establishes for the audience not only what is to occur immediately but why the servants are all clustered near the windows of the lodge. Browning has handled this introductory material dextrously, for in the following few lines spoken by one of the servants, Gerard, who is to figure importantly in the following act is singled out as the focus of attention and at the same time the necessary expository material is revealed for the audience.

2d Retainer. Now Gerard, out with it!
 What makes you sullen, this of all the days
 I' the year? To-day that young rich bountiful
 Handsome Earl Mertoun, whom alone they
 match
 With our Lord Tresham through the country-
 side,
 Is coming here in utmost bravery
 To ask our master's sister's hand?⁸⁴

The remaining dialogue creates for the spectator the air of excitement, of expectancy which should accompany an occasion of such importance. This should make a very lively scene on the stage with the growing anticipation of the servants conveyed to the audience; the climax of the scene coming with the arrival of Henry, Earl Mertoun with his colorful entourage. This is vividly described as one after another remarks upon various aspects of the meeting between the two titled gentlemen. If this were done according to the established standards of modern cinema, this arrival scene of young Mertoun would be treated with indescribable pageantry and glittering fanfare. Browning, a century behind such stupendous productions, has handled it in the manner of the Greek

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 216.

theatre. This method, some two thousand years old, is still unquestionably effective theatre. The action, supposedly taking place off stage, is left, therefore, to the imagination of the audience as the retainers describe the scene which they are viewing from the windows. Much can be made of such a scene, and it can successfully launch the play with the desired mood and colorful setting as an embellishment of the exposition. A combination of the above three could not be more dramatically or interestingly served to the spectator than through the excited reports of various faithful servants who report the following:

2d Retainer. Peace, Cook! The Earl descends.
 --Well, Gerard, see
 The Earl at least! Come, there's a proper
 man,
 I hope! Why, Ralph, no falcon, Pole or
 Swede,
 Has got a starrier eye.

3d Retainer. His eyes are blue
 But leave my hawks alone!

4th Retainer. So young, and yet
 So tall and shapely!

5th Retainer. Here's Lord Tresham's self!
 There now--there's what a nobleman should
 be!
 He's older, graver, loftier, he's more like
 A House's head!

2d Retainer. But you'd not have a boy
 --And what's the Earl beside?--possess too
 That stateliness soon?

1st Retainer. Our master takes his hand--
 Richard and his white staff are on the move--
 Back fall our people--(tsh!--there's Timo--
 thy
 Sure to get tangled in his ribbon-ties,
 And Peter's cursed rosette's a-coming off!)
 --At last I see our lord's back and his friend's;
 And the whole beautiful bright company
 Close around them: in they go! Jumping down
from the window-bench, and making for the
table and its jugs. Good health, long life
 Great joy to our Lord Tresham and his House!⁸⁵

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 217.

Thus the colorful use of exposition sufficiently well establishes this third dramaturgical device provides evidence that Browning is capable of producing effective theatre.

The point of attack occurs in Scene II of Act I with Thorold Tresham's acceptance of Henry Mertoun's proposal of marriage for his sister. The exposition, in laying the groundwork for the point of attack, has enabled this point of attack to instigate the action, in this play, almost immediately. Because Browning provides more physical action in this dramatic vehicle than is his custom, it moves rapidly in every respect in the sequence of events which bring about its conclusion. It sets into motion the tightly knit plot and provides unimpeded interest for the audience as well as praiseworthy dramatic handling. There are no superfluous lines to obscure the point of attack nor is there any cause for the action to lag after the point of attack is passed, and the drama gets underway.

The successful handling of the point of attack is another favorable aspect to be considered in the examination of The Blot in the 'Scutcheon.

The dramaturgical use of foreshadowing receives prominent treatment in this play. Foreshadowing occurs in the first quoted lines of the play in which Gerard is asked why he is sullen on this most important days. Again in the same scene foreshadowing is employed with reference to Gerard. Ironically, the retainers present attribute the old warrener's lack of interest in the festive day to senility and ill health. However, the inner turmoil and heart breaking conflict to which he is being subjected is not understood by the audience at such an early point in the drama. But the seed has been sown; and if it were to be given sufficient emphasis upon the stage, the implication should not completely escape notice.

idea that he is ready to accept concerning his beloved sister, through his own enlarged proportions of rashness and pride, bring a greater blot to the family escutcheon than his sister has done.

Austin's "brevities" are obvious. His entire contribution to the play is an abbreviated one; but, specifically, if his inclination toward brevities in speech, actions, and even thoughts were not so strong, he might have been able to have warned either Mildred or Henry or to have encouraged his brother to more rational thinking and have thus averted the tragedy.

Guendolen is more guilty than her lover, Austin, for she has from the first been established as a strong character. Consequently, her attempted "smartnesses" were never more "ill-timed" and "misplaced" than when after realizing Henry Mertoun's identity she does nothing to save him from Thorold's vengeance. She truly behaves in a "poor" and "silly" manner, and sadly enough this makes her exactly what she says she is--"heartless" Guendolen.

Finally through her own intuition Mildred phrases a statement of foreshadowing of what the outcome of the drama is to be.

Mildred. Mildred and Mertoun! Mildred, with consent
Of all the world and Thorold, Mertoun's bride!
Too late! 'T is sweet to think of, sweeter
still
To hope for, that this blessed end soothes up
The curse of the beginning; but I know
It comes too late: 't will sweetest be of all
To dream my soul away and die upon.⁸⁷

As foreshadowing is employed in this drama it attains the desired effect in just the proper degree. Browning has integrated it into the play with skill, and in so doing he has created in the audience a

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 220.

There be! 'T is naught to say that I'll endure
 And bless you,--that my spirit yearns to purge
 Her stains off in the fierce renewing fire:
 But do not plunge me into other guilt!
 Oh, guilt enough! I cannot tell his name.⁸⁹

The tenseness of the situation has almost reached its peak when the third crisis is brought about as Mildred states that she will accept Henry Mertoun's proposal.

Mildred. But, Thorold--if
 I will receive him as I said?
Tresham. The Earl?
Mildred. I will receive him.⁹⁰

The fourth and last critical point preceding the climax does not have the explosive intensity which this foregoing crisis has produced, but it does serve to suggest a turning point to the audience when Guendolen discovers for herself that Henry Mertoun is Mildred's lover.

Guendolen. But you said
 You would receive his suit in spite of this?
Mildred. I say there is a cloud...
Guendolen. No cloud to me!
 Lord Mertoun and your lover are the same!⁹¹

Now that Guendolen has realized this identity, and made it clear that she is aware of it, the audience should not be wrong in expecting this to be a turning point, and that this crisis should produce some intervention by Guendolen or, perhaps, Austin, in the plans which Mildred and Henry have made to meet once more. The closing lines in Act II indicate that Guendolen must have this plan in mind.

Austin. Thorold's gone.
 I know not how, across the meadow-land.
 I watched him till I lost him in the skirts
 O' the beech-wood.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 224.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 226.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 226.

Guendolen. Gone? All thwarts us.
Mildred. Thorold too?
Guendolen. I have thought. First lead this Mil-
 dred to her room.
 Go on the other side; and then we'll seek
 Your brother; and I'll tell you, by the way,
 The greatest comfort in the world. You said
 There was a clue to all. Remember, Sweet,
 He said there was a clue! I hold it. Come!⁹²

From this final speech, the audience could with certainty be led to believe that whatever tragic outcome had been in the offing might now be averted. However, this is not the case, and there is no explanation anywhere in the final act which in anyway clarifies these last remarks. They were evidently inserted in order to make the final act the more tragic because no intervention occurs. But they very definitely weaken the play, for no lines as meaningful as these should be included in any drama unless some logical development should result from them.

In Act II the climax toward which the crises have been building is approached when Thorold Tresham apprehends the mysterious lover under the yew tree and learns that he is Henry Mertoun. This criterion finally attains its highest emotional peak when Henry dies as the result of the duel in which he refuses to draw against Thorold. There has been a sufficient building up throughout the drama to this point so that the desired emotional pitch should find sympathetic rapport with the audience, and it is through Browning's poetic genius that this effect is truly completed. As can be attested by the lines from this scene which have been previously quoted, there are lines of great beauty in this final scene, which despite the unwise actions of which they are the result, touch a chord of universal response in the audience. For

⁹²Ibid., p. 226.

sorrow and love and the joy of death are woven together in beauty. If we must go through the previous acts to get to this, we forgive, for its sake, their wrongness. It has turns of love made exquisitely fair by inevitable death, unfathomable depths of feeling. We touch in these last scenes the sacred love beyond the world in which forgiveness is forgotten.⁹³

In the foregoing action and through that emotional peak which is reached in the drama, the climax fulfills the dramaturgical requirements.

The major dramatic question of The Blot in the 'Scutcheon is a problem of sufficient importance to justify its dramaturgical requirements. That Henry Mertoun may win the approval of Thorold Tresham to marry Mildred in order that their illicit love affair may be a legal marriage without anyone's being the wiser is the major dramatic question. This is a serious subject which amply justifies its selection. There are innumerable possibilities which could have been pursued for its final solution. The path which Browning chooses for his protagonist and the other personages involved leads not to a gratifying solution of the question, but to a tragic conclusion. The dramatic question creates the desired dramatic response in the audience as it builds up through the series of crises to its culmination in the climax. As a selection for the major dramatic question the tragic love affair of Henry Mertoun and Mildred Tresham is effectively carried out as a dramaturgical requirement.

The prize which is included in the drama is the question of Thorold Tresham's acceptance of Henry Mertoun's suit for Mildred's hand. Ironically enough the winning of the prize appears to be no problem at all. Tresham is willing to accept the proposal. The real dramaturgical effectiveness of the inclusion of a prize in the drama is that the

⁹³Brooke, (1902), p. 235.

antagonist is ultimately Tresham himself. Lest any blot be evidenced upon his prized escutcheon he perpetrates a far worse crime against his family honor by killing the young man who would actually have been the only one who could have removed the blot caused by Mildred in carrying on her love affair. This ironical twist in the circumstances concerning the prize makes its dramaturgical treatment exceptional.

The final dramaturgical requirement for the play is that of resolution. It becomes evident that Browning has treated this final point in much the same manner as it was treated in Colombe's Birthday. Browning has drawn the drama to its conclusion with such rapidity that, once the climax has resulted from the series of spiraling crises of which it is the logical outgrowth, the resolution is completed almost before its presence has been ascertained.

The death of Henry Mertoun is, of course, the climax. The remaining action constitutes the dénouement; however, it is so closely allied with the antecedent action of the climax that the high level of excitement and interest which has been evoked in the audience really slackens very little with the resolution of the play. The lessening of the tension following the climax is almost imperceptible, but it can be felt since the final result which is the death of Mildred and the suicide of Thorold has been strongly enough hinted at that the audience must anticipate that the demise of both will occur in some manner.

The resolution is a sound dramaturgical achievement within the confines of this play. It is the end result which the dramatist has set out to achieve. Browning has carefully arranged the entire drama in order that this outcome will be the result of the preceding action. He has even achieved effective katharsis in the death of Mildred and Henry, for

there is a kind of universal satisfaction evoked in the audience by their union in death. The treatment of Thorold expiates in sufficient measure the wrong he has perpetrated upon his family and upon his escutcheon.

The resolution is without doubt effective theatre. For the action combined with Browning's poetic technique is an effective combination for a period drama such as this one is. Upon this contribution alone the resolution could be termed a success dramaturgically. But unfortunately more must be considered requisite of the ultimate success of this requirement than stimulating action and moving lyricism, however dynamic and effective they may be as theatre.

"A resolution may fail because some preparatory step in the play structure (and in the stage production) has been fumbled, so that the motivation is less convincing,"⁹⁴ and in The Blot in the 'Scutcheon the statement is unfortunately true not only in regard to the resolution but also in regard to the nine remaining dramaturgical elements.

In the critical application of each of these ten points care has been employed in that each has been viewed as objectively as possible. There has been no attempt to place its value with reference to the overall effect of the play. It would be impossible to judge the merits of the work if this procedure were not to have been followed.

There have been references made to the incongruities which are inherent in the fabric of the drama; but in order to judge first the admirable qualities which are also present, there has been no specific stress made upon these major flaws until this point.

The necessities of the drama at times exact, or at any rate permit, the neglect of probability in the conduct of the characters. Still they

⁹⁴John Gassner and Philip Barber, Producing the Play (New York, 1953), p. 19.

do not require unhesitating and persistent defiance of it. Yet such is the course unflinchingly followed in this play. The possibility of the existence of the condition of things described in it at its opening puts of itself a sufficiently severe strain upon belief, or rather upon credulity, without the further persistent demands made upon it during the course of action.⁹⁵

It is this glaring flaw which casts its shadow over the entire play and which shall prevent it always from emerging into the bright light of success. The characters are portrayed powerfully at times, and the action is exciting; but the situations, which sensible actions upon the part any one of the characters could have so easily reversed so that no tragedy resulted, are absurd. It surpasses all understanding of how Browning could fail to see what such inconsistencies could do to a play, which possesses such promising possibilities and which surely could have been treated differently and with sufficient logic to make it a success.

In view of only their merits these dramaturgical points with the exception of the protagonist stand out far beyond those achieved by Browning in the two previous plays. But in each instance a curious paradox occurs when these same merits are balanced against these flaws. Hence these requirements which are dramaturgically successful are blotted out in importance by the very situations which have given rise to them.

When absurd demands are placed upon people, whether in real life or personae in a drama, their resulting behavior can neither be predicted nor always commended. In the situation existing in The Blot in the Scutcheon Mildred as the protagonist and the other characters involved must behave according to the dictates of the dramatist; therefore, the opportunities presented in which their behavior can be either normal or

⁹⁵Lounsbury, p. 145.

admirable are few. Consequently, Mildred can only be weak and permissive because it suits the playwright's plans. She does rise above these restrictions in her final speech to Thorold, when she says:

Mildred. As I dare approach that Heaven
Which has not bade a living thing despair,
Which needs no code to keep its grace from
stain,
But bids the vilest worm that turns on it
Desist and be forgiven,--I--forgive not,
But bless you, Thorold, from my soul of souls!
Falls on his neck.
There! Do not think too much upon the past!
The cloud that's broke was all the same a cloud
While it stood up between my friend and you;
You hurt him 'neath its shadow; but is that
So past retrieve? I have his heart, you know;
I may dispose of it: I give it you!
It loves you as mine loves! Confirm me,
Henry! Dies.⁹⁶

This speech alone, however beautiful and inspired, cannot suffice to elevate the protagonist to the effective position in the drama which the foremost character is expected to fill.

The treatment of theme is a successful creation. Its dual aspect of pride and love are entirely suitable for feudal life. It withstands better than any of the other remaining dramaturgical elements the adverse pressure of the play's faulty plot.

Although its colorful descriptive passages begin the play, the exposition is at the mercy of Browning's illogical plot. It is, of necessity, the means by which this unfortunate love affair first comes to light. It is successfully handled in revealing the necessary unfolding of the plot; but it defeats its own purpose in preparing and making the audience aware that, in addition to their being entangled in an inexplicable love affair, neither of these unfortunate young people nor

⁹⁶Scudder, (1895), p. 230.

those aware of their plight are able to act in a sensible or logical way in order to avert the death of both. It then cannot be given the credit it would ordinarily deserve.

The point of attack does not suffer appreciably from Browning's illogical plot. It is true that it focuses for the audience the direction of the action and thus initiates the movement of this plan of action, but the fact remains that a successful treatment of this fourth requirement should not be overlooked.

Foreshadowing suffers perhaps more at Browning's pen than does his exposition. It brings to light the inconsistencies of plot with unmitigated accuracy. With each hint of what is to come, comes the awareness in the spectator that a slight change of plan could avert the impending tragedy. In all probability the audience has longed to cry out a warning to Henry Mertoun after watching the inertia of those who could save him. Yet, when no help comes for Henry Mertoun, this fifth element has sealed its own doom as surely as it has foretold Henry's. Once more the flaw outweighs the merit.

The crises and the climax, as the sixth and seventh requirements, carry the audience admirably from one level of anticipation to another of higher intensity until the final emotional peak if the drama is attained. This is undeniably good theatre, but it is in the same instant undeniably poor logic which brings about the dramatic result. It is insulting to the intelligence of the audience or reader to expect this frustrating lack of logical actions to furnish such complete entertainment that the play would be accepted upon its merits without question of such a gross flaw. Where Browning has succeeded admirably, it may be seen that he has failed abysmally.

As the eighth requirement the major dramatic question is affected indirectly by the affair of Henry and Mildred which has been going on before the question of their marriage is ever put before Thorold Tresham. The very obvious puzzle of why they had not attempted to marry after realizing they were in love, which has been previously suggested, undermines the dramatic value of the question. Although it stands the dramaturgical test from the standpoint of being a sufficient foundation upon which to build a play, it is undermined, at the outset, by the fact that there is no apparent reason for this illicit liaison of two noble persons of mutually acceptable background. In this light the major dramatic question is not such a credit to the dramatist and his play as it should be.

No criticism can be offered of the ninth requirement. Dramaturgically the handling of the prize is praiseworthy. It suffers no apparent damage as a result of faulty plot. The fact that Thorold condones the marriage yet becomes the antagonist who opposes it reflects commendable use of dramatic irony.

The resolution, which culminates in the genuine intensity and feeling which Browning imparts to his poetry, brings to an end the pathetic misunderstandings which have been revealed in some true dramatic interactions. Yet in spite of the katharsis and universality which are recognized as being a part of the resolution, the drama ends upon a note which could very possibly leave a dissatisfied audience. This feeling is best conveyed by a contemporary critic of the drama who says "the resolution of the climax that arises in the play should be an inevitable outcome of the expectations created up to this point."⁹⁷ There does not seem to

⁹⁷Gassner and Barber, p. 17.

be sufficient justification of the actions of the characters in the play to engender in the audience a completely satisfied feeling that the resolution should truly be the inevitable outcome of all of the foregoing action. The illogical plot is obviously responsible for this feeling, and this same lack of logic creates an impasse which even ten commendably devised dramaturgical elements cannot surmount. Unfortunately the opinion of Stopford Brooke some fifty years ago in regard to this very point is still irrevocably true.

It might well be represented on the stage as a literary drama before those who had already read it, and who would listen to it for its passion and poetry; but its ill-construction and the unnaturalness of its situations will always prevent, and justly, its public success as a drama.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Brooke, p. 232.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

This investigation of three of Robert Browning's closet dramas in the light of new dramatic techniques has produced but one conclusion: that of reaffirming the statements and opinions of earlier critics who summed up the failure of Strafford, Colombe's Birthday, and A Blot in the Scutcheon. Browning's four remaining dramas King Victor and King Charles, The Return of the Druses, Luria, and A Soul's Tragedy resulted in failure, as well. They suffer from the same mishandling of dramatic technique that the three plays examined have been shown to do through dramaturgical analysis.

It has been shown that the modern methods of dramaturgy, when they are applied in a thorough analysis of the protagonist, the theme, exposition, the point of attack, foreshadowing, crisis, climax, the major dramatic question, the prize, and resolution, have merely proved more conclusively that

it is no marvel therefore that Browning's plays did not succeed. They are often hard to follow in the closet; on the stage it is impossible to follow them. The truth is that his forte did not lie at all in the drama. It is in dramatic monologue alone that he achieved success. In that he has no superior in our literature; we may almost say he has no equal. But the dramatic monologue is only allied to the drama; it is not the drama itself.¹

Browning excells in the static drama of his dramatic monologues, where a man's soul and inner thoughts may be revealed without the need

¹Lounsbury, pp. 64-65.

of physical action.

But action is a cardinal distinction of the drama proper; it is essential to its very existence. Herein Browning failed completely..... His plays therefore are to be read and studied; they are not to be witnessed. Not one of them complies with the canons of effective stage representation.²

These statements only serve to reaffirm the following statements regarding the results of this investigation.

Filled as they are with positive dramaturgy, wherein flashes of brilliant and dynamic dialogue and interaction occur and wherein original approaches to plot can be appreciated, these plays could not as they stand be revived as successful theater today. Those dramaturgical requirements which are presented with positive treatment, contributing toward recognizable dramaturgical excellence, are negated by the unsatisfactory handling of the requirements which Browning failed to observe.

In Strafford, his dramatic treatment of the ten requirements, save possibly his exposition, from a historical standpoint, and the children's scene in the resolution is so blurred as to be ineffectual. The exposition is cluttered to the point of obscurity in many places, but it is the only means by which the historical and political aspects of the play can be located in relation to the remaining requirements. The only truly successful portion of the drama which enjoys competent dramatic treatment is that scene in the resolution involving Strafford and his children. The symbolism and dramatic irony of the little song, as well as its lyrical quality, and the gentle, unaffected sweetness of the scene contribute through Browning's dramatic power to a valuable dramaturgical asset.

However, two requirements cannot compensate for the inconsistencies

²Ibid., p. 65.

revealed in the protagonist and the lack of clarity in the theme. The lack of clarity, of conciseness, and the lack of the brilliant pinpointing of a desired effect which is so representative in Browning's other works serve to mar the treatment of the foreshadowing, the crisis and climax, the point of attack, the major dramatic question and the prize. If obscurity and lack of consideration for the demands of the audience were to have been the requisite for successful dramaturgy, Browning could surely have qualified with Strafford.

In his treatment of Colombe's Birthday, Browning has shown definite improvement over Strafford. However, this second drama shows, despite Browning's improved handling of some dramaturgical aspects, that the ineffectual treatment of the majority of the established criteria has definitely contributed to its failure as theater. Only the creation of Colombe as the protagonist, and in Valence and Berthold, has the dramatist at least, in part, achieved a dramaturgical element of intrinsic worth. Even in this creation of the three major personae, Browning has not achieved perfection. His protagonist is far too weak to carry the drama to its close alone without the assistance of Valence and the helpful maneuvering of Berthold. Colombe's character does furnish for the audience delight in her gentleness and sincerity, and this, in part, compensates for her definite weakness in failing to sustain the action of the play.

Although his treatment of the protagonist is not wholly successful dramaturgically, it does constitute the most successfully developed element of dramaturgy. The resolution is not a particularly noteworthy achievement, but it does satisfy the dramaturgical demands set forth for its fulfillment. It is handled, however, as befitting the play; and

consequently, it cannot be wholly ignored.

The remaining eight elements form a blurred wall through which the successful contributions may hardly be seen. As has been stated, heretofore, the subject of the theme is too thin, and there is little understandable reason for sustaining this theme to those proportions.

The exposition is too lengthy and tiresome to merit praise. The point of attack, which is all but obscured in the exposition, is neither clear nor effectively enough stated to warrant praise. The crisis and climax, which do manage to maintain some suspense for the audience, receive adequate but not spectacular treatment. The foreshadowing is somewhat over emphasized and does tend to interfere with the element of suspense which is the sustaining factor in the play. The major dramatic question and the prize suffice for the demands made upon them by the dramatist, but they in no way contribute appreciably to the vehicle.

As with Strafford the overall effect of Colombe's Birthday is that it is continually blurred by these elements which are never sufficiently refined so as to bring the play as a whole into sharp focus. With only the protagonist and the resolution as acceptable dramaturgy, the audience could not be expected to hunt hopelessly for the other eight requirements.

The Blot in the 'Scutcheon has suffered more from Browning's incongruity of plot and generally illogical treatment than have the other plays; yet, at the same time, it seems to present that seed, which if it were properly developed, could give rise to an actable drama. As it stands it is as much a failure today as it was fifty years ago when "its ill construction and the unnaturalness of its situations will always prevent, and justly, its public success as a drama."³

³Brooke, p. 232.

The favorable aspects which reveal some positive dramaturgical treatment are revealed in the theme; they are interestingly handled in the crisis and climax which in turn convey some element of suspense and, hence, more dramaturgy into the treatment of the resolution. The prize reveals effective use of dramatic irony. The point of attack which instigates the drama is easily apprehended, and it is not obscured from the perception of the audience as it has been in the two previous dramas.

The remaining dramaturgical criteria are completely at the mercy of the illogical situations which Browning has presented with no apparent or understandable regard for either the spectator or the reader.

Again Browning has created a weak protagonist. And again it is a woman whose failings undermine the dramaturgical demands placed upon her. Neither Mildred Tresham nor the other dramatis personae are able to rise above the incongruities of character and actions foisted upon them by the dramatist. No amount of poetic greatness nor flashes of exciting action can atone for the irrational treatment of the entire personae. The elements of exposition and foreshadowing suffer greatly from the lack of logic evinced in the plot. Since both are the vehicles by which the story is advanced, their intrinsic worth, which is noteworthy, is almost obliterated by this flaw. The major dramatic question loses its dramaturgical value by this same method.

Consequently, although the positively treated dramaturgical elements presented in this dramatic vehicle outweigh those which are rendered ineffectual by illogical plot construction, even these partially successful criteria do not compensate for this illogical blur of Browning's making. It is unfortunate that the drama which provides the greatest interest and excitement and which relates a clearly defined theme and

story should after rising to recognizable heights sink so low in failure.

Although all ten dramaturgical requirements have been found to be present in each of the dramas analyzed, Browning has so consistently blurred their treatment and so compounded their flaws that any possibility of a successful stage presentation in the modern theater medium is completely eliminated. Even those dramaturgical qualities which have been infused successfully into these dramatic vehicles cannot provide sufficient justification for making a success of these failures of actable drama.

Thus this reexamination even in the light of later techniques can only restate the criticism to which Browning's contemporaries subjected his plays.

Browning in the proper sense of the word is no dramatist at all. No great poet who has set out to write plays has failed more signally than he in mastering the technique of the art. None has shown so little comprehension of those details of expression, construction, and arrangement which unite to make a play successful on the stage..... His dramas throughout exhibit vital defects as acting plays. They lack organic unity and order, and what we may call inevitable development. What is further unsatisfactory in them is the utter inadequacy of their portrayal of human nature, and too frequently their unfaithfulness to it. But so far as the average theater-goer is concerned, worse than anything else, is their lack of sustained interest. Powerful passages appear in them; but no play can be kept alive merely by powerful passages. Above all, so far as regards representation, the impossibility of comprehending the conversation and consequently of following the course of what little action there is, without effort which must occasionally be almost agonizing in its intensity,—this of itself will always make them failures upon the stage.⁴

⁴Lounsbury, pp. 61-62.

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