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Laura Clarke

*CUNY Guttman Community College*

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# Gathering Sense from Song: Robert Browning and the Romantic Epistemology of Music

LAURA H. CLARKE

The place of music in nineteenth-century poetry and fiction has garnered much interest in recent criticism and has stimulated innovative work on the idea of music in nineteenth-century British literature, including the political, class, and gendered implications of music in fiction and poetry; yet the crucial fact that music provided poetry with a philosophic language is given less attention than it merits.<sup>1</sup> Felicia Bonaparte argues that its philosophical significance is often missed because twentieth- and twenty-first-century thought has inherited an empirical concept of music. This is distinct from the Victorian idea of music that was influenced by German Romantic theory.<sup>2</sup> While the predominant eighteenth-century empirical view of music argued that instrumental music was capable of stimulating the physical emotions but was unable to convey ideas, German Romantic writers such as Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), the Schlegel brothers, E. T. A Hoffman, Arthur Schopenhauer, and later Richard Wagner maintained that it was precisely its unmediated quality that allowed music to access Platonic ideas that transcend the sensory realm.<sup>3</sup> Believing that music facilitated a perception of the ideal, the German Romantics conceived of music not only as a progression of numerical notes but as way to apprehend universal and transcendent ideas that could not be known through the intellect. It was this correlation between music and philosophy that gave music its crucial place in discussions of art and epistemology in the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

That Robert Browning shared the Romantic view of music as the most transcendent of all the arts is well attested in criticism of his life and poetry, as is his virtuosity as a musician;<sup>5</sup> yet despite insightful critical commentary elicited by his music monologues, the fact that Browning utilizes the German Romantic theory of music as a way to discuss epistemological issues has been largely overlooked.<sup>6</sup> Browning refers to music hundreds of times in his poetry, and he refers to song many more times again; yet because these many allusions are often only glimpsed in single lines and briefly recurring metaphors, their

philosophical significance can easily be missed. Despite the widely held notion that Browning espoused an essentially Romantic view of music, many of the critical assumptions about Browning's music poems are derived from an empirical concept of music; therefore, a philosophical paradigm shift is needed in order to see how Browning relies on the idealist view of music to provide his reader with an interpretive key for the complex epistemological questions that he raises throughout his poetry. To uncover this alternative philosophical framework, I examine Browning's self-proclaimed affinity with the German idealist philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, because an attention to the similarities that Browning found in his foundational philosophical premises reveals how music has a central symbolic significance in the poems that explicitly discuss music and also in important philosophical poems, such as *La Saisiaz*, that have not previously been associated with music philosophy.

The German Romantic idea that music precedes the notes that bring it forth is an enduring metaphor in Browning's poetry for two different faculties of knowledge, which he refers to as "fancy" and "fact," or reason. While fancy intuits the transcendent ideas expressed by music, the faculty of reason, the logical processes of the mind that make judgments based on sense experience, can only perceive the external numerical form of music. Romantic music philosophy also provides Browning with a symbolic language through which to express his theory of the objective poet. Browning's conception of the objective poet, and its development in the dramatic monologue form, has typically been seen as a rejection of Romantic epistemology; yet the relationship between the inner realm of music and the outward expression of sound is symbolic for Browning of the connection between an ideal substrate and its manifestation in the real world and also of the connection between the idealism of the subjective poet and the realism of the objective poet. The music monologues "Master Hugues of Saxe Gotha," "A Toccata of Galuppi's," and "Abt Vogler" are an important explication of this use of symbolism as they focus on the tension between the empirical view of music as form and the Romantic view of music as philosophy in order to express the relationship of fancy to reason and of the ideal to the real.

The Romantic philosophy of music expounded by Tieck, Wackenroder, and the Schlegel brothers finds its most comprehensive exposition in Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*. Critics have variously promoted or denied the significance of Schopenhauer's philosophy for Browning's poetry: Leslie White explores the similarity between Schopenhauer's concept of will and Browning's faith in human intuition as it is expressed in his early poetry, yet Apryl Lea Denny Heath refutes William Lyon Phelps's suggestion

that Schopenhauer may have influenced Browning's music monologues because she finds Schopenhauer's concept of music to be entirely incompatible with Browning's emphasis on the material world, an issue to which I will return in due course.<sup>7</sup> It is clear, however, that Phelps is absolutely justified in perceiving the arresting similarities between Schopenhauer and Browning since Browning recognized them himself. After reading a biography of Schopenhauer given to him in 1876, Browning wrote to Mrs. Ernest Benzon to describe the affinity that he had found between himself and the German philosopher:

I gain an adequate notion of Schopenhauer and what he accounts his grand discovery. So much of it as I acknowledge for truth as I have believed in them from my earliest youth, . . . the distinction and pre-eminence of the Soul from and over the intelligence—"Soul" in the evident sense of Schopenhauer's "Will"—And the fact was at once so realized by me, that I am sure it must show through my writings, here and there as their substratum.<sup>8</sup>

Browning states that his foundational convictions regarding soul and mind derive from the same epistemological foundation as Schopenhauer's philosophy and that this shared ground constitutes the "substratum" of his own poetic works. This substratum, I argue, is that of philosophical idealism. The critical consensus has been, in its different forms, that Browning's concept of the objective poet is a repudiation of the absolutes sought by the subjective poet—an idea that would also appear at odds with the transcendental foundations of German idealism; yet in *The Lucid Veil*, W. David Shaw demonstrates the pervasive impact that idealist philosophy had on Victorian poets, especially Browning.<sup>9</sup> While Shaw focuses on the compelling correlations between Browning and Hegel, Clyde de L. Ryals and Patricia Dianne Rigg, two critics who have written on Browning and German philosophy, both analyze Browning's poetics within the context of Friedrich Schlegel's concept of irony;<sup>10</sup> however, it is the point of connection between Schopenhauer and Browning on which I focus in this essay because this particular relationship illuminates how Browning utilizes Romantic music philosophy to symbolize key epistemological issues in his poetry and to express the idealist foundation of his poetic theory.<sup>11</sup>

Schopenhauer argues in *The World as Will and Representation* that there are two aspects to the world—the world of representation and the will—each aspect being dependent on and inseparable from the other.<sup>12</sup> The world of representation is the objective material world of phenomena as they exist in space and time; it is the world of empirical perception and is the manifestation of the other aspect of the world, which is the will. The will is the realm of the

subject and exists entirely outside of time and space, and Schopenhauer explains that his idea of the will is analogous to Immanuel Kant's concept of the noumenal: it is "the being-in-itself of every thing in the world, and is the sole kernel of every phenomenon" (p. 118). The will is a universal substrate, encompassing and comprising the essences of the entire world; as opposed to the mere representation or semblance of a phenomenon, the will is the thing-in-itself.

In contrast to the groundless world of will, Schopenhauer says that the faculty of the understanding perceives the laws of cause and effect that govern the world of representation. The senses supply the understanding with data from the material world that is then passed into the reflective consciousness of the reason. Schopenhauer combines these branches of knowledge—sense, understanding, and reason—into what he calls the principle of sufficient reason, which may be understood as defining the processes of conceptual thought; however, Schopenhauer argues that the understanding can never reveal the inner nature or will of things because, in perceiving only the world of cause and effect, it is confined to showing "mere connexions, relations, of one representation to another, form without any content" (p. 121). It is Schopenhauer's conviction that the will as thing-in-itself cannot be subject to direct investigation because it is not the object of knowledge: the faculty of understanding can never penetrate past the phenomenal and into the noumenal, or the inner essence of things. Although Schopenhauer aligns himself with Kant in maintaining the impossibility of accessing the noumenal, he distinguishes himself in asserting that, although the intellect can only know the *how* and not the *what* of phenomena, we can search for the inner meaning of things through the true inverse of rational knowledge—the intuition of the imagination and of feeling, which allows us to know the noumenal aspect of the world.

Browning explicitly aligns his concept of soul with Schopenhauer's will and reveals the striking similarity of German idealism to his foundational epistemology: for Browning, soul is not only a theological concept but also the noumenal realm of existence made manifest in the world and in humankind. In "Charles Avison," Browning avers the difficulty of defining soul and seeks to compare it against mind, which he sees as corresponding to Schopenhauer's principle of sufficient reason.<sup>13</sup> Imagining his reader asking for "an illustrative image" (l. 150), Browning uses architectural imagery to connote the processes of the mind and help define what he means by "soul." Browning visualizes the mind as a worker who seeks to "o'erarch a gulf" (l. 153) and who, in using facts, assesses, connects, assimilates, and builds in order to construct knowledge: "he digs, transports / Shapes and, through enginery—all sizes, sorts, / Lays stone

by stone until a floor compact / Proves our bridged causeway" (ll. 153–156). The mind derives knowledge from data that is taken from the senses: "So worked Mind: its tribe / Of senses ministrant above, below, / Far, near, or now or haply long ago / Brought to pass knowledge" (ll. 175–178). While the precision of these varied movements of the mind are "easy, even, to descry, describe" (l. 174), Browning says that soul is "An element which works beyond our guess" (l. 160). Belonging to the noumenal realm, the soul lies beyond the reach of the mind.

A formless voice that comes from within and undulates under the mind, soul is the "unsounded sea—whose lift of surge / Spite of all superstructure" of the mind, "lets emerge, / In flower and foam, Feeling from out the deeps" (ll. 161–163). It is important to remember that here Browning means "feeling" not in its empirical sense but, in accordance with Schopenhauer, as a profound intuition of the noumenal substrate of material reality. Although Browning proclaims the ineffable nature of soul—the will-in-itself—he asserts that ultimately it seeks to find form in the world:

Yet wherefore heaving sway and restless roll  
 This side and that, except to emulate  
 Stability above? To match and mate  
 Feeling with knowledge,—make as manifest  
 Soul's work as Mind's work . . . (ll. 183–187)

Along with employing metaphors of the ocean's surface and depth to show how soul endeavors to embody itself in forms of the material world, Browning also describes the process of manifestation in metallurgical terms: "run mercury into a mould like lead" (l. 192) and "shoot / Liquidity into a mould" (ll. 209–210). Soul seeks to manifest itself in the empirical world, its groundless viscosity seeking material encasement, just as Schopenhauer's will is embodied in the world of representation.

It is this material realization of soul that is the "prize" and "puzzle" of art (l. 195), and Browning asks the same question that was posed, and answered, by the Romantic generation before him: "Does Mind get Knowledge from Art's ministry?" (l. 200). Schopenhauer argues that the mind does indeed derive knowledge from art because art is able to objectify or represent the will by means of the Platonic ideas. These ideas are the highest objectification of the will because they deal in essences rather than in particulars; they do not take on a form particular to knowledge but rather precede all knowledge. All of the arts endeavor to represent the eternal Platonic ideas, just as the ideas are an

objectification of the will; therefore, Schopenhauer says that art can be defined “as *the way of considering things independently of the principle of sufficient reason*” (p. 185). Thus, through bypassing the principle of sufficient reason, it is possible to grasp the ideas that are embodied in art.

As the representation of the Platonic ideas, art is a copy of a copy that offers only an indirect route to the will. However, for Schopenhauer, music stands apart from all of the other arts in its unmediated power to express the innermost being of the world and of our own selves. According to Schopenhauer, this transcendent quality of music suggests that we must look beyond the aesthetic experience of music as merely the effect on our perception of music’s empirical and external form—the sound that is the progression of notes over time—and that these “numerical ratios into which it [music] can be resolved are related not as the thing signified, but only as the sign” (p. 256). Schopenhauer explains that music, unlike the other arts, is not mediated through concepts, and in bypassing the understanding, it speaks a language that is intelligible to all. Music always reveals the inner nature of every phenomenon and “gives the innermost kernel preceding all form, or the heart of things” (p. 263). As the most immediate expression of feeling, music is not a copy of the ideas but a copy of the will itself; therefore, “music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, or peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature” (p. 261). Music directly expresses the essence of noumenal truth.

Browning too believes that the mind can receive knowledge from art’s ministry because art apprehends eternal truths. Through art, “What’s known once is known ever” (l. 201). Yet, as with Schopenhauer, Browning views art as belonging to the world of representation. Indeed, Browning uses the same metaphor of building, gathering, and assembling to depict the artistic process that he utilizes to delineate the workings of mind: “Arts arrange, / Dissociate, re-distribute, interchange / Part with part, lengthen, broaden, high or deep / Construct their bravest” (ll. 201–204). It is only through enhancing these structural maneuverings that the artist can reveal more clearly the idea concealed beneath them: “what lay loose / At first lies firmly after, what design / Was faintly traced in hesitating line / Once on a time, grows firmly resolute / Henceforth and evermore” (ll. 205–209). Despite the fact that art’s ministry endeavors to represent eternal ideas, its processes are still implicated in the processes of reason because they are mediated.

Each art form seeks to “stay the apparition” (l. 218) and may succeed in this to varying degrees, but music surpasses the other art forms in its capacity

to express truth: "There is no truer truth obtainable / By Man than comes of music" (ll. 138–139). Browning declares about music, "Dredging deeper yet / Drag into day,—by sound, thy master-net,— / The abysmal bottom-growth, ambiguous thing / Unbroken of a branch, palpitating / With limbs' play and life's semblance!" (ll. 235–239). Music expresses soul, whereas sound is music's form that has been manifested into a progression of notes. The Romantic idea that music precedes sound is crucial for the way in which Browning utilizes the symbol of music in his poetry: music plunges into the depths of soul, and sound is the "master-net" that works to bring it forth into day. Browning also draws on the metaphor of night and day, where night is the realm of noumenal truth and day is the realm of manifestation—a metaphor that was popularized by Novalis in his *Hymns to the Night*—to emphasize that sound embodies the music of the "unsounded sea" that is soul (l. 161).<sup>14</sup>

For Browning, although transcendent ideas are eternal, their material embodiments are inevitably subject to material changes. He explores this subject in "Charles Avison" by pondering the temporal transformations in musical fashion: when Browning asks how it is that Avison's outdated music can still be a perfect expression of soul and yet how Wagner's new music can be equally as true, he is not conceding that all music is subjective, as Marc Plamondon suggests,<sup>15</sup> but rather that new musical styles are different embodiments of eternal ideas—they are the forms that freshly embody universal emotions so that they can be perceived from the temporal side of the world. Note how it is that the ideas wait "Till Music loose them, fit each filmily / With form enough to know and name it by" (ll. 261–262): ideas persist yet are only known when a fit form is periodically found. Browning returns to the German Romantic metaphor of night and day to denote this manifestation: "Nor to such appeal / Is Music long obdurate: off they steal— / How gently, dawn-doomed phantoms! back come they / Full-blooded with new crimson of broad day— / Passion made palpable once more" (ll. 265–269). Thus, although the musical expression of soul is indeed transitory, Browning shares Schopenhauer's conviction that if it could be fixed, music would completely transmit the transcendent substrate of the world.

The full implication of music for Browning's foundational epistemology is articulated in *La Saisiaz* (1878), a highly personal poem in which Browning professes to look for answers to metaphysical questions from within the scope of reason.<sup>16</sup> *La Saisiaz* has not yet been analyzed for its discussion of music, but this discussion is in fact the symbolic key that Browning provides for our interpretation of the poem. Written after the shockingly sudden death of his good friend Miss A. Egerton-Smith, Browning begins his inquiry into

metaphysics by presenting two ontological conditions of knowledge: that God exists and that the soul is eternal; however, he admits at the start that he cannot fully impart this knowledge to the reader of his poem. Turning first to the idea of music, he attests the futility of speech's aim to express truth: "I shall no more dare to mimic such response in futile speech, / Pass off human lisp as echo of the sphere-song out of reach" (ll. 153–154). Browning later compares the futility of fully translating divine music into human speech to an impossible attempt to extrapolate the sound of a roaring avalanche from the sound of a single clump of earth thrown to the ground. Human speech is unavailing for Browning because it is implicated in conceptual cognition and thus cannot access the noumenal "sphere-song out of reach." Donald Hair has explored in detail the similarity of Browning's conception of speech to John Locke's understanding that the connection between the sign and the signified is entirely arbitrary;<sup>17</sup> however, while it is true that Browning avers the ontological separation of the sign and the signified, it is important to note that he juxtaposes language with music, as he does so many times in his poetry, in order to show that the divine totality (represented by music) is made manifest in the laws of succession and plurality (represented by speech).

Although Browning confirms that he cannot speak of the divine sphere in human language, he also proclaims that knowledge outside of the empirical scope of reason is indeed possible through fancy. It is easy to misunderstand what Browning means by this term; although "fancy" for Coleridge designates the empirical conception of the associative imagination, Browning uses the term "fancy," like Dickens, to refer to Shelley's concept of imagination, the faculty that accesses objective truth. "Fancy" for Browning is not the empirical associative imagination but rather the imaginative faculty that perceives the essences that are inexplicable to the principle of sufficient reason. However, Hair assumes that Browning's notion of fancy, along with his understanding of language, is Lockean and defines it in its empirical sense as "something made up in the mind, something which does not correspond to the relations we actually observe outside us" (p. 265). This leads Hair to conclude that Browning's Lockean theory of language results in his emphasis on the necessity of reason, which despite the relativity of language can still make a judgment and thereby infer a probable relation between name and idea (p. 261).

Yet fancy and fact are ontologically linked for Browning: while fancy is the faculty that apprehends soul, fact comprises soul's manifestation in the empirical laws that condition our perception of the material world. Browning also states that fancy circumvents the conditioned realm of fact and thus has access to the initial cause and of the ultimate effect: "Fact it is I know I know

not something which is fact as much. / What before caused all the causes,  
 what effect of all effects / Haply follows,—these are fancy” (ll. 224–226). Browning expresses this more simply in “Gerard de Lairesse” (“Parleyings,” *CW*, 16: 95–111), when he asserts that fancy deals with “fact unseen but no less fact the same” (l. 152) or, in other words, with facts that the senses cannot see and that reason cannot discern.

Although fancy for Browning apprehends immaterial truth, in grieving for his recently deceased friend in *La Saisiaz*, he longs for more tangible proof of the soul’s afterlife. Thus, in trying to know rationally what he has perceived through fancy, Browning places his argument within the scope of reason, which interacts with the facts of the material world: it is a deliberate exercise that exerts “Sense and thought on fact, and then, from fact educing fit surmise” (l. 522). Within the realm of mind, Browning entertains a series of conjectures—that God seems good and wise or that hope for the afterlife proves the existence of the afterlife—and follows their logical implications; yet the weakness of these conjectures, as Browning sees it, is that they engage in circular reasoning, since the proof of such a surmise can only be sought in its own premise.

Browning continues to explore these suppositions, what he terms “conjecture styled belief,” (l. 233) by conditionally positing the complete subjectivity of all experience, which is the necessary end point of empirical philosophy. Browning notes that subjectivity is an idea that “loomed immense to fancy” (l. 296)—because in apprehending the wide scope of objective truth, fancy cannot sustain the notion that truth is subjective and particular to every individual—but he explains that subjectivity is far more palatable to reason. Through calculation and the balancing of data, reason can “postulate omnipotence” (l. 294) and deduce a moral judgment; yet Browning observes that if fancy (the pursuit of objective truth) were attempted through fact (knowledge that is only derived from sensory experience), the results would be fruitless because of their bounded nature.

In a brief, yet crucial, part of the poem that has been overlooked, Browning turns again to music to symbolize the realm of soul that cannot be discerned through the principle of sufficient reason. Taking a rest from logic, his “brain o’erloaded” (l. 380), Browning passionately asks whether he has forgotten “the open vast where soon or late converged / Ways through winding?—world-wide heaven-high sea where music slept or surged / As the angel had ascendant, and Beethoven’s Titan mace / Smote the immense to storm Mozart would by a finger’s lifting chase?” (ll. 381–384). Music precedes the sound that brings it forth: music sleeps until it is stirred up by Beethoven’s divine genius, his “Titan mace,” and is pursued by Mozart’s dexterous touch. Here Browning

utilizes the same language as E. T. A. Hoffmann, who proclaimed in his famous 1810 “Review of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony” that Beethoven’s music enables the listener to transcend the senses and to be transported directly to the infinite realm.<sup>18</sup> The night-realm of music is the space of the noumenal, and the compressed alliteration within “world-wide heaven-high sea” holds together the oppositional axes of heaven and earth to denote how music, as the expression of the ideal, encompasses all of existence. At this critical moment in the poem, it is the symbol of music that alerts the reader to an epistemological turning point and to a level of perception that transcends Browning’s recourse to reason.<sup>19</sup>

Browning continues to allude to this unspoken element through the connection that he makes between music and silence. Browning’s cry of “Silence!” (l. 390) appears to check the skeptical conclusions that have thus far ensued from his suppositions about faith, but it also serves a far subtler and more important symbolic meaning. Since one half of a duality has no existence without the other, silence actually presupposes sound’s perpetual presence; it is not the absence of sound but the deafening and imperceptibly potential presence of sound. Since both silence and music express noumenal truth, they precede the temporal iterations of sound; therefore, the two terms are equated in Romantic music philosophy. It is this ontological equality of music and silence that provides an explanation for why Wagner exclaimed that Beethoven first heard music after becoming deaf.<sup>20</sup>

Browning contrasts his concept of silence with that of muteness to distinguish between fancy and reason. In contrast to silence, muteness is a linear, temporal event during which sound is truly switched off; it belongs to the realm of phenomena, co-occurring with, rather than preceding, sound. Therefore, when Browning’s conjectures have to grapple with “Fact’s inexorable ruling ‘Outside fact, surmise be mute!’” (l. 392), he realizes that surmise can have no voice in fact’s phenomenal domain, and just as sound cannot be glimpsed in muteness, Browning implies that truth cannot be reached through reason. Indeed, logical suppositions are bounded within the principle of sufficient reason: they inscribe a circle beyond which they may not venture. By contrast, Browning shows how fancy lies outside of reason’s bounded circle, encompassing fact. Although the intimations of fancy cannot be logically proven, it has a vantage of the totality that is beyond the reach of reason: “Thus have we come back full circle: fancy’s footsteps one by one / Go their round conducting reason to the point where they begun” (ll. 525–526). Reason arrives at the place where it began—unable to prove or disprove the fancy’s perception of the divine, which can only be expressed in the poem by the symbol of music.<sup>21</sup>

Browning revisits the correlation between music and fancy in "Flute Music, with an Accompaniment."<sup>22</sup> Two lovers walking through the forest hear a flutist playing music in the distance, which elicits a debate between the two speakers as to the merits of the work. Penelope Gay argues that the two distinct responses to the overheard composition reflect Browning's empirical view that what music can express is ultimately circumscribed by subjective interpretation;<sup>23</sup> however, this is actually another instance of Browning utilizing the Romantic distinction between music as idea and music as form to explore the epistemological faculties of fancy and reason. The man perceives the distant notes to carry a fresh expression of the eternal, universal emotion of love, declaring that such an experience could not be entirely of this world: "Holds earth such a wonder? / Fairy-mortal, soul-sense-fusing / Past thought's power to sunder!" (ll. 42–44). Representing fancy, he proclaims that rational thought cannot sunder his imaginative perception of the composition, which intuits in the notes an expression of the ideal realm. The female speaker, however, maintains the opposite position and asks him to look at the facts. Analyzing the music for its technical imperfections, she insists that the player is most likely an amateur musician practicing his notes. Rather than demonstrating the subjectivity of experience, Browning shows that the woman, in perceiving the composition through her reason, can only consider music as consisting of form and not as serving as a vessel for transcendent truth.

Although it is Browning's conviction that fancy circumvents the principle of sufficient reason to apprehend noumenal truth, it is also his view that its insights cannot be fully embodied in art, which, in contrast to music, is implicated in the processes of conceptual thought; therefore, the symbol of music also becomes an important means through which Browning discusses the idealism of the subjective poet. Indeed, Browning turns to music again and again in his early poetry to discuss the relationship between idealism, his early idol Shelley, and the development of his objective poetics. The correlation that Browning sees between music and the Romantic poet is unequivocally stated in his 1851 "Essay on Shelley."<sup>24</sup> Browning defines Shelley as the archetypal subjective poet who seeks, through his own soul, "Not what man sees, but what God sees—the Ideas of Plato" (CW, 5: 138). Shelley glimpsed in "the universe, nature and man, their actual state of perfection in imperfection" (5: 142), and since he was not willing to accept "the manifold partial developments of beauty and good on every side," he left "them the ultimates he found them" (5: 142). It is this interpretation of Shelley's enduring idealism that leads Browning to pronounce that Shelley was "moved by and suffused with a music

at once of the soul and the sense" (5: 143), where music symbolizes Shelley's acute perception of the existence of ideal forms.

Browning invokes music and its implications for questions of epistemology in his very first published poem, *Pauline: The Fragment of a Confession* (1833), to explore his youthful passion for Shelley and his relationship to idealism.<sup>25</sup> When the poet-narrator recounts to Pauline his journey from the first intimations of poetic aspiration to his mature poetic stance, he explains how Shelley's idealism set him the task: "To disentangle, gather sense from song: / Since, song-inwoven, lurked there words which seemed / A key to a new world, the muttering / Of angels, something yet unguessed by man" (ll. 413–416). Shelley's poetry is song—is music—because it speaks of and takes the young poet to the Platonic ideas that he had begun to perceive through fancy; however, the challenge for the narrator, and for Browning, is to find out whether he can ultimately realize or "gather sense" from these ideal forms that he follows in Shelley's bewitching song. Yet upon facing the real world, the narrator soon realizes that no ideal can ever be fully realized, precipitating his disillusion and despair. Declaring that he will no longer look within, the maturing poet apprehends the fundamental transition that has taken place in his poetic philosophy, telling his lover, "I aim not even to catch a tone / Of harmonies he [Shelley] called profusely up" (ll. 216–217). Nevertheless, he maintains that Shelley's song can still be heard: "A melody some wondrous singer sings, / Which, though it haunt men oft in the still eve, / They dream not to essay; yet it no less / But more is honoured" (ll. 222–225), demonstrating that rather than renouncing Shelley, Browning makes his music an abiding symbol for the noumenal aspect of the world that precedes its imperfect material manifestation.

Browning continues to use the symbol of music in *Paracelsus* (1835) to delineate both Paracelsus's and the poet Aprile's failed quests for the absolute (CW, 1: 64–266). Aprile explains to Paracelsus that his plight has been to love infinitely and to be loved infinitely in return, and in striving to give form to all the beauties of nature and passions of humanity, he has endeavored in vain: "to perfect and consummate all, / Even as a luminous haze links star to star, / I would supply all chasms with music, breathing / Mysterious motions of the soul, no way / To be defined save in strange melodies (bk. 2, ll. 475–479). Although Aprile looks to the forms of the material world, his desire to encompass all of them is akin to the way Paracelsus seeks complete knowledge. The poet concedes to Paracelsus that he knew that his potential to fully embody each of the world's disparate forms was beyond his "mortal power" (bk. 2, l. 586) and that he should have chosen one and given it "entire / In beauty,

to the world" (bk. 2, ll. 584–585). Aprile also conceives of Paracelsus's quest for the absolute as song: "Sing thou, and I will sit / Beside, and call deep silence for thy songs, / And worship thee" (bk. 2, ll. 374–376); furthermore, when Paracelsus's dreams of divine knowledge vanish, "they pass in song!" (bk. 4, l. 189).

The Romantic conception that music precedes thought is utilized by Browning in *Pauline* when the poet-speaker compares the early stirrings of soul to a bard who first plays music and then translates these intuitions into the rational realm of words, or the bard's song: "And first I sang as I in dream have seen / Music wait on a lyrist for some thought, / Yet singing to herself until it came" (ll. 377–379). In *Sordello*, Browning turns again to the role of the bard who is a musician, as well as a poet who crafts the words of his songs, to express the problem of realizing fully in the phenomenal world the intimations of the soul.<sup>26</sup> *Sordello* finds himself "Sundered in twain" (bk. 2, l. 657) when he discovers that language is not able to express what the fancy conceives. Browning returns to the symbol of music to express this dilemma. *Sordello* wished to capture the harmony of all nature in his song, but "Meditate / Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord / And the whole music it was framed afford,— / The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck / One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck" (bk. 6, ll. 528–532). In focusing exclusively on the underlying noumenal essence of the natural world, the harmony of the "cluster-chord," *Sordello* has tried to furnish the music that frames this totality, and since this is only partially rendered, he finds that the finger that should have plucked one note at a time is unable to play at all.

Michael Yetman views Browning's turn to objective poetry as an exorcism of Shelley's subjective poetry, but Britta Martens observes how Browning often looked for an objective poetic that might retain his lyrical ideal.<sup>27</sup> However, because Martens views Browning's definition of the objective poet as missing the "transcendental component" of the subjective poet, she concludes that Browning necessarily undermines the pursuit of transcendent truth that he sees as defining the Romantic project (p. 165). I would argue, however, that although Browning defines the objective poet in contrast to the subjective poet as "one whose endeavour has been to reproduce things external," this does not exclude Shelley's idealism because Browning views the objective world as embodied from the ideal ("Essay on Shelley," *CW*, 5: 137).

Browning reveals this conviction explicitly in his explanation that the "double faculty" of the objective poet sees "external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply, than is possible to the average mind"—seeing in the object what

the noumenal substrate originally endeavored to form, but he is also “so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrower comprehension” that he sees the idea in its necessarily lower forms of material manifestation. This double faculty extends beyond an object as it is empirically presented to perceive both its ideal content and its empirical form in order to help those people “who would have missed the deeper meaning and enjoyment of the original object” (“Essay on Shelley,” CW, 5: 137).

The objective poet must find a fit form to present the object as both ideal and real, and Browning finds this in the monologue. E. Warwick Slinn and Loy D. Martin view Browning’s development of the dramatic monologue as a Victorian response to Romantic epistemology, both considering the monologue as a testament to the poststructural assumption that there is no reality independent of thought or language.<sup>28</sup> As the recent philosophical trend of speculative realism notes, this “correlationism” in twentieth-century critical theory, as Quentin Meillassoux terms it, is itself a further articulation of the Kantian argument that it is impossible to know the thing-in-itself outside of the a priori forms of perception.<sup>29</sup> Browning agrees with Schopenhauer that the majority of humankind lives within this principle of sufficient reason—a point that Browning implies in his “Essay on Shelley”; yet both Browning and Schopenhauer depart from Kant by using Romantic music philosophy to show that there are two distinct ways of looking at the object: through reason as a series of empirical and logical relations or through fancy as the manifested aspect of the noumenal realm. Browning and Schopenhauer take into account those aspects of psychology that anticipate critical theory, yet their foundational epistemology allows them to overstep the attendant conclusion that it undermines the possibility of absolute truth.

In viewing the world through fancy, Schopenhauer declares that “we could just as well call the world embodied music as embodied will” since, like music, the world embodies the inner essential spirit of every phenomenon (pp. 262–263). Carlyle invokes music to make the same argument in his *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*—lectures that Browning attended in 1840—when he exclaims, “The seeing eye! It is this that discloses the inner harmony of things; what Nature meant, what musical idea Nature has wrapped up in these often rough embodiments” (p. 67).<sup>30</sup> Writing to Joseph Milsand during the composition of *Men and Women*, Browning explained that he was attempting “‘Lyrics,’ with more music and painting than before, so as to get people to hear and see.”<sup>31</sup> The correlation between music and painting expresses how the monologue for Browning, like humankind itself, is

embodied music. This means that its objective form comprises both the realms of will and representation, the ideal and its embodiment in the real. Indeed, Browning's speakers are the "rough embodiments," and the "musical idea" is not only the germ of truth that Browning sees in every one of his speakers but also the philosophical idea that each monologue conveys. In presenting these personas as an object for the "co-operating fancy" of the reader, Browning's monologues illuminate what Shaw terms the "astonishing (and often disturbing) life of ideas," as well as revealing what Browning sees as crucial problems of epistemology.<sup>32</sup>

Browning's music monologues are an important example of how Browning reveals ideas through an existential problem posed by one of his speakers. Indeed, although Browning's music monologues, "Abt Vogler" (1864),<sup>33</sup> "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" (1855; "Men and Women," *CW*, 5: 285–292), and "A Toccata of Galuppi's" (1855; "Men and Women," *CW*, 5: 197–199), have not been seen to encompass one unified idea about music, in the light of Browning's music symbolism, it is apparent that these monologues are companion pieces in which Browning uses music to express his foundational Romantic epistemology. For Browning, music is both numerical form and ideal content: while reason may only span the temporal structure of music, it is fancy that perceives music as noumenal expression, and this becomes the focal point through which Browning explores the ironic tension between the ideal and its problematic manifestation in the realms of art ("Abt Vogler"), religion ("Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha"), and science ("A Toccata of Galuppi").

Since both the speaker of a monologue and the linguistic action of the monologue itself necessarily belong to the world of representation, Browning begins "Abt Vogler" with the composition that Vogler builds in his mind, the external laws of conceptual thought that strive to express internal soul. The keys of Vogler's organ are the tools that express sound, and Browning equates the musician's process of composition with Solomon's call for the creatures of earth, heaven, and hell to build his palace. Just as Browning does in "Charles Avison," he uses architectural imagery to show that this is the temporal form of music that belongs to conditioned laws of the material world; yet Browning emphasizes that Vogler's composition is fashioned out of notes that would have no intrinsic meaning without his initial divine inspiration, just as Solomon's host is also the manifestation of an internal noumenal force: they "rush into sight at once as he named the ineffable Name" (l. 6). Continuing this imagery of temporal manifestation, Vogler's notes "build / broad on the roots of things, / Then

swim up again into sight" (ll. 14–15); they are built "fearless of flame, flat on the nether springs," (l. 16) and yet his composition at this point in the poem has failed to express the totality of his initial inspiration.

Vogler knows that notes by themselves are governed by finite rules, and thus like the other art forms of poetry and painting, it is "art in obedience to laws" (l. 47); however, Browning shows that the combination of three or more notes into harmony sparks something altogether more than the sum of its constituent notes, and it is only in this whole that Vogler is able to encapsulate his initial inspiration: "And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man, / That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star" (ll. 51–52). Transcending the outer forms of conceptual knowledge—the laws of cause and effect that govern the arrangement of the individual notes, Vogler's music "is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can, / Existent behind all laws, that made them, and, lo, they are!" (ll. 49–50).

Despite the fact that Vogler's harmonies express his soul, music is by nature elusive and transitory. The tension that Vogler feels between his infinite music and its finite embodiment is very similar to the experiences of Wackenroder and Tieck's fictional musician, Joseph Berlinger, who is torn between his ecstatic, transcendent flights with music and the inevitable descent into the material realm.<sup>34</sup> However, although music is fleeting, Browning uses music in "Abt Vogler" as a symbol for the ideal forms that are perceived by feeling and fancy but cannot be fully expressed in the world of sense. Thus, when Vogler declares, "Well, it is earth with me" (l. 89), it is not a pessimistic view of music or a condemnation of the material world, as it is for Berlinger, but rather a recognition that only in heaven will things exist in their inner essence and not in their phenomenal form: "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist; / Not its semblance, but itself" (ll. 73–74).

While Vogler's music expresses soul, the church organist who plays the fictional Master Hugues's fugue in "Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha" cannot get to the inner truth of Hugues's work: "So your fugue broadens and thickens, / Greatens and deepens and lengthens, / Till we exclaim—'But where's music, the dickens?'" (ll. 96–98). It may initially appear strange to ask for music considering that the speaker is in the process of playing Hugues's composition, yet it is explained by the fact that, in looking for the "music" in Master Hugues's arrangement, the speaker holds the Romantic view that believes music can convey ideal content, rather than an empirical view that sees music to consist in form. The struggling player imagines Master Hugues reprimanding him for knowing the notes but not understanding the composer's purpose. However, the speaker perceives that Hugues's notion of success is superficially based on

the technical dexterity that separates him from other players when, in contrast to Hugues, the speaker is looking for the inner meaning of the music that has a significance beyond form.

Browning engages questions of epistemology through this tension between music as form and music as content: since Hugues's fugue does not reach beyond its material structure, Browning uses the song's form as a metaphor for the epistemological faculty of reason that can only interact with the phenomenal realm.<sup>35</sup> While Vogler's composition embodies music—the expression of his soul—Browning implies that Master Hugues's fugue only reflects the futile intellectualizing of the modern age: “Nothings grow something which quietly closes / Heaven's earnest eye: not a glimpse of the far land / Gets through our comments and glozes” (ll. 118–120). In likening the artificiality of Hugues's fugue to the web that people weave in their lives through the intellect or through reason—“Such a web, simple and subtle, / Weave we on earth here in impotent strife” (ll. 107–108)—the speaker exclaims that instead of viewing “God's gold” (l. 114) or allowing “a glimpse of the far land” (l. 119), Hugues's dexterous fugue merely obscures it.<sup>36</sup> This has broader philosophical significance for Browning as it reaffirms his personal conviction in *La Saisiaz* that religious ideas cannot be known through reason but can only be apprehended by feeling and fancy.

The toccata is a form that, like the fugue, showcases a player's technical dexterity, and Browning shows in “A Toccata of Galuppi's” that Galuppi's music, in a way similar to Master Hugues's music, is unable to transcend the material realm. The speaker of Browning's monologue is a nineteenth-century scientist, who upon listening to Galuppi's composition imaginatively projects himself into the world that is embodied in the composer's music. Although on the surface there appears to be a discrepancy between what the speaker perceives as Galuppi's “stately” (l. 18) and “cold” (l. 33) music and the gay frivolity of the Venetians, the fact that the progression of Galuppi's chords mirrors their thoughts—“What? Those lesser thirds so plaintive, sixths diminished, sigh on sigh, / Told them something?” (ll. 19–20)—shows that Browning means Galuppi's toccata to be an analogue of eighteenth-century Venetian society. That Galuppi's toccata is unable to express the ideal is expressed in the poem by the very fact that it reminds the revelers of their inevitable mortality: “Those suspensions, those solutions—‘Must we die?’” (l. 20). The speaker recognizes that the Venetians are desperately looking for confirmation of their immortality in Galuppi's music and that this desire is mirrored in the expected resolution of the toccata: “Hark, the dominant's persistence till it must be answered to!” (l. 24).

That Galuppi's "octave struck an answer" (l. 25) seems to suggest a musical resolution, and critics have varied in their view as to whether returning to the tonic is positive or negative in its implications;<sup>37</sup> yet I would argue that it is Galuppi's inability to answer the Venetians that is the true crux of the poem. While the Venetians have been seemingly placated by the confirmation that they find in Galuppi's music, the speaker recognizes that his toccata only offers a misleading resolution. The key issue here is that although Galuppi appears to resolve the Venetians' mortal anxiety by raising the octave in his toccata, thereby returning to the tonic that provides the resolution, it is crucial to consider that, in the higher octave, Galuppi remains within the same dominant key; therefore, his elevation to the next octave does not evoke anything different harmonically, or symbolically, for the listener. Constricted by counterpoint, Galuppi's toccata is not able to rise above its insistent melodic structure into a finer expression of harmony that would enable him to reach truth. It is this hollow sense of elevation that the speaker recognizes when he cries at the start of the poem, "Oh Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find! / I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind; / But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind!" (ll. 1–3). The speaker gives Galuppi credit for providing an ostensible answer to what the Venetians are looking for in his music, but he sees that Galuppi is ultimately unable to raise them to a perception of the ideal.

The significance of music for matters of epistemology is made clear in the poem when the speaker, finding a correlation between his own scientific recourse to reason and Galuppi's music, begins to doubt the immortality of his own soul. The scientist imagines Galuppi denouncing the Venetians for their sensuality and envisions Galuppi comparing the speaker's scientific pursuits against such frivolity, yet his comments are clearly ironic in tone toward the speaker's achievements: "Yours for instance: you know physics, something of geology, / Mathematics are your pastime; souls shall rise in their degree; / Butterflies may dread extinction,—you'll not die, it cannot be!" (ll. 37–39). Schopenhauer argues that knowledge derived from the fields of mathematics and science belongs to the world of representation since, in evaluating and comparing one representation to another, people fail to perceive the mysterious inner nature of these phenomena (pp. 96–97). Similarly, Galuppi's sardonic praise implicitly connects the speaker's interest in mathematics and science with the sensory life of the Venetians to show that he too is unable to glimpse the ideal. When the speaker laments the transitory nature of life at the end of the monologue, he is left feeling "chilly and grown old" (l. 45), which reveals the doubt that he feels about the spiritual efficacy of reason.

Belonging to the world of representation, Browning's speakers struggle in varying ways with apprehending or articulating the nature of the ideal, and in the music monologues, music is a symbol through which Browning embodies his conviction that the intellect cannot reach religious and scientific truth as it only operates within the principle of sufficient reason. Browning's poet-narrator returns to music in the last lines of *The Ring and the Book* to restate this correlation between music, fancy, and the project of the objective poet.<sup>38</sup>

—Art may tell a truth

Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,  
 Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.  
 So you may paint your picture, twice show truth,  
 Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—  
 So, note by note, bring music from your mind,  
 Deeper then ever Beethoven dived,—  
 So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,  
 Suffice the eye and save the soul beside. (bk. 12, ll. 859–867)

In seeking to re-create the external world of representation, the objective poet “twice show[s] truth” because, in depicting empirical reality, he also points to the eternal reality that is the source of its phenomenal form—beyond the “mere imagery on the wall.” Turning to music and to Beethoven, the archetypal Romantic musician, Browning asserts that the objective poet must see the facts of the material world musically—in other words, with fancy—in order to perceive their obfuscated meanings. In a series of monologues that aver the relativity of truth when only looked for within the confines of reason, it is the role of the objective poet to reveal the relationship between the real and the ideal. Indeed, in *The Ring and the Book*, Browning offers a key to Pompilia's innocence when Caponsacchi observes how “music seemed / Always to hover just above her lips / Not settle,—break a silence music too” (bk. 6, ll. 1196–1198). Music philosophy is a central way that Browning conceived of the relationship between the noumenal realm and its imperfect embodiment in the material. If seen through fancy, these phenomenal forms, while at a remove from what the ideal endeavored to form, are still expressions of music. This is why Browning asks us again in “The Two Poets of Croisic” to consider whether “Our simulated thunderclaps / Which tell us counterfeited truths—these same / Are—sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?” (CW, 14: 129–209; 64: ll. 505–507).

## Notes

- 1 See Alisa Clapp-Intyre, *Angelic Airs, Subversive Songs: Music as Social Discourse in the Victorian Novel* (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2002); Sophie Fuller and Nicky Losseff, eds., *The Idea of Music in Victorian Fiction* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2004); Phyllis Weliver, ed., *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry* (Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005); Michael Allis, *British Music and Literary Context: Artistic Connections in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Woodbridge, U.K.: Boydell, 2012); Phyllis Weliver, *The Musical Crowd in English Fiction, 1840–1910: Class, Culture and Nation* (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Ruth A. Solie, *Music in Other Words: Victorian Conversations* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2004).
- 2 Felicia Bonaparte, *The Poetics of Poesis: The Making of Nineteenth-Century English Fiction* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2016), p. 195.
- 3 For a detailed analysis of the transition from the eighteenth-century empirical concept of music to the nineteenth-century idealist concept of music, see Mark Evan Bonds, *Music as Thought: Listening to the Symphony in the Age of Beethoven* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2006).
- 4 For a comprehensive discussion of music and philosophy in Victorian fiction, see Bonaparte, *Poetics of Poesis*.
- 5 See Herbert Eveleth Greene, "Browning's Knowledge of Music," *PMLA* 62 (1947): 1095–1099; R. W. S. Mendl, "Robert Browning, the Poet-Musician," *Music and Letters* 42 (1961): 141–150; Penelope Gay, "Browning and Music," in *Robert Browning*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: G. Bell, 1974), pp. 211–230; Malcolm Richardson, "Robert Browning's Taste in Music," *Browning Institute Studies* 6 (1978): 105–116; Nachum Schoffman, *There Is No Truer Truth: The Musical Aspect of Browning's Poetry* (New York: Greenwood, 1991).
- 6 George M. Ridenour also explores the symbol of music as an expression of fancy and fact, but he does not pursue the broader epistemological implications of music for Browning's poetic theory. See Ridenour, "Browning's Music Poems: Fancy and Fact," *PMLA* 78 (1963): 369–377.
- 7 Leslie White, "'Uproar in the Echo': Browning's Vitalist Beginnings," *Browning Institute Studies* 15 (1987): 91–103; William Lyon Phelps, "Browning, Schopenhauer, and Music," *North American Review* 206 (1917): 622–627; Apryl Lea Denny Heath, "Phelps, Browning, Schopenhauer and Music," *Comparative Literature Studies* 22 (1985): 211–217.
- 8 Robert Browning to Mrs. Ernest Benzon, 29 July 1876, Armstrong-Browning Library, Baylor Univ., Waco, Tex.; quoted in White p. 91.
- 9 W. David Shaw, *The Lucid Veil: Poetic Truth in the Victorian Age* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987).
- 10 Patricia Diane Rigg, *Robert Browning's Romantic Irony in the Ring and the Book* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 1999); Clyde de L. Ryals, *Becoming Browning: The Poems and Plays of Robert Browning, 1833–1846* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1983).

- 11 Although Browning appears taken aback by the deep correlation that he finds between himself and Schopenhauer's philosophy, his discovery is not surprising considering the wider influence of the earlier German Romantic movement that also culminated in Schopenhauer's work. Gay argues that British writers were not familiar with Continental developments in music theory, yet Bonaparte has demonstrated the immense impact of German Romantic texts on the British Romantics and on the Victorians, citing the many works that were translated into English and then published and republished throughout the nineteenth century. Moreover, John Maynard notes that the young poet would have undoubtedly been exposed to the ideas of German Romanticism when he studied under Ludwig von Mühlenfels at the University of London. Maynard, *Browning's Youth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), p. 274. And Browning shows his familiarity with the early German Romantic group when he wrote to Alfred Domett in 1843 to say that he had been learning to read German through a study of Tieck and Schlegel's translations of Shakespeare. Robert Browning to Alfred Domett, March 5, 1843, in Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Brownings' Correspondence*, 24 vols., ed. Philip Kelley and Ronald Hudson (Winfield, Kan.: Wedgestone, 1988), 6: 352–353. Mary Ellis Gibson observes that Browning would have been familiar with the critical vocabulary of the Schlegels, Schiller, and Goethe as it was reproduced in the works of Henry Crabbe Robinson, John Gibson Lockhart, Thomas De Quincey, Carlyle, and Coleridge, among many others, especially in the essays that were published by W. J. Fox in the *Monthly Repository* in 1833. Gibson, *History and the Prism of Art: Browning's Poetic Experiments* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 73–74. Browning would have undoubtedly engaged with the early German Romantic movement under the aegis of his close friend Thomas Carlyle, who was a passionate proponent and disseminator of German Romantic ideas, and also through his relationship with Elizabeth Barrett, who was an avid reader of German Romantic criticism. Although Robert Browning declared to the Browning Society that he had not read Kant, Schelling, or Hegel, Shaw argues in *The Lucid Veil* that “Browning's comments to overly keen admirers in the Browning Societies are seldom ingenuous, and in discouraging the notion that he is merely a versifier of other men's ideas Browning seems to me to be seriously minimizing his idealist heritage” (p. 235).
- 12 Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 1, trans. E. F. J. Payne (New York: Dover, 1958).
- 13 Robert Browning, “Parleying with Certain People Of Importance In Their Day,” in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 16, ed. Susan Crowl and Roma A. King (Waco, Tex.: Baylor Univ. Press; Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 112–129.
- 14 Novalis, *Hymns to the Night*, trans. Dick Higgins (Kingston, N.Y.: McPherson, 1988). Thomas Carlyle reviewed Novalis's work in his essay “Novalis,” *Foreign Review* 4 (July 1829).
- 15 Marc R. Plamondon, “‘What Do You Mean by Your Mountainous Fugues?: A Musical Reading of Browning's ‘A Toccata of Galuppi’s’ and ‘Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha,’” *VP* 37, no. 3 (1999): 309–332.

- 16 Robert Browning, "The Agamemnon of Aeschylus," "La Saisiaz and The Two Poets of Croisic," and "Dramatic Idyls, first series," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 14, ed. John C. Berkey, Michael Bright, David Ewbank, and Paul D. L. Turner (Waco, Tex.: Baylor Univ. Press; Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 97–123.
- 17 Donald S. Hair, *Robert Browning's Language* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1999).
- 18 E. T. A. Hoffmann, "Review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony," in *E. T. A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings: Kreisleriana, The Poet and the Composer, Music Criticism*, ed. David Charlton, trans. Martyn Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), pp. 381–384. See also the similar language used by Browning in his comment to Isa Blagden about Beethoven's music: "the last time I saw Hallé, at his own house, he played Beethoven's wonderful last Sonata . . . in which the very gates of Heaven seem opening." Browning to Blagden, August 19, 1864, in *Dearest Isa: Robert Browning's Letters to Isabella Blagden*, ed. Edward C. McAleer (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1951), p. 191.
- 19 F. E. L. Priestly also recognizes a distinction between feeling and thought in *La Saisiaz*, but he still analyzes fancy in its empirical sense. Priestly, "A Reading of *La Saisiaz*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 25 (1955): 47–59.
- 20 "A musician sans ears!—Can one conceive an eyeless painter? But the blinded *Seer* we know. Tiresias to whom the world of Appearance has closed itself, and whose inner eye beholds instead the ground of all appearances: his fellow is the deaf musician who now, untroubled by life's uproar, but listens to his inner harmonies, now from his depths but speaks to that world—for it has nothing more to tell him. So is genius freed from all outside it, at home forever with and in itself. Whoso could then have seen Beethoven with the vision of Tiresias, what a wonder must have opened to him: a world walking among men,—the In-itself of the world as a living, moving man!" Richard Wagner, "Beethoven," in *Richard Wagner's Prose Works*, vol. 5, *Actors and Singers*, trans. William Ashton Ellis (1896), <http://users.belgacom.net/wagnerlibrary/prose/wlpr0133.htm>.
- 21 W. David Shaw also discusses the epistemological meaning of silence for Browning: "There seem to be three reasons for Browning's failure to speak the words a reader most wants to hear. Silence may proceed from a depth of reserve. A speaker may be afraid of telling secrets that portray or profane a hidden god. More disturbingly, the unheard words may be Browning's way of hinting there is no secret to tell. Behind his plenitude of masks, the role-player may find only the silence of a void. A third possibility is that the poet of silence may fashion meanings that are unspeakable not because they are too empty to be uttered, but because they are too full. The silence of reserve and the silence of emptiness then yield to a third form of silence—a silence that marks the amazed possession of all words." Shaw, *Victorians and Mystery: Crises of Representation* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), p. 197. My reading of Browning's theory of music supports Shaw's third reason for the use of silence in Browning's poetry.
- 22 Robert Browning, "Asolando," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 17, ed. Ashby Bland Crowder and Allen C. Dooley (Waco, Tex.: Baylor Univ. Press; Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 2011), pp. 56–62.

- 23 Penelope Gay, "Browning and Music," in Armstrong, *Robert Browning*, pp. 211–230.
- 24 Robert Browning, "A Soul's Tragedy," "Poems (1849)," "Christmas-Eve and Easter-Day," "Essay on Shelley," and "Men and Women, volume 1," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 5, ed. Roma A. King and Jack W. Herring (Waco, Tex.: Baylor Univ. Press; Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1981), pp. 135–151.
- 25 Robert Browning, "Pauline" and "Paracelsus," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 1, ed. John Berkey and Morse Peckham (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1969), pp. 6–52.
- 26 Robert Browning, "Strafford" and "Sordello," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A. King, vol. 2, ed. John C. Berkey, Roma A. King, and Gordon Pitts (Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 121–335.
- 27 Michael G. Yetman, "Exorcising Shelley out of Browning: 'Sordello' and the Problem of Poetic Identity," *VP* 13, no. 2 (1975): 79–98; Britta Martens, *Browning, Victorian Poetics and the Romantic Legacy: Challenging the Personal Voice* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate, 2011). Elizabeth Helsinger also notes how Browning is "powerfully drawn to the idea of song, albeit always to celebrate its possibilities for other poets, not himself (for Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett, or Swinburne)." Helsinger, *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2015), p. 30. It is interesting for my argument that Helsinger also observes how Browning does not turn from song but rather embeds song in his poetry: "Yet song appears in his poems, however fragmentary and overheard, hedged round by the vigorously inventive talk of his speakers" (p. 30).
- 28 E. Warwick Slinn, *Browning and the Fictions of Identity* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Loy D. Martin, *Browning's Dramatic Monologues and the Post-Romantic Subject* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985).
- 29 Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, "Towards a Speculative Philosophy," in *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism*, ed. Levi Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman (Melbourne: re.press, 2011), pp. 1–18.
- 30 Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Teddington, U.K.: Echo Library, 2007), p. 67.
- 31 Robert Browning to Joseph Milsand, 24 February 1853, in *Brownings' Correspondence* 18: 339.
- 32 W. David Shaw, *The Dialectical Temper: The Rhetorical Art of Robert Browning* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1968), p. 3.
- 33 Robert Browning, "Men and Women, II," "Ben Karshook's Wisdom," "Last Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Browning," "The Greek Christian Poets and the English Poets by Elizabeth Barrett Browning," "Poetical Works (1863 and 1865)," "Eurydice to Orpheus; A Picture by Leighton," "Dramatis Personae," "A Selection from the Works of Robert Browning," "A Selection from the Poetry of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," "Poetical Works (1868 and 1870)," and "Deaf and Dumb," in *The Complete Works of Robert Browning*, ed. Roma A King, vol. 6, ed. John C. Berkey, Allen C. Dooley, and Susan E. Dooley (Waco, Tex.: Baylor Univ. Press; Athens: Ohio Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 220–225.

- 34 "Many a tear I have shed for him, and I am curiously moved when I survey his life. Why was it the will of Heaven that the conflict between his ethereal enthusiasm and the baseness and wretchedness of earthly existence should so embitter his whole life and should in the end sever forever body from spirit in his divided self?" Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck, *Outpourings of an Art-loving Friar*, trans. Edward Mornin (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1975), pp. 122–123.
- 35 Browning's point is similar to Schopenhauer's argument that in order for a temporal structure of a composition to express music, it "must have come from an immediate knowledge of the inner nature unknown to his faculty of reason; it cannot be imitation brought about with conscious intention by means of concepts, otherwise the music does not express the inner nature of the will itself, but merely imitates its phenomenon inadequately" (p. 263).
- 36 Richard D. Altick also explores Browning's discussion of epistemology in "Master Hugues," although not through the lens of Romantic music philosophy. Altick, "The Symbolism of Browning's 'Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha,'" *VP* 3 (1965): 1–7.
- 37 See Robert C. Schweik, "Art, Mortality, and the Drama of Subjective Response in 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,'" *Browning Institute Studies* 15 (1987): 131–136; Stefan Hawlin, "Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's': How Venice Once Was Dear," *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 41 (1990): 496–509; Edgar F. Harden, "A New Reading of Browning's 'A Toccata of Galuppi's,'" *VP* 11 (1973): 330–336; Plamondon, "What Do You Mean by Your Mountainous Fugues?"
- 38 Robert Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, ed. Thomas J. Collins and Richard D. Altick (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd, 2001).