



The Use of Introspection in Robert Browning's *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession**

Robert Browning'in *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* Adlı Eserinde İçebakış Yönteminin Kullanımı

Pelin KUT BELENLİ**

Abstract

This study argues that Robert Browning uses the method of “introspection,” the psychological method of self-examination or first-person observation of one’s own mental and emotional processes, used by the Victorian psychologists, to represent various psychological states of the speaker in *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833). Accordingly, this study analyses it pursuing the different methods Browning used in the portrayal of the human soul to obtain an insight into the changes in the inner world of humans and to achieve a realistic representation of it. The endeavour of the speaker to achieve self-knowledge through self-analysis and how he is represented as an introspective individual are scrutinised. Furthermore, Browning’s use of the matters of self-consciousness, the first and/or third-person speech, and subjectivity and objectivity—that were discussed and used in the discourse of introspection—to examine the images of the self and subjective experience are studied and illustrated in the analysis of the work. In this analysis, scientific studies conducted by the leading figures in Victorian psychology, and definitions used and discussed by them are used in the discussion.

Keywords: Robert Browning, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*, Introspection, Victorian Psychology, Dramatic Monologue.

Öz

Bu çalışma, Robert Browning'in, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession* (1833) adlı eserindeki ana karakterin farklı ruh hallerinin temsilinde bireyin öz-inceleme veya kendi zihinsel ve duygusal süreçlerini birinci elden gözlemlemesi için psikolojik bir yöntem olarak Viktorya dönemi psikologları tarafından kullanılan “içebakış” yöntemini kullandığını savunmaktadır. Buna göre, bu çalışma, Browning'in insanın iç dünyasındaki değişimlerin özünü anlamak ve bunun gerçekçi bir temsili sunmak amacıyla insan ruhunun tasvirinde kullandığı farklı yöntemleri ele alarak bu şiiri incelemektedir. Ana karakterin öz-inceleme yoluyla benlik bilgisi elde etme çabaları ve içebakışçı bir birey olarak nasıl temsil edildiği farklı boyutlarıyla ele alınmıştır. Ayrıca, Viktorya dönemi kültürü içinde yaşayan Browning'in,

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** Asst. Prof. Dr., Kutahya Dumlupınar University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Department of English Language and Literature. e-mail: pelin.belenli@dpu.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0003-1046-9139

benlik imgeleri ve bireysel deneyimleri incelemek için içebakış bağlamında kullanılan ve tartışılan öz-bilinç, birinci şahıs ve/veya üçüncü şahıs konuşma, öznellik ile nesnellik konularını kullanımı irdelenmektedir. Bu incelemelerde, Viktorya dönemi psikoloji biliminin önde gelen isimleri tarafından yapılan bilimsel çalışmalar ve onlar tarafından kullanılan ve tartışılan tanımlar Browning'in insan ruhunun gelişimini konu ediş şekli tartışılırken kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Robert Browning, *Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession*, İçebakış, Viktorya Dönemi Psikoloji Bilimi, Dramatik Monolog.

Introduction

I strip my mind bare, whose first elements
I shall unveil—not as they struggle forth
In infancy, nor as they now exist,
When I am grown above them and can rule
But in that middle stage when they were full
Yet ere I disposed them to my will;
And then I shall show how these elements
Produced my present state, and what it is.

I am made up of an intensest life,
Of a most clear idea of consciousness
Of self, distinct from all its qualities,
From all affections, passions, feelings, powers;
. . . (Browning, 1833/1969, ll¹. 260-71)

The development of the new “mental science” during the Victorian period gave way to the parallel rise of a “psychological school of poetry” as a result of the interaction between psychological studies and literary texts (Faas, 1988, pp. 30-35; Shuttleworth, 1996, pp. 13-18). As a prominent Victorian man of letters, Robert Browning's work reflects the developments in mental sciences: he was a leading figure in psychological school of poetry since he referred to terms or used words from the new mental science, portrayed the psyche and the inner self of his characters, and reflected ideas concerning human nature (Faas, 1988, pp. 35-72; Shuttleworth, 1996, pp. 13-18). The similarity between the literary writer and the physician who used similar terminology for the analysis of the inner self is evidently observed in Browning's *Pauline*. In this work Browning endeavoured to represent a man who tends to obtain self-knowledge and insight into his past and present lives through self-analysis or inner observation of his own mental and emotional processes or psychological states. This character questions himself, voices his fears, reveals, and expresses his inner truths, desires, yearnings, doubts, uncertainties, hopes, and despair. Browning depicts and examines the psychological states of consciousness, nervousness, doubt/uncertainty, and depression in *Pauline*.² Browning's use of the first-person perspective in the observation, self-conscious examination, and report of the inner self of the persona can be considered as his application of the method of “introspection.” Accordingly, this article argues that Browning's earliest work, as this analysis of *Pauline* claims, represents various psychological states, their causes, and their effects on the thoughts, emotions, decisions, acts, and life of the persona. Discussion on the poem will endeavour to point out the striking resemblance between Browning's poem and “introspection” as a method.

¹ In this study, the poem has been quoted with line numbers instead of page numbers. Accordingly, “l” in parenthetical references indicates “line” and “ll” stands for “lines.”

² Since these psychological states were represented in *Pauline*, their meanings should be clarified briefly. Consciousness is a cognitive state which includes awareness of one's self and situation (“Consciousness,” 2001). Nervousness is an “uneasy” psychological state (“Id,” 2001). Doubt or uncertainty suggests the state of being “unsure,” while certainty is the state of being “certain” (Nugent, 2013). Depression includes the “sense of inadequacy” in a pessimistic way as well as “lack of activity” (“Depression,” 2001).

There was a growing interest in the authorship and readership of psychological matters during the Victorian period. As Paradis and Postlewait (1981) argue, “nineteenth century science became a subject of Victorian literature because it so thoroughly manifested itself throughout Victorian society ... Victorian artists like Tennyson, Eliot, and Hardy often appropriated the images and metaphors of science in order to reflect a contemporary sense of reality” (pp. ix-xii). In addition to the scientists who published their psychological studies, many literary figures produced works regarding psychological topics. As Faas (1988) affirms, “mental science, in its early phase, absorbed much from literature and philosophy as it was to contribute to these disciplines later” (p. 12). The nineteenth-century psychological issues were interdisciplinary, and therefore there was a “common, rather than specialist” intellectual platform where “literary and medical texts played a crucial role” in the expression and negotiation of the anxieties belonging to the period (Rylance, 2000, pp. 28-9; Shuttleworth, 1996, pp. 12-3).

The interaction between literature and the new mental sciences was to a considerable extent based on mutual support and exchange between psychological works and literary texts. While literary writers used psychological cases in their works, medical writers and doctors found examples in literary works for the cases of their patients. These writers could follow one another’s works because they published their studies in the same journals, newspapers, magazines, and other periodicals of the time. One of the most well-known magazines which published such works was *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817-1980) (Shuttleworth, 1996, p. 12). The literary writers thus followed advancements in the new mental science. Inspired by psychological studies published in the periodicals, the Victorian literary writers enjoyed reflecting upon the human mind by handling psychological topics, such as human nature, feelings, sensations, and passions as well as the mysterious and dark soul of man.

Browning’s interest in the human psyche coincided with the Victorian curiosity for similar subjects. “Introspection” was one of the psychological methods of “the growing area of mental science” (Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, 1998, p. xiii), and it was used to observe, examine, and explain psychological states. In this respect, certain states of mind drew the attention of theorists of “introspection” and of Browning. Problems concerning self-consciousness, first and/or third-person speech, and subjectivity and objectivity were handled by these theorists and Browning.

As Johnson states, “Browning’s most characteristic ideas are traceable to certain psychological assumptions adumbrated in the three substantial poems with which he inaugurated his career. These are: ‘Pauline’ (1833), ‘Paracelsus’ (1835), and ‘Sordello’ (1840)” (2000). In *Pauline* Browning employed the topics discussed in Victorian psychology and used terms that were widely referred to in the Victorian psychological discourse, such as “soul” and “mind.” Undoubtedly his reference to the terminology of the new mental science was not restricted to the use of these terms; in many instances, he made the persona relate his examination of the self by using words, such as “analyse,” “observe,” “perception,” “imagination,” “feel(ing),” “thought,” and “state,” which are often included in the definitions, explanations, and theories of Victorian psychologists. This terminology will also be underlined in the analysis of *Pauline* since it displays the poet’s major concern for the inner world of humankind.

There are numerous references to the term “soul” in Browning’s poetry, correspondence, and prefaces. It is not a monosemic word; therefore, some of its lexical meanings and definitions that are related to this study need to be examined before giving a working definition. The following dictionary entries for the term give its modern definitions, and Browning’s use of the word “soul” indicates that his definition would bear resemblances to these. The *OED*, for instance, provides this definition: “The principle of thought and action in man, commonly regarded as an entity distinct from the body; the spiritual part of man in contrast to the purely physical” (“Soul,” def. 2, 1991). Date of earliest citation for this meaning of the word in the *OED* is 888, and date of latest citation is 1829. Since it deals with the principle of thought and action, this definition concerns the cognitive powers of man (these powers denote the mental processes of knowing, perceiving, thinking, reasoning, memory, judgement, imagination, and similar others). The definition also has reference to the animate existence of man in opposition to his bodily existence.

Another definition of the term “soul” in the *OED* concerns the emotional faculty of human beings: “The seat of the emotions, feelings, or sentiments; the emotional part of man’s nature” (def. 3a, 1991). Date of earliest citation for this meaning of the word in the *OED* is 825, and date of latest citation is 1874.

Nonetheless, the term in the *OED* is also related to cognitive capacity: “Intellectual or spiritual power; high development of the mental faculties” (“Soul,” def. 3b, 1991). Date of earliest citation for this meaning of the word in the *OED* is 1604, and date of latest citation is 1888. According to the last definition, having a soul means being endowed with intellectual and spiritual power, or having developed mental faculties. It, here, means human being’s animate entity, as distinct from his physical body, that harbours his personal, cognitive, emotional, and sensory powers which differentiate him from the rest of the creation and thus make up his distinct character. “Soul” as used by Browning is “the human soul” in general, with both its universal and personal aspects and with all its components, such as emotions, feelings, sensations, and passions. The word “soul” also represents “human nature” along with “the human mind” for him since it stands for the perceptions and thoughts of the characters in his poetry.

Another term which was frequently used both by the writers of Victorian mental science and by Browning is “mind.” As Tate (2012) states, “the Victorians used this word with a great deal of conceptual latitude,” and it seems the mind for them was “an indeterminate halfway point between the soul and the brain” (p. 11). “Mind” was used interchangeably with “spirit” and “soul,” and was sometimes interpreted as a “god-given elevation of humans over other animals” (Mandler, 2007, p. 2). Mandler takes Aristotle’s idea of “the soul” as “the actualization of the body’s potential” as the basis of his argument, and further states that “‘mind’ has often been used as a synonym for the ancient sense of ‘spirit’ or ‘soul,’” and “the meaning of mind as ‘soul’ still exists in everyday speech, in philosophy, and even in some psychological writings” (2007, pp. 2-3). In relation to the term “soul,” William James (1890/1950) said “Now ... the Soul manifests its faculty of Memory, now of Reasoning, now of Volition, or again its Imagination or its Appetite” (p. 1). In other words, according to James, the “soul” has several faculties which are also today accepted to be the components of the “mind.” In 1855, a significant writer of the time, Alexander Bain, made a more comprehensive definition of the term “mind.” He argued that “mind” possessed three main attributes: It has “Feeling,” in which he includes Sensation and Emotion, it can “Act” according to “Feeling” and it can “Think” (1855, pp. 1-5). Another reference to the human mind was made by George Man Burrows in *An Inquiry* in 1820. Burrows explained that no one disputed that the human brain was “the seat of the understanding,” and further argued that this organ had been dissected structurally to discover the instruments of the intellectual functions, “by the synthetical operation of which that effect is produced which we call—mind” (p. 5). Browning used the term soul in the sense of “mind,” and as in Bain’s definition of the mind, he developed the character in *Pauline* by fashioning him with certain feelings, acts, ideas, and impressions. His prevalent portrayal of the mental state of this character makes references to the well-known psychological discussions of the day.

Relevant to Browning’s way of dealing with human psychology in *Pauline*, the term “introspection” should be defined and explained. “Introspection,” in the context of Victorian mental science, is known as a psychological method for the first-person examination and observation of one’s own mental and emotional processes and/or psychological states, which requires a self-conscious state. For the Victorians, it was a “scientific methodology” which was based on “inward observation,” and it “remained the primary method of mental research at mid-century, making the first-person perspective the means by which theorists positioned themselves in psychology’s battle of philosophies” (Stolte, 2009, pp. ii-23). The term “introspection” is also commonly understood as the tendency or disposition to examine or observe one’s own mental or emotional state or processes. In this method one looks within for the purpose of soul-searching and self-analysis. According to Dunlap (1912), “‘introspection’ is usually defined in terms which are equivalent to the expression *consciousness scrutinizing itself* [emphasis original]” (para. 3). Indeed, this word’s various definitions by the contemporary and modern theorists usually refer to terms and phrases, such as consciousness, self-scrutiny, looking inward, inner observation, turning the mind upon itself, self-examination, self-analysis, self-contemplation, and soul-searching, as the central acts carried out by the practitioner of “introspection.” Other significant figures who discussed this term were the Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid (1710), the German pioneer Wilhelm Wundt (1832) and the American William James (1842).

Thomas Reid introduced “introspection” as a domain of Victorian mental science relating to self-consciousness and self-revelation. Yet, it should be noted that “introspection” is not limited to the internal observation and the examination of the self; the subject also reports this self-analysis in speech, which shows

that “introspection” also provides information about the inner action of human beings. This means that the subject “generates” “judgements,” “statements,” or “self-ascriptions” about “their own ... mental life” (Schwitzgebel, 2010/2019). These “self-ascriptions ... prompt self-shaping” or “precipitate” “change” (Schwitzgebel, 2010/2019). Similarly, the speaker in *Pauline* expresses judgements and makes statements about himself throughout his monologue in order to change for the better since his personality is marked by the “principle of restlessness” (Browning, 1833/1969, l. 277). As Ryals maintains, “[f]or Browning an entity becomes something so as to become something else, is created to be de-created, is formed so as to be transformed. Chaos → cosmos → chaos and so on *ad infinitum*—the principle of becoming is at the very heart of his thought and practice as a poet” (Ryals, 1983, p. 3). Change and becoming are central to many of the poet’s works; *Pauline* is no exception, and “Browning’s belief in dynamicism and change” is also salient in this poem (Ryals, 1983, p. 3). The speaker’s deliberate self-scrutiny to restore his faith in God, truth, and love (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 1020-21) is introspection for the purpose of self-shaping, and it precipitates change.

“Introspection” was regarded as a problematic method by several Victorian theorists, especially since it was the subject who was to analyse and report their own psychological states, and objectivity was impossible through first-person point of view. As Richards explains, Wundt “included a form of systematic disciplined introspection in his experimental studies of the nature of consciousness” which would overcome the often-raised problem “that the ‘mind’ was private and not open to objective scientific study,” which was then known as “introspection” (2009, p. 114). Indeed, the problems of introspection were many in the sense that its object (mind) was not a physical and visible one, and its subject (the individual) had to report the inner observation in an objective manner which seemed impossible for some theorists. For instance, Reid noted that it is a very challenging task to focus on “the operations” of the human mind “so as to form a distinct notion of them” (1827, p. vi). Therefore, many theorists discussed whether introspection was really a scientific method or not, and if it really could provide objective and scientific knowledge of the mental and emotional states. They had to explain and know “what the ‘mind’ is which ‘one’ attends to” and “what the ‘one’ who attends is” (Dunlap, 1912, para. 13). This can be further explained as follows: the subject who was supposed to analyse his/her mind automatically became an object to be analysed, and the division of attention seemed a problem. These problems were known to both Wundt and James, and they saw them as “numerous difficulties which introspection poses as an objective scientific method” (Richards, 2009, p. 114).

Although these difficulties, or rather the impossibility of attaining impartial self-knowledge through self-analysis were known, “a form of systemic disciplined introspection” continued to be used by Victorian psychologists (Richards, 2009, p. 114). Comte was one of the main figures who expressed his influential “skepticism about the scientific viability of introspection” (Schwitzgebel, 2010/2019). To eliminate the difficulties of the method, some psychologists presented new explanations and provided new insights about the nature of introspection and consciousness.³ However, this pre-Freudian and pre-modern psychological method increasingly lost its value with further discussions on the issue, new theories, and methods in the developing mental science. As Richards further explains, “in practical terms, it was impossible to resolve conflicting findings, more profoundly, however, it was increasingly realised that, on logical and philosophical grounds, it was impossible to observe what was going on in one’s mind, let alone report it, in a totally neutral ‘objective’ way” (2009, p. 114).

This article does not claim to make a final statement about the validity and reliability of introspection as a scientific method. Nor does it aim at proving that the speaker in *Pauline* is objective in his examination

³ Wilhelm Wundt and William James were among the theorists who proposed new ideas against Comte’s argument. James, as a response to Comte’s concern, recommended “immediate retrospection” as a potential solution to the problem (Schwitzgebel, 2010/2019). For further study, see Schwitzgebel, E. (2010/2019). Introspection. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/introspection/#NecFeaIntPro> (Original work published 2010)

of the self. It merely highlights the fact that the speaker has an evident effort to unravel the steps and the progress of his soul through self-analysis “as though [his state was] none of [his]” (Browning, 1833/1969, l. 586). In other words, the speaker clearly states his intention to examine the inner workings of his mind impartially. Yet, again, this is only the speaker’s claim and it cannot be relied on. Whatever the speaker in the poem expresses—including his experience and sensations—he cannot possibly “describe them without interpreting them” (Richards, 2009, p. 114); and once interpretation comes in, objectivity disappears.

Pauline as an Introspective Poem

Pauline: A Fragment of a Confession is an introspective dramatic monologue since the speaker is portrayed as examining his own thoughts, feelings, and decisions in a self-conscious state, trying to perceive and understand his own mental and emotional processes, and expressing his psychological state to Pauline, his implied listener. As Honan argues, Pauline as “a living audience” “motivates the narrator’s self-revelations” (1961, p. 15). Browning reveals the inner world of his poet-character and exposes his mood by using another character in the role of a listener who, somehow, causes the persona to express his emotions, impulses, passions, yearnings, and obsessions in his speech. The solipsistic dramatic speaker launches into his first-person monologue about the “elements” of his “mind” which “produced [his] present state, and what it is” (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 260-7). As Kennedy and Hair also suggest, “the dramatic action is entirely within, and the feelings and emotions are the characters that propel it” (2007, p. 41). The speaker’s efforts to chronicle all the stages of his life by using the memories of his past life and mental and emotional experiences are his introspective observation of his inner self at the present time.

Pauline’s speaker is “restless” (Browning, 1833/1969, 277), in search of knowledge about “the workings of [his] own mind,” to use the terms of Stout’s 1898 definition of introspection (p. 14). Introspection could not be used by “children, animals, or mentally disturbed individuals” and “only the normal adult human could serve as a subject” (Robinson, 1981, p. 42). Similarly, Browning represents *Pauline*’s speaker as a highly self-conscious adult man (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 261-63) and makes him declare that his aim is self-scrutiny and self-revelation (ll. 124-30). As James stated, introspection means “looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover,” and “every one agrees that we there discover states of consciousness” (1890/1950, p. 185). In this regard, Browning’s representation of the speaker’s states in *Pauline* echoes the nineteenth-century definitions of introspection. As Smithies and Stoljar (2012) argue, the knowledge the subject gets as a result his self-inquiry is “a piece of self-knowledge:” “it is knowledge about [himself] and, more specifically, about the contents of [his] conscious stream of thought” (p. 4). Therefore, considering the psychological elements and focus of the text, *Pauline* is a significant example of “the reflective verse of the 1830s, a poem which uses associationist concepts and self-analytic strategies to present the mind as ‘the true and essential universe’ of poetic interest” (Tate, 2012, p. 31).

Conscious of his interest in self-knowledge, the speaker expresses his intention to reveal the depths of his mind and to lift the veil that covers the secrets of its workings in order to purge his soul of the negative effects of “all the wandering” and “the weakness” (Browning, 1833/1969, l. 125) he has experienced. After exploring the causal links between his past and current psychological states, his next intention is to describe how the elements of his mental activity “produced” his current psychological state, which he refers to as his “present state” (l. 267). The “intensest life” that he is “made up of” (l. 268) consists of his active thought-life and other inner experiences, and his salient state of self-consciousness further enriches his mental activity. Moreover, the speaker’s constant repetition of words, such as “affections, passions, feelings, powers” (l. 271) shows his recognition that his feelings indicate his mental condition. The analysis of his ideas about himself through self-scrutiny and the description of his state highlight his belief that if he can “lay [his] soul bare” (l. 124), “[he] can be young again” (l. 127). In other words, the speaker assumes that once he manages to purge his soul of his “aimless” and “hopeless state” (l. 50), which he defines as “weakness” (l. 54), he will be able to regain the optimistic mood of his youth, when he was hopeful and had trust in truth and love (ll. 84-87). Therefore, the speaker is aware that this entire confession will function as a remedy for his hopelessness and depression. Accordingly, this poem bears the significance of “[pointing]

to a new dramatic-psychological genre” (Faas, 1988, p. 70) as a work in which Browning experiments with the representation of human psychological states through a fictional character with a confessional tone.

The pattern of *Pauline*'s speaker's self-scrutiny is like the Victorian pattern of introspection, the psychological method to study “mental processes” which “can only be grasped through self-analysis” (Tate, 2012, p. 31). As the Victorian theorists suggested, the mental processes form the psychological state of a person and this state is an invisible state, which only the person can “mark for himself” (Mill, 1829, p. 149); and the mind of man is “the nearest to us, and seems the most within our reach” (Reid, 1827, p. vi). However, Reid stressed that the introspective analysis is successful only if it is carried out in an objective manner, yet, the fact that self-reflection is a concept concerning “individuality” upsets the objectivity of the process (1827, p. vi). This predicament, that is, impossibility of achieving objectivity through first-person analysis, point of view, and speech is a central matter in introspection, and this article does not deny it. Since *Pauline* is written in first-person point of view, the very problem of the impossibility of objectivity is evident in this work. Yet, in Mill's terms, the speaker tries to “mark” his psychological states “for himself” (1829, p. 149), and it is salient in his “self-analy[ti]c” style, to put it in Tate's terms (2012, p. 31):

So as I grew, I rudely shaped my life
To my immediate wants, yet strong beneath
Was a vague sense of power folded up—
A sense that, though those shades and times were past,
Their spirit dwelt in me, with them should rule. (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 339-43)

These lines are about the speaker's psychological past, and the style of his expression gives an idea about his way of examining his past “self.” While he tells “the history of his soul,” he is trying to understand himself, or rather, to give a meaning to the different stages which his mind goes through. The storytelling in *Pauline* is actually the “lay” (l. 870) of his soul-searching, and of his quest for the self in which he “analyses” his “feelings” (l. 296) and thoughts.

The feeling of failure is one of the stages of the speaker's psychological process. As the speaker reminds Pauline, he could not think “calm” since his “fancies followed thought” (ll. 876-77), and due to this confusion, he did not know what to include in or exclude from his confession (l. 881). He also reminds Pauline that upon this she had told him that “a perfect bard was one / Who chronicled the stages of all life” (ll. 883-84). Accordingly, this poem “is a sort of spiritual autobiography; a record of sensations and ideas, rather than of deeds” (Symons, 1906, p. 15). This “spiritual autobiography” includes the speaker's consecutive psychological processes. In one of these major processes, Pauline's lover experiences an “ultra-consciousness of self” (Orr, 1892, p. 14) as is evident in his unhappy and pessimistic statements: “Thou seest then my aimless, hopeless state” (Browning, 1833/1969, l. 50) or “. . . sure I must own / That I am fallen, having chosen gifts / Distinct from theirs—that I am sad and fain” (ll. 79-81) or more strikingly, “I am made up of an intensest life, / Of a most clear idea of consciousness / Of self” (ll. 268-70). This conscious state of mind makes the speaker aware that his aims and choices, distinct from other people's, are the reasons for his frustration and disappointment with himself. The speaker's dissatisfaction and unhappiness pave the way for his longing for the past and for a need to look back at his past life and self to explain his current state of mind in a better way through comparison as well as cause and effect analogies:

Still I can lay my soul bare in its fall,
Since all the wandering and all the weakness
Will be a saddest comment on the song:
And if, that done, I can be young again,
I will give up all gained, as willingly
As one gives up a charm which shuts him out
From hope or part or care in human kind
. . .
All these seem clear and only worth our thoughts:
So, aught connected with my early life,
My rude songs or my wild imaginings,

How I look on them – most distinct amid
The fever and the stir of after years! (ll. 124-40)

The speaker is ready to give up everything he has gained to be young again and to compensate for his former deeds since he is not happy with his current state of mind. Moreover, he yearns for a better “soul” despite his awareness that it is difficult as he says: “Souls alter not, and mine must still advance” (l. 588). Accordingly, “[h]is confession of all this to Pauline seems motivated by the hope that he will recover his poetic powers and will be sustained by the renewed love of God and the love of Pauline, with whom he fancies a withdrawal from the world into a womblike seclusion” (Kennedy & Hair, 2007, p. 41). The speaker thinks that, to achieve all these ends, he must go through the process of laying his exhausted “soul” bare. He maintains that once he manages to complete it, he can get rid of the burden of his restlessness and weakness. Furthermore, he is not satisfied with the works he produced in the past as he defines them as “rude songs” or “wild imaginings” (Browning, 1833/1969, l. 138). As a mature man, he is now able to evaluate his works and imaginative powers from a different perspective. Therefore, his self-realisation teaches him that to become a better poet, he needs to make peace with his past first. He is conscious that his mind needs self-cleansing.

The Psychological States Represented in Pauline

As William J. Fox observed in his review of *Pauline*, “the whole composition is of the spirit, spiritual. The scenery is in the chambers of thought; the agencies are powers and passions; the events are transitions from one state of spiritual existence to another” (1833). In other words, the poem is “an elaborate retrospect of successive mental states” (Orr, 1892, p.14). The first psychological state Browning represents in *Pauline* is consciousness. As Raymond also underlined, in *Pauline*, “the poet is absorbed in the description and analysis of inner states of consciousness” (1955/1966, p. 117) and the conscious state of the speaker prevails throughout the poem as the essential component of his self-observation. It brings his dilemmas to the surface, as a part of his self-reflection. On the one hand, he yearns for the past when he was “low and weak yet full of hope” (l. 84); on the other hand, he says: “I am fallen, having chosen gifts / Distinct from theirs,” (ll. 80-81) which shows that he regrets the choices he has made, and compares his decisions to those of other people. These feelings vex him even further and he feels weaker and sicker as he scrutinises them. His efforts to understand and explain his current state lead him into a kind of extreme consciousness.

The consciousness of his present misery leads him to a nervous state, which is the second psychological state that Browning represents in *Pauline*, and there is a causal link between the speaker’s states of consciousness and nervousness. Other dilemmas the speaker experiences are concerned with his religious faith and his faith in several other concepts concerning mankind, such as love, truth, and freedom. In this stage, he is portrayed in the state of doubt and uncertainty. He has had religious doubt for a while; yet, in time, he realises that he actually has “a need, a trust, a yearning after God” (l. 295)—“[a] feeling I have analysed but late” (l. 296) he adds—, and eventually his religious faith is restored (ll. 820-37, ll. 1020-31). The speaker’s conflicts are also related to his identity as a poet. He feels that what happens in other poets’ minds does not happen in his mind, therefore, he feels inferior to the renowned poets, thinking that he lacks poetic imagination and mastery. Even though the speaker’s past life has not been successful enough to please him, still he misses it because he believes that at least he had trust in truth and love, then. Therefore, it is not only his religious faith, but also his faith in life that is affected by the speaker’s uncertainty, or doubt. He “would give up all to be where [he] was;” because he was “full of hope, and sure / Of goodness as of life . . . trusting in truth and love” (ll. 82-87).

The speaker’s conscious scrutiny of his inner truths, such as his pessimistic sense of inadequacy, the feeling of weakness, and loss of faith in truth and love, makes him realise that he also experienced a state of depression. His confession to Pauline is crucial to obtain self-knowledge and relief. He believes “despair / Cannot come near [them]” (ll. 586-87) if he manages to tell his state like that. Therefore, it is evident that his intention is to get away from his state of depression through careful self-analysis and detailed description. The final state of the speaker, as represented by Browning, is certainty and happiness, which he reports to Pauline in the present tense: “’Tis done, and even now I recognize / The shift, the change from last to past—

discern / Faintly how life is truth and truth is good" (ll. 886-88). The recovery of his faith in God (ll. 820-54, ll. 1020-31), and furthermore, his restored belief in truth and love indicate that his last state is certainty: ". . . I believe in God and truth / And love . . ." (ll. 1020-21). The final two lines reflect the speaker's conscious description of his final state: "Know my last state is happy, free from doubt / Or touch of fear. Love me and wish me well" (ll. 1030-31). Therefore, recovery is the final part of the speaker's introspective process. In that sense, "*Pauline* purports to be an account, from a young man of twenty to his love, Pauline, of his victory over the forces of doubt, skepticism, and self-centeredness, and his winning to faith, hope, and love" (DeVane, 1935/1955, p. 42). In other words, the subject undergoes psychological changes for the better as a result of the introspective process.

Scrutiny of the Past

Honan emphasizes that *Pauline* "recount[s] the history of spiritual experiences that are over now" (1961, p. 15). Yet, the speaker's comparison of the days of the inexperienced yet optimistic youth with the present in which he examines and describes the disturbance of his peace of mind is a method that Browning employs in the speaker's self-analysis in *Pauline* (ll. 79-88). As Titchener argued in his 1912 study on introspection, "scientific introspection" consists of three parts: "a process, an apperception, and a description:" the "process" is the "state" of the subject; "apperception" signifies the subject's "judgement" of the state or "process" from the psychological standpoint; and the "description" gives the "apperception" a "linguistic expression" (p. 491; Pepper, 1918, p. 209). "Memory" enters into the introspection in three ways: In the first kind, the subject makes the description on the basis of "present immediacy;" in the second kind, the subject makes it on the basis of "remembered apperception;" and in the third kind, the subject "recalls" the process as "memory-image" and makes the description on the basis of this apperception (Titchener, 1912, p. 491; Pepper, 1918, p. 209). In a similar manner, in *Pauline*, during this stage of his self-analysis and description, the speaker's "present immediacy" is at work when he describes his current states; his "remembered apperception" and "memory-images" are active when he tries to describe his past states. The use of past tense and present tense in the speaker's speech helps to differentiate between his report of the past and of the present inner experiences. The nostalgia that he feels for the past (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 39-40, ll. 85-88) is caused by the split between his naive past and its degeneration with the experiences he had later. His scrutiny of the past reveals his current wish to attain beauty, hope, and truth. He suffers from inertia and tries to overcome it by regenerating the innocence and hopefulness of his past. The speaker remembers that he has left "all undone" in youth (l. 1002), and he is aware of the difficulty of bringing back what is lost, and he tries to restore it by building a "home" "in thought" for him and Pauline (ll. 729-31) and by creating a perfect image of Pauline, associating her with hope, faith, freedom, virtue, and love that he lost in the course of time (ll. 458-61). As he is a poet, the speaker's retreat into his mind, more specifically to his imagination, to find all he wishes for is striking. Furthermore, the poet-speaker's love of beauty is evident in several instances (l. 30, l. 52, l. 322), and he apparently looks for beauty in his thoughts, sensations, feelings, and actually, in all possible experiences he may have. As a poet, his search for beauty is connected to his search for inspiration and artistic creativity. Therefore, his nostalgic remembrance, recalling, and memory of his past and his reliance on Pauline are related to his wish to regain his faith in truth, beauty, goodness, and hope for the peace of his mind. His conscious self-scrutiny enables him to check his thoughts, emotions, and passions, and to direct them to artistic ends.

The Introspective Concept: "Return of the Mind upon Itself"

The speaker describes how he learnt to practice self-analysis, in other words, how to "return" his mind "upon itself" (Tate, 2012, p. 25), or "turn [his] mind against itself" (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 348-49) through an experience of some successive mental stages. As he describes, after suffering from the burden of "cunning, envy, falsehood" for a while in the past, he manages to purge himself of these, yet the influence which urged his soul "to seek its old delights" remains:

Then came a pause, and long *restraint* [emphasis added] chained down
 My soul till it was changed. I *lost myself* [emphasis added],
 And were it not that I so loathe that loss,
 I could *recall* [emphasis added] how first I learned to *turn* [emphasis added]
 My *mind against itself* [emphasis added]; and the effects,
 In deeds for which *remorse* [emphasis added] were vain as for
 The *wanderings of delirious dream* [emphasis added]; yet thence
 Came *cunning, envy, falsehood* [emphasis added], all world's wrong
 That spotted me: at length I cleansed my soul.
 Yet long world's *influence* [emphasis added] remained (ll. 344-53)

Evidently, the speaker's speech is strongly dominated by the terminology reminiscent of the ones used by the people involved in Victorian mental science. Especially "the turning of the mind in on itself" (Maher, 1918, p. 11), or "return of the mind upon itself" (Hallam, 1831/1972, p. 91) is a significant feature of the method of introspection which was used "to observe states of consciousness" (Maher, 1918, p. 11). The speaker in the poem describes the process of his self-analysis by using almost the same terminology (Browning, 1833/1969, ll. 347-48). In the following lines, the speaker describes in the past tense how he exchanged the innocent and the hopeful state of mind he had in the past with the power over the choices he had and with the life he leads in the present, and his description reflects concerns for the analysis of one's inner experiences:

I paused again: a change was coming—came:
 I was no more a boy, the past was breaking
 Before the future and like fever worked.
 I *thought on my new self* [emphasis added], and all my powers
 Burst out. *I dreamed not of restraint, but gazed* [emphasis added]
On all things: schemes and systems went and came,
 And I was proud (being vainest of the weak)
In wandering o'er thought's world [emphasis added] to seek some one
 To be my prize (ll. 394-402)

Thus, he recognises that remembering the past guides him to what he needs to do to "heal." Even if he cannot bring back the past, he can attain new meanings and find new alternatives with the help of the inspiration and motivation that his past feelings and thoughts provide.

Need for an Aim

According to Raymond, "[a] passion for the absolute, a desire to exhibit the fulness of personality, an urge to realize the boundless capacities of the soul, even in a finite world, is the noble ambition—yet the cardinal error—of the heroes of [Browning's] early monodramas" (1955/1966, p.126). Raymond regards *Pauline* as one of Browning's early monodramas. *Pauline's* speaker's scrutiny and description of his loss of hope and aimlessness lead him to the realisation of his state of depression and urge him to search for a goal in life to make his life meaningful. When he looks back, he finds that, in the first dawn of his life, he was full of joy, excited, hopeful, positive, and therefore he had plans. Additionally, he is conscious that it was in his "plan to look on real life," "the life all new" to him; however, he has left his own "theories" in order to look and learn "[m]ankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys" instead (ll. 442-45). His self-analysis reveals his current belief that relinquishing his own theories and plans for the purpose of learning about mankind was futile. He describes his realisation with the metaphor of a sudden awakening from a dream; and his perception of this purpose as a dream makes him leave it, as it is no longer real for him (ll. 448-50). He further reports what he emotionally experienced upon this realisation and how he abandoned all his ideals: "First went [his] hopes of perfecting mankind, / Next—faith in them, and then in freedom's self / And virtue's self, then [his] own motives, ends / And aims and loves, and human love went last" (ll. 458-

61). The speaker's description of this experience with a pessimistic tone, and his representation of a hopeless self reflect that his despair reaches its peak with this incident. His aim to perfect mankind has failed and he has fulfilled none of his aims. On the contrary, he has lost what he used to have as he stopped believing in freedom, virtue, and eventually human love. Nevertheless, after the scrutiny of his hopelessness, he finds something good, even in this loss:

I felt this no decay, because new powers
Rose as old feelings left—wit, mockery,
Light-heartedness; for I had oft been sad,
Mistrusting my resolves, but now I cast
Hope joyously away: I laughed and said
“No more of this!” I must not think: at length
I looked again to see if all went well. (ll. 462-68)

The speaker explains how he evaluated this change in a positive mindset, since as a result of this shift, he embraced the new “powers” that he attained, such as wit, mockery, and light-heartedness. He delineates how these new qualities helped him laugh and cast away all the thoughts though for only a while. In time, as the speaker explains, these new powers were beaten by the analytical quality of his mind, and thus, the speaker again could not help but observe his own state of mind. Upon this observation, the speaker detects the loss of his religious faith: “God is gone” (l. 471) from the temple and on his throne, a “dark spirit” (l. 472) is sitting now, and people shout that it is the speaker himself: “Thyself, thou art our king!” So, I stood there / Smiling—oh, vanity of vanities!” (ll. 487-88). Like Lucifer, who was once bright, he becomes a “dark spirit,” as he loses “God.” Yet, he feels “once more [himself], [his] powers—all [his]” (l. 491).

The speaker refashions himself with new powers in “youth and health” (ll. 492) and releases the entire stress. Moreover, he feels he must “ever be light-hearted” (l. 494) now that he is young and healthy. This is because he is conscious that “if age came, / [He] should be left—a wreck linked to a soul / Yet fluttering, or mind-broken and aware / Of [his] decay” (ll. 496-99). In other words, he believes that when he becomes an old man, he will not be in control of his own powers as much as he is now. He assumes that the strains of old age are many, and that his physical powers will then fade away. Therefore, he sees the younger ages as the most appropriate times for joy. Thus, he decides one summer morning that he will not waste a single sunbeam, that he will make every hour his, that he will enjoy his youth, and only then he will embrace old age and death (ll. 499-504).

The speaker's decision to enjoy life requires him to abandon his passions, since they give him a “troubled life of genius” which “grows sad when all proves vain” (ll. 506-08). Therefore, he “. . . sought / To chain [his] spirit down which erst [he] freed / For flights to fame” (ll. 504-06). He continues going through different phases of thought, belief, questionings, and moods; and the confusion he feels about his faith haunts him throughout the poem. In that sense, he is already imprisoned in and by his own mind, as he never stops analysing his own inner workings.

. . . I will tell
My state as though 'twere none of mine—despair
Cannot come near us—thus it is, my state.
Souls alter not, and mine must still advance;
Strange that I knew not, when I flung away
My youth's chief aims . . . (ll. 585-90)

In his attempt to remember the past for recovery (l. 84, l. 590) he fails because his apparent unhappiness and hopelessness discourage him. However, he is at the same time conscious that to overcome his despair, his soul must progress toward a better state which is possible through the pursuit of an ideal, or through a search for an aim (ll. 588-92). The poet-speaker experiences a nervous breakdown since he cannot find the answers he looks for. He has difficulty in accounting for or explaining his “strange impulse,”

“tendency,” and “desire” that he is not able to control or suppress (ll. 595-96). Besides, because of his intense contemplations and reflections on his own thinking and feeling processes, he suffers from a marked nervous exhaustion:

My selfishness is satiated not,
It wears me like a flame; my hunger for
All pleasure, howsoe'er minute, grows pain;
I envy—how I envy him whose soul
Turns its whole energies to some one end,
To elevate an aim, pursue success
However mean! (ll. 601-08)

The speaker is conscious that his selfish desire for all pleasure in life wears him out and that he envies those who can channel their powers or passions to a certain goal in life. He feels pain and finds himself in a hopeless, exasperated, sad state of mind; however, his soul is mad for freedom, rejecting any limits that will chain it to his corporeal self, which indicates the presence of a clash between his mind and soul: “I cannot chain my soul: it will not rest / In its clay prison, this most narrow sphere: / It has strange impulse, tendency, desire, / Which nowise I account for nor explain” (ll. 593-96). The speaker’s soul is metaphorically lodged in his body which he describes as a “narrow sphere” and “clay prison.” The prison that his soul wants to break free from is too narrow a space for the strange impulses, tendencies, and desires. His actual body as a “clay prison” that is described as “narrow” is the speaker’s figurative way of explaining the immensity of his impulses. His need to release his soul, to realise its yearnings and desires is reflected in this metaphor. The intensity of his feelings and thoughts makes it difficult for him to find the correct words to explain to Pauline what these desires and tendencies are; yet, he makes an effort to express them clearly. His resolution to have a goal in life reveals itself in his further explanations:

. . . So, my still baffled hope
Seeks out abstractions; I would have one joy,
But one in life, so it were wholly mine,
One rapture all my soul could fill: and this
Wild feeling places me in dream afar
In some vast country where the eye can see
No end to the far hills and dales bestrewn
With shining towers and towns, till I grow mad
Well-nigh, to know not one abode but holds
Some pleasure, while my soul could grasp the world,
But must remain this vile form’s slave. I look
With hope to age at last, which quenching much,
May let me concentrate what sparks it spares. (ll. 607-619)

He contrasts the dark depiction of his soul of “selfishness,” “flame,” “hunger,” “pain” and “envy” (ll. 601-04) with a picture of his ideal: a soul which is able to turn its energies to an end, to “pursue success” (l. 606). The speaker’s expressions in this quotation, such as “wild,” “dream,” “vast,” “no end,” “far hills,” and “dales,” are actually the images of his intense desire for the total freedom of the soul, away from all its burden and restraint. These images indicate the speaker’s wish to attain the unattainable. In this context, the speaker’s imagination and, accordingly, the figures of speech that he uses to describe are crucial to apprehend his feelings, emotions, and thoughts. The speaker’s introspective discourse and psychological concerns indicate his wish to free his mind from the prison of boundaries and limits of the mortal body and life.

In addition, the speaker’s conscious state helps him realise that he had enough of self-scrutiny and self-observation, and it further takes him to a new stage where he makes decisions about his next steps in life:

No more of the past! I'll look within no more.
I have too trusted my own lawless wants,
Too trusted my vain self, vague intuition—
Draining soul's wine alone in the still night,
And seeing how, as gathering films arose,
As by an inspiration life seemed bare

...

No more of this! We will go hand in hand,
I with thee [Pauline], even as a child—love's slave,
Looking no farther than his liege commands. (ll. 937-49)

The speaker's new belief that his intuitions are obscure, his wants are lawless, and that he is vain makes him change his mind about this introspective analysis. Now that he is exhausted by his intense thought and self-examination, which he represents as "draining soul's wine alone," he decides not to look within anymore. Having faced that this process is tough and painful, he has now passed to another stage: a bitter realisation of the vanity of his desires and futility of the idea of turning the clock back and restoring what is long gone. His new plan is to surrender to Pauline, who represents the truth and love he longs for. She is "the one person in whom the poet may safely confide" (Honan, 1961, p. 15). Pauline is everything he needs in that she is the embodiment of the ideal that he does not intend to seek any more now that he has her. Therefore, this entire "lay" (l. 870) he narrates and "dedicate[s]" (l. 870) to Pauline is not a momentary overflow of emotions. This look-within helps him create a new realm of imagination in which Pauline's contribution as an inspirational source is quite clear.

Conclusion

In *Pauline*, Browning presents the long speech of a fictional speaker who is a poet. The speaker gives his speech in the present time to a silent listener, with constant references to the past; yet, the setting of the poem is not specified. Thus, a dreamy and vague mood which reflects the non-chronological operation of the human mind is created by Browning. The borders between past, present, and future seem to be blurred, and it illustrates the non-chronological operation of the human mind. In this work, Browning employs a rich variety of representations of emotions, thoughts, and ideas, also revealing his personal interest in the inner workings of human beings. The "aimless" and "hopeless state" that bothers and upsets the speaker causes him to consciously "look within" and tell what he finds there for a better understanding of his self. Thus, in these representations, Browning illustrates how self-consciousness, passions, yearnings, ambitions, hopelessness, questionings, doubts, confusion, and emotional weaknesses shape the individual's perception of reality, create states of mind, and end up with or lead to decisions, behaviour, and change. Nevertheless, Browning does not endeavour to evaluate, criticise, judge, or comment on the decisions and/or behaviours of his character morally; in other words, he does not attempt to provide a didactic or moral message.

The problems of introspection, discussed by the theorists, such as the problems of self-consciousness, the first and/or third-person speech, and subjectivity and objectivity during the description of inner experiences are also treated in Browning's *Pauline*. When evaluated with regard to the definitions of introspection, in *Pauline*, the introspective process is created by Browning through the first-person point of view of a dramatic speaker. The speaker's monologue is not interrupted by any other character, and his speech is thoroughly about himself: he focuses on what he feels, what he thinks, and how and why he feels or thinks that way. The whole monologue consists of the speaker's self-observation, self-examination, and self-description. *Pauline* stands in terms of representing the full operation of the introspective method for two reasons: first of all, the only voice in the poem belongs to the introspective persona, and secondly, this persona clearly states a couple of times that he has an aim to look within and return his mind upon itself. It is also possible to consider this work as an example of Browning's endeavour to put forward two potential

results of introspection: a disturbed mental state and recovery. At the beginning of the introspective process, the speaker, who clearly declares with a pessimistic tone that his aimlessness and hopelessness cause despair, reaches a happy state at the end of the poem. In other words, in *Pauline*, Browning chooses to end this process with recovery and represents introspection as a healing and helpful method for the development of the soul despite being difficult for the person. The speaker goes through several changes and eventually feels happy not only due to the presence of Pauline but also due to restoring his faith in God, truth, and love. The listener, Pauline, who starts as a mere listener of the speaker's confession, gradually becomes, in the speaker's mind, the embodiment of all that he yearns for. Since it is the improvement of the soul that is central to the work, rather than physical action, the poem's thematic flow is determined by these gradual changes.

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